An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition

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The main aim of the study is to narrate and critically analyse for the first time the theological history of “the good news of adoption” in the Calvinistic tradition - from John Calvin to nineteenth-century Scottish and American Calvinism. The history reveals not only the importance of adoption for Calvin but also its overwhelming neglect among later Calvinists. Not only so, it also reveals that even when adoption was expounded by later Calvinists their treatments were characterised by historical and methodological detachment from Calvin’s more biblical-theological approach.

In the first of two parts, the study establishes the evidence of adoption in the annals of Reformed theology. In Section One of the first part there is provided the most substantive treatment to date of Calvin’s theology of adoption. Although not exhaustive, it begins with an investigation into the origin of the reformer’s use of the motif, but concentrates in chapters two to four on the salient features of Calvin’s understanding, which embrace the entire scope of redemptive-history from protology to eschatology, and includes themes such as the Fatherhood of God, predestination, covenant, union with Christ and duplex gratia, the Christian life and the church. In Section Two there is an investigation of the other main source of adoption in the Calvinistic tradition, namely, the Westminster Standards (ch. 5). While acknowledging the Westminster commissioners’ differing approach to the doctrine, notice is nevertheless taken of the fact that the Westminster Confession of Faith was the first confession in the church’s history to include a distinct locus on adoption. Moreover, the methodological discontinuity notwithstanding, the statements on adoption in the Standards mirror in embryonic fashion much of what Calvin says of the doctrine.

In Part Two the study examines the legacy of Calvin and the commissioners by uncovering first the decline and then the stillborn revival of adoption in later Calvinism. The sixth chapter accounts for the reasons why adoption faded from theological discourse among Westminster Calvinists, and how the increasingly lopsided juridical emphasis of orthodox Calvinism eventually gave rise to the birth of revisionist Calvinism in Scotland through the influence of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and John McLeod Campbell (ch. 7). Faced with the paradigm shift towards a more familial expression of the gospel, Robert S Candlish sought to counter the sentimental universalising tendencies characteristic of Victorian liberalism by addressing the new familial focus from within the framework of Reformed orthodoxy. While ignored by the Broad Church movement he was seeking to rebuff, Candlish was challenged ironically from within his own Calvinistic constituency by Thomas J Crawford who took umbrage with his positions on Adam’s status in Eden and the connection between adoptive sonship and Christ’s sonship (ch. 8). While such issues were left unresolved in Scotland, across the Atlantic they were taken up by the Southern Presbyterians John L Girardeau and Robert A Webb (ch. 9). Webb in fact remains the only Reformed author of an explicitly doctrinal monograph on adoption (Girardeau’s short treatment aside), yet his claim that Calvin made “no allusion whatever to adoption” concludes the history, thereby demonstrating the extent to which Calvin’s rich theology of adoption had been left to languish unknown of even in that wing of the post-Reformation church that gave greater theological consideration to the doctrine than any other.

The thesis ends, therefore, not only with an appeal for the recovery of the doctrine in the Calvinistic tradition, but with a discussion of the implications of its recovery for Westminster Calvinism, and a suggestion that the retrieval of adoption be shaped by a biblically regulated synthesis of historia (Calvin) and ordo salutis (later Calvinism) approaches to the doctrine. In short, the study claims that the doctrine of adoption is crucial to the constructive revamping of Westminster Calvinism.
To the glory of God and for the greater enjoyment of him

And

In loving memory of Myrddyn Lloyd Williams (1933-1999):

The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies [the adoption], which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. (The Larger Catechism Ans. 86)

I hereby declare that the thesis has been composed solely by myself, and is therefore my own work.

Signed: Jim Thompson
1 “Abba,” Father – thus we call Thee,
(Hallowed name!) from day to day;
Tis Thy children's right to know Thee,
    None but children “Abba” say.
This high honor we inherit,
Thy free gift, through Jesu’s blood;
    God the Spirit, with our spirit,
Witnesseth we’re sons of God.

2 Abba’s purpose gave us being
When in Christ, in that vast plan,
Abba chose the saints in Jesus
Long before the world began;
O what love the Father bore us!
O how precious in his sight!
When he gave the church to Jesus!
Jesus, His whole soul’s delight!

3 Though our nature’s fall in Adam,
    Seemed to shut us out from God,
Thus it was His counsel brought us
Nearer still, through Jesu’s blood;
For in Him we found redemption,
    Grace and glory in the Son;
Oh the height and depth of mercy!
“Christ and we, through grace, are one.”

(Hymns of the Little Flock (1881) No. 104)
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Acknowledgements

Every thesis has its story, and this one is no exception. Often, however, the details of the origins of a work are lost to history. Being deemed neither relevant nor interesting, they frequently die with the author. Sometimes faint clues can be discerned from the text, but that may be all. Yet it is the reader who may be better placed to discern the importance of the underlying motive of, or influence behind a piece of work. Where there are but the vaguest of clues to go by, the research required to piece together the background of a given literary endeavour can prove most frustrating. Certainly, this has been my experience of researching Calvin. It is only fair to say, however, that other factors may contribute to this. The progress of time, for instance, raises questions that an author of an earlier generation or era was not concerned to address.

For reasons such as these I have included here an outline of those influences that have helped to mould the present work. The inclusion ought not to be interpreted as a presumption on my own part that the dissertation will gain either a wide readership or be of protracted interest. After all, the history of the doctrine of adoption does not lend itself to such confidence. Nevertheless, with the modest growth of interest in the doctrine a summary of the history of this dissertation may prove informative. For one thing, this is the first full-length study of the theological history of adoption. Although adoption has been the subject of a number of New Testament studies, most recently James Scott’s, this is the first study of its kind. Secondly, while coinciding with the growth of interest in adoption the dissertation is also the product of it. In confirming the essential correctness of these appeals, it seeks to advance the discussion beyond the realm of complaint. Although there is no saying that the current level of interest is sufficient to result in the long overdue breakthrough for the doctrine, by adding to the available New Testament treatments the study has the potential to further significantly the prospects for the recovery of adoption. Should this transpire, there may be interest, thirdly, in discovering why the present work espouses certain principles not necessarily held by other appellants. The reading of the thesis will explain much of my appreciation for redemptive history, although, as noticeable will be my rejection of the conflation of distinct models employed by different biblical authors.

My interest in adoption dates back to the ministerial training I received at the Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh (1989-1993). As part of the study of New Testament theology Principal Boyd introduced us to Herman Ridderbos’ volume Paul: An Outline of His Theology. Although the influence of E P Sanders and the new perspective post-dates Ridderbos’s work on Paul, his serious attempt to understand the apostle’s thought on his own terms warrants the continued study of his work. Thus, each class member was asked to present “an outline of an outline of some aspect of Pauline theology”! In allotting me Ridderbos’ chapter on adoption, Professor Boyd instigated a fascination with the doctrine that has stayed with me ever since. Part of the reason for this is attributable to the issues Ridderbos raised. These have helped define my understanding of the doctrine to a degree never anticipated at the outset of the assignment. In studying Ridderbos whole vistas opened up to view. These have since proved determinative for much of my approach to Scripture, theology and adoption itself.
First, Ridderbos confirmed me in a profound appreciation of Geerhardus Vos' old Princetonian emphasis on the importance of biblical theology. In particular, he revealed how significant the discipline is for an understanding of Paul. Especially stimulating was his consciousness of the apostle's emphasis on the unfolding of God's plan of salvation throughout the consecutive eras of salvation-history. Ridderbos' brief exposition of Paul's doctrine of adoption is based upon an underlying appreciation of this trajectory.

This fresh perspective (to me at least) was intriguing and sent me in search of comparisons of how others had dealt with the doctrine. What expositions of adoption I came across seemed markedly at odds with Ridderbos' treatment. Whereas he makes much of the development of adoption from the more collective and minority sonship of Israel under the old covenant to the more individual and majority sonship under the new, the few I found dealing with adoption made little or nothing of the coming of age of God's son. Typically speaking, it seemed that an exclusive appropriation of the ordo salutis model led to a flattening out of the contours of redemptive history. Accordingly, it also appeared that the filial development of God's people from the old to new covenant had been eradicated, especially in the Puritan handling of the doctrine.

Secondly, Ridderbos subtly introduced me to the authorial diversity of Scripture. In particular, he instilled in me an awareness of the grandeur of Pauline theology. By example, he demonstrated the possibility of capturing the particular direction and distinctive meaning of Paul by refusing to allow the apostle's theology to be coloured by material drawn from other biblical authors. Thus, one does not find in Ridderbos either the dilution or the distortion resulting from the accepted practice of embellishing Paul's comments on adoption with Johannine references to the new birth.

Although I have dealt with this issue at some length in my two SBET articles entitled "The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation", let it be briefly re-stated here that there are solid reasons for opposing the practice. First, the conflation assumes that God has mixed his metaphors. While there are certainly countless occasions where metaphors run together in biblical literature, systematicians are only warranted in conflating biblical metaphors where in fact they have been mixed in Scripture. It is by no means certain that metaphors or models used by different biblical authors are in fact to be conflated because, secondly, their distinctive structures form rich expressions of the humanness of Scripture. As the thesis seeks to clarify, acknowledgement that the Scriptures were written by human authors is not intended to deny their divineness. Nonetheless, systematic theologians will only be able to continue paying scant attention to the humanness of Scripture at the expense of the reputation of the discipline. Thirdly, the conflation of John and Paul compromises Paul's redemptive-historical perspective on adoption.

Thirdly, Ridderbos' realisation that adoption is "an important concept" in Pauline soteriology contrasted markedly with the substantive neglect of the doctrine uncovered in much of the tradition. Thus, for all Ridderbos' help, the wider search that his work stimulated left me with the overwhelming impression of the lacuna created by the almost normative oversight of adoption. Research began, therefore, with but a handful of useful references drawn from the annals of the tradition. That a
dissertation has emerged from such an unpromising start is due to the help and interest of a number of people.

Naturally, there are my supervisors to thank. To Dr Gary Badcock I am indebted for his all round vocational, financial and academic advice. Especially valuable was the freedom he allowed me to maintain a distinctive emphasis on adoption. More than that, his suggestions helped to mould the shape of the dissertation. With very little to go on it was Dr Badcock who suggested an investigatory essay on Calvin, and look where that led! Certainly the study of Calvin provided confirmation of the viability of Ridderbos's approach.

Again, the prolonged interest and all round support of Professor David Wright has been most welcome, as has his precious experience as a scholar and editor. Digested his comments has been an education in itself. Like Dr Badcock he was patient with me early on when I was overly reliant on Ridderbos. More than that, he stood by the dissertation at a point when confidence and direction could so easily have been lost.

Secondly, gratitude is due to the staffs of various libraries consulted. Worthy of special note is the staff of New College Library, especially Norma Henderson, Paul Coombes and Eileen Dickson. Their time, patience, friendliness and kindness have been outstanding. Many thanks also go to the Senate of the Free Church College for free and unlimited use of the library facilities. Especially beneficial has been the access to the Senate room, which, claims Professor Donald Macleod, "is the closest place to heaven". To the library staff at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, namely Rev. Ken Elliott and Rev. Don Malin, as well as Chris Cullnane and Belinda Wooley I am indebted for their Southern kindness during my visit in September 1996. Such extensive benefit from the Blackburn Collection could not have been obtained without the help of Stephen Berry, the archivist. It helped that he also had an interest in adoption in Southern Presbyterian theology as is demonstrated in his insightful essay on Girardeau. My thanks also go to the faculty at the Jackson campus (especially Dr and Mrs Derek Thomas and Dr and Mrs Duncan Rankin) for their hospitality, as well as for permission to photocopy many of the relevant manuscripts from the Blackburn Collection.

Thirdly, gratitude goes to those of the Evangelisches Stift, Tübingen, who helped enrich my stay during the academic year 1994-95. Of the many kind students mention must be made of Peter Mätz. On the academic front, it was a privilege to receive help from Professor Emeritus Jürgen Moltmann, Professor Peter Stuhlmacher. Most of all I benefited from the encouragement of Professor Emeritus Otto Betz who, at the Kolloquium für Graduerte, gave me confidence to express the differences between Johannine and Pauline theology.

Fourthly, as a late applicant I will ever be indebted to the late Alfred Austin of London for payment of the tuition fees. Many of the maintenance costs were met by the Whitefield Institute, Oxford. More than that, thanks goes to Dr Mark Elliott and the Director, Dr David Cook for feedback received from the grantee seminars. Others have also given generously. New College provided a substantial grant during the first summer. The Erasmus scholarship covered the year spent in Tübingen. The opportunity to serve as ministerial assistant at Durham Presbyterian Church (1995-
1997) also proved helpful in a number of ways, as did the generosity of the Gilchrist Educational Trust, London. Most touching has been the extraordinary generosity and friendship of a number of folk. Without depreciating the help of many others mention must be made of Mrs Dorothy Lewis of Holywell, Clwyd. For the prayerful encouragement and kindnesses of many friends in Swansea, Belfast, Edinburgh, London and Philadelphia much thanks is due.

Fifthly, the dissertation reveals the obvious benefit derived from the work of Professor Brian A Gerrish, Dr Sinclair Ferguson (Minister of St. George’s Tron, Glasgow), and Dr Douglas Kelly (Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina). At different times benefit has been gained from personal correspondence with Drs Ferguson and Kelly, as also with Revs Errol Hulse and Iain H Murray, and Dr John McIntyre, Professor Emeritus of New College. Credit belongs to Mr Murray Linton of Guildford, Surrey, for discovering a number of the references in the Introduction, as also to Alex Staton, my former classmate at the Free Church College, for the use of his unpublished essay on John McLeod Campbell. Numerous others have on occasion kindly suggested references or comments, including those from the various congregations and audiences around the United Kingdom, Zambia and America who have listened attentively to aspects of the work. Special encouragement has been gained more recently from working alongside my senior colleague at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Dr Richard B Gaffin Jr, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology. No one has done more in the English-speaking world to advance the insights of Herman Ridderbos and Geerhardus Vos. Through Dr Gaffin’s influence I was confirmed in the new world in what Ridderbos and Vos had first taught me in the old. Also beneficial and worthy of note has been the interaction with David Garner, a doctoral student at the seminary, whose own forthcoming dissertation is also on adoption.

Sixthly, gratitude goes to those friends at New College, whether North American, African or British for the time we shared together. In particular, the fellowship throughout with Martin Dotterweich gave valuable continuity to my connection with New College. The congregation at Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church of Scotland provided much stability in all my nomadic wanderings during the research. In particular, the fellowship of Eric and Moira Mackay, Christina Cummings (nee Murray), William Lytle, Jon Balserak and especially Elizabeth MacLeod (soon to be Ferguson) has been most valued. More recently the interest of the faculty, staff and students of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, in seeing this project completed has been a welcome comfort and challenge. That the dissertation has arisen from an honest attempt to understand the history of Calvinism, and yet arrives at findings in line with the seminary’s sympathetic-critical approach to the Reformed tradition has revealed the essentially constructive stance that the seminary has taken since its inception in 1929.

Finally, gratitude goes to my family for all their love, practical kindnesses, and interest. Although our family life has been shaped over recent decades by my father’s illness, his multiple sclerosis has undoubtedly honed my focus on the adoption, the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:22-23). It is said that we choose our friends but not our families. God chose my family. He chose most kindly.
One last word: Inevitably the dissertation has a predominant share of masculine terminology – “Father”, “Son”, “sons”, “brothers” etc. Where this is explicit use of biblical terminology I have not seen fit to meddle. Neither has it been appropriate to tamper with the expressions of nineteenth-century theology. However, where there has been no danger of compromising either, I have sought to make use of “humankind” rather than “mankind”, “sons and daughters of God” rather than “sons of God”. In this regard, the reader ought to note that the simple substitutes “children” or “Kinder” instead of sons is by no means always theologically appropriate (see the brief comments in ch. 10). Furthermore, when writing in the third person of “the believer” or “the sinner” or “the adopted” it has made sense to the author to use the pronoun that comes most naturally. Were the author female, it would make sense for her to do the same. It is to be hoped that the coming years may witness a more balanced approach to these understandable sensitivities.

For those coming to the dissertation through the SBET articles, please note that chapter 6 is now chapter 7 and is now entitled “The Restoration of ‘Adoption’”. Others may need to bear in mind that the forthcoming publication of my 1997 Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference Paper is actually an earlier edition of chapter 5.
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Introduction

The Theological History of Adoption

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


Certain it is... that a good treatise on Adoption - such as should at once do justice to the fine theology of the question, and to the precious import of the privilege - is a desideratum.

Hugh Martin, Christ's Presence in the Gospel History.

Behind this study lies an aspiration to heighten the profile of the doctrine of adoption in the church at large. Motivated by a concern to restore it to its proper place in theology, the dissertation seeks more modestly to complete some of the groundwork for the fulfilment of these hopes. Thus, after a broad survey of the place of adoption in historical theology, the study concentrates more narrowly on the formative expressions of adoption in Reformed theology – Calvin and the Westminster Standards – and thereafter on its large-scale neglect in the subsequent tradition.

Whether considered in terms of its motivation or its more immediate purpose the underlying assumption of the present study remains constant, namely, that adoption has not received the attention it warrants. Those best acquainted with the doctrine (παραγόμενοι) will need little if any convincing of this (vide infra). There is no guarantee, however, that those new to the subject will accept this on face value. Accordingly, the assumption requires some justification, a process that conveniently presents the opportunity to document the theological history of adoption as has never before been undertaken in such detail. The following introductory account then is not the result of an eccentric antiquarian interest. Rather, it is a serious attempt to resolve Thornton Whaling's complaint of the 1920s that "the history of the doctrine of

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1 Of course, mention of the Greek term for adoption does not allow for its isolation from the syntactical structures in which it is found. Rather, the context is vital for adding detail and colour to each particular use of the term.
adoption is yet to be fully and adequately written”. 2 Even supposing that the present study is only partially successful, the chances of stimulating fresh interest in both adoption and its implications are nevertheless exponentially increased simply by virtue of having made the attempt.

Before beginning to document the history of the doctrine, it is worth pausing to inquire what exactly adoption is. In the process of assembling the study this author’s experience has been that even in theological circles mention of the motif has often been confused in the English-speaking world with the familiar societal process and among native German-speaking theologians with christology (Adoptionismus). The doctrine, however, is soteriological, and, as I have argued elsewhere,3 solely Pauline (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). What possible hints of adoption may or may not be discerned in extra-Pauline texts must be understood in the light of the theology of the particular author in view before any comparisons (more likely contrasts) can be drawn with the Pauline model.4 In this way the clarity of Paul’s distinct vision of redemptive history is maintained, the scope of which covers many of the essential loci of theology:

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


4 Jn 1:12-13, 1 Jn 3:1 and, to a lesser extent, the Epistle to the Hebrews are the classic instances where this is claimed.
The Redemptive-Historical Unfolding of Adoption

Seen diagrammatically it becomes apparent why Paul’s fivefold use of *υἱόθεσια* is significant far beyond what may be thought at first sight. The importance of the doctrine is actually determined by methodological, linguistic and contextual factors, and not by the frequency of the use of the term.

Without digressing too far, it may be said in short that adoption refers to a major salvific blessing of God the Father (Eph. 1:3), to which he has predestined (pre-horizoned (*προορίσας*)) his people (*ἡμᾶς* (v.5)) ἐν Χριστῷ and διὰ Χριστοῦ. This blessing is not novel to the new covenantal era, but is traceable back to the promise of an inheritance first given to Abraham (Gal. 3:15-18,29) and initially fulfilled in the adoption of Israel as God’s corporate *νήπιος* at Mount Sinai (Rom. 9:4; Gal. 4:1). What is novel to the new covenant era is the maturity of God’s sons and daughters. They came of age with the fulfilment of the education process through which the church passed in Old Testament times (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:1-3). In the fullness of time, the Father sent first his Son into the world and, secondly, the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of those redeemed by him and united to him in his Sonship (Gal. 4:4-5; cf.

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5 Eph. 1:3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens (*τοῖς ἐν οὐρανοῖς*) in Christ, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption (*υἱόθεσια*) through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” This translation and the ones that follow are my own.

6 Rom. 9:4: “Whosoever are Israelites, of whom are the adoption (*ινυἱοθεσία*), and the glory, and the covenants, also the giving of the law, and the service and the promises”.

7 Gal. 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, having been born (*γενόμενον*) of a woman, having been born (*γενόμενον*) under the law, in order to redeem those from under the law, that we may receive the adoption (*υἱόθεσιν*)”.

8 Rom. 8:15-16: “For you have not received the spirit of servitude again to fear but you received the Spirit of adoption (*γενέμα ινυἱοθεσία*) in whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ This Spirit witnesses with our spirits because [ὅτι] we are the children of God.”

9 Rom. 8:22-23: “For we know that all the creation groans and travails together until now; but not alone, but they also, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption (*υἱόθεσιν*), the redemption of our bodies.”

10 See particularly the argument in my article “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation I”, 103-104.
Mk. 14:36). Whether the adopted be Jew or now also Gentile the blessings of adoption include a loving acceptance by the Father in Christ and the liberty to enjoy something of the Son’s filial relationship to the Father. Such a liberty, being genuine, is nevertheless only to be consummated at the end of the age, when the bodies of the redeemed are to be included in the adoption *simpliciter*.

As rich as the doctrine appears even from such a brief *prima facie* reading, the relevant materials built up by the church after all these centuries are remarkably scant. By bringing many of them to light it is hoped that the following investigation will contribute towards a clearer understanding of the historical theology of the doctrine, so providing ready access to the writings of those theologians who have realised its significance. As surprising as it may seem, many theologians (maybe most) have never thought seriously about the doctrine; or, being unaware of its neglect, assume that it has been dealt with as much as any other element of salvation; or, alternatively, they interpret wrongly the scarcity of literature on adoption as a commensurate reflection of the doctrine’s profile in Scripture. It is not for us to refute these views directly, at least not in the present study. However, the straightforward documentation of the historical theology of adoption may in fact result in the undermining of such reasoning. But such a happy outcome would be but the by-product of our current investigation, and not our explicit intention.

There is enough to do with the task at hand. In getting to it, we are immediately faced with a dilemma. Is it best to catalogue those who have omitted adoption from their theology or those who have not? There are advantages and disadvantages either way. One thing is certain. So substantive has the church’s oversight been that it is far easier to document those who have focused on adoption than those who have not. This is especially so, if the list is curtailed in the main to those creeds and volumes that have dealt with adoption *in its own right*. To list those omitting adoption would not be feasible, practical or interesting. Neither would it bring to light the resources required to help stimulate creative thinking in the years to come. For example, the observation that Harnack, Dorner, Hagenbach, Charles Hodge, Robert J Breckinridge, W G T Shedd, Thomas Chalmers, George Hill, and William Cunningham say nothing of the doctrine, tells us simply that they need not
be consulted for help in expounding adoption, but that is all.\textsuperscript{11} We have opted then for the more manageable and beneficial task.

This, however, does not resolve all the difficulties. There is still the basic two-dimensional problem of impression. In the spiritual realm, cognisance must be accorded the fact that however neglected the doctrine of adoption may be, all those in Christ nevertheless have the Spirit of adoption, the possession of which quite probably colours the realisation of the theological neglect. On the more technical front, the list of relevant theologians and their writings have inevitably become somewhat lengthy over the course of two millennia. Consequently, our chosen method of documentation has precluded the possibility of highlighting as starkly as is fitting the extent of the lacuna created by the oversight of adoption. A cursory perusal of the major writings of the church is therefore strongly recommended as supplementary to the following record. Too frequently to count it has been noted how successive theologians have moved from lengthy treatments of justification to equally extensive expositions of sanctification seemingly oblivious to the glaring omission of adoption.

The difficulties aside, what follows is the most extensive survey of the historical theology of adoption to date. It is hoped that future research will cater for its remaining incompleteness. Such a reduction will inevitably supply additional (commensurate) resources beyond what we are currently able to provide, which all together can fund a fresh and vital awareness of adoption as intrinsic to biblical soteriology.

.1 Adoption in the Church’s Creeds and Confessions

In Philip Schaff's collection of \textit{The Creeds of Christendom}\textsuperscript{12} there are only six confessions that contain anything like a distinct chapter on adoption. However,


\textsuperscript{12} \textit{The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes}. 3 vols. Edited by P Schaff. Revised by D S Schaff. 6th ed. reprinted from the 1931 ed. Published by Harper and Row. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990. This is a particularly valid avenue of investigation given Schaff’s assessment of the general function of creeds: “A Creed, or Rule of Faith, or Symbol,” he says, “is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of
given that Schaff's list is not exhaustive, we must remain open to the possibility that there are others hidden away within the annals of ecclesiastical history. In any case, many referred to are not cited in full. Nevertheless, the fewness of the confessions containing distinctive statements on adoption explains in part why the doctrine has been so infrequently discussed.

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

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

Given this distinctive locus, it is ironic that the Confession has been so vilified for its juridical approach. As Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, "perhaps more than anything else it is the presence of [the twelfth chapter] which has kept alive within Presbyterianism (particularly in Scotland and the Southern Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A) the significance of Sonship in the life of Faith."14

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

Answer 34

Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.
Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

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

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

We believe that those who receive Christ by faith are united to Him, so that they are partakers in his life, and receive His fulness; and that they are adopted into the family of God, are made heirs with Christ, and have His Spirit abiding in them, the witness to their sonship, and the earnest of their inheritance. 15

The Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1925), which is described by Schaff as “the boldest official attempt within the Presbyterian family of Churches to restate the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century”, 16 also contains an article on adoption. Article XI of The Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada (1925), while entitled “Of Justification and Sonship”, reads:

We believe that God, on the sole ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, pardons those who by faith receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the adoption of sons, with a right to all the privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship. 17

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15 Schaff, op. cit., vol. 3, 918. The New Testament, of course, includes other filial models and this is reflected, for example, in Article XI of a “Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith” (1902), which was prepared by a committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It is entitled “Of the New Birth and the New Life” (ibid., 923).
16 Ibid., 924.
17 Ibid., 936.
A prima facie glance at this survey demonstrates that adoption is mainly, but not exclusively, a Reformed distinctive. Various confessions of other pre- and post-Reformation traditions also make passing allusions to adoption or at least employ the sort of relational terminology that can be construed as such. These include: (i) The Councils of Toledo (675) and the Synod of Frankfurt (794), which discuss adoption in relation to the sonship of Christ.\(^{18}\) (ii) The Sixty-Seven Articles or Conclusions of Ulrich Zwingli (1523);\(^{19}\) (iii) The Anglican Catechism (1549);\(^{20}\) (iv) The French or Gallican Confession of Faith (1559);\(^{21}\) (v) The Scots Confession of Faith (1560);\(^{22}\) (vi) The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent (1563);\(^{23}\) (vii) The Heidelberg Catechism (1563);\(^{24}\) (viii) The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1566);\(^{25}\) (ix) The Second Helvetic Confession (1566);\(^{26}\) (x) Formula

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\(^{19}\) This, the first creed of the Reformed churches, was originally written in Zwingli's Swiss German dialect. Although possessing no specific references to adoption, nevertheless two of the articles include statements on the filial relationship between believers and their heavenly Father. Article VIII: "Daraus folgt, zuerst, daß Alle, die in dem haupte leben, Glieder und Kinder Gottes sind, und das ist die Kirche oder Gemeinschaft der heiligen, eine hausfrau Christi, ecclesia catholica."; Article XXVII: "Daß alle Christenmenschen Brüder Christi und unter einander sind, und keinen auf Erden Vater nennen sollen. Da fallen hin Orden, Secten, Rotten etc." (Schaff, op. cit., vol. 3, 198 and 201).

\(^{20}\) Here too we find general familial language rather than an explicit reference to adoption (ibid., 517). The Anglican Catechism does, however, make mention of the new birth (ibid., 521).

\(^{21}\) Having been prepared by Calvin (see Part One), it is no coincidence that the French Confession contains two references to adoption and one allusion. See Articles XVII, XIX and XXII (ibid., 369-72).

\(^{22}\) Article XIII ("Of the cause of Good Works") does not actually mention adoption but is couched in terms of sonship (ibid., 452-453). For more on the Scots Confession see "Adoption: The Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology" (op.cit.) or ch. 5 below.

\(^{23}\) Mention of adoption is made in the Decree on Justification, chapter II. In chapter IV, justification is said to involve "a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour." (Ibid., vol. 2, 91). Adoption is clearly implied in chapter VIII (ibid., 97). Moreover, in chapters VII, XI and XVI there are references to the closely related themes of inheritance and eternal life (ibid., 94-95, 101, and 107).

\(^{24}\) Questions 33 and 120 are of greatest relevance, particularly the former: "Frage 33: Warum heißt Er Gottes eingeborner Sohn, so doch wir auch Gottes Kinder sind? Antwort. Darum, weil Christus allein der ewige natürliche Sohn Gottes ist, wir aber um seinetwillen aus Gnaden zu Kindern Gottes angenommen sind." (Ibid., vol. 3, 318). For Question and Answer 120, ibid., 351.

\(^{25}\) Adoption receives mention in at least two articles: Art. XVII ("Of Predestination and Election") – "Wherefore such as have so excellent a benefit of God given unto them, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons by adoption: they be made like unto the image of God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." (Ibid., vol. 1, 633). Schaff writes that Article XVII "very clearly teaches a free eternal election in Christ, which carries with it, by way of execution in time, the certainty of the call, justification, adoption, sanctification, and final glorification (Rom. viii.29, 30)" (ibid., 634). Cf.
Concordiae (1576 (L. 1584)); (x) The Saxon Visitation Articles (1592); (xi) The Irish Articles of Religion (1615); (xii) The Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-19); (xiii) The Orthodox Confession of the Eastern Church (1643); (xiv) The Confession of the Waldenses (1655); (xv) The Confession of Dositheus, or The Eighteen Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem (1672); (xvi) Easter Litany of the Moravian Church (1749); (xvii) The Articles of Religion of the Reformed Article XVII of The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1553) in Oliver O'Donovan's On the 39 Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity. A Latimer Monograph. Reprint ed. published for Latimer House, Oxford by Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1993, 142. Adoption is also mentioned under Article XXVII (“Of Baptism”): “Baptism is not onely a signe of profession, and marke of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from other that be not christened: but is also a signe of regeneration or newe byrth, whereby as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly, are grafted into the Church: the promises of the forugeuenesse of sinne, and of our adoption to be the sonnes of God, by the holy ghost, are visibly signed and sealed: bayth is confyrmed: and grace increased by vertue of the prayer vnto God.” (ibid., vol. 3, 504-5; cf. Article XXVIII of the Forty-two Articles in O'Donovan, op. cit., 148).

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

27 The fourth in the list of Schwenkfeldian errors complains that, “the water of baptism is not a means whereby the Lord seals adoption in the children of God and effects regeneration.” (ibid., vol. 3, 178). Article III. iv states that, “baptism is the bath of regeneration, because in it we are born again, and sealed by the Spirit of adoption [Kindheit/adoptionis] through grace” (ibid., 184).

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

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


32 Article XXIX: “Christ has instituted the sacrament of Baptism to be a testimony of our adoption, and that therein we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, and renewed in holiness of life.” (ibid., vol. 3, 766).


34 “I believe in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath... made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: having predestined us unto the adoption of children [zur Kindschaft] by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” (ibid., vol. 3, 799; cf. 802).
This list is lengthy simply because it includes even the very faintest allusions to the familial implications of the gospel gleaned from Schaff’s *Creeds of Christendom*. Its detail ought not to be understood as effectively overturning the case for the substantive neglect of adoption. The evidence will not allow it, as is surely verified by the sparsity of confessions distinctly treating adoption for its own sake. The truth is the doctrine has rarely been accorded official creedal recognition. When referred to at all, it is usually mentioned in connection with predestination, assurance or the sacrament of baptism. Indeed, Schaff himself indirectly reveals the significance of this oversight of adoption when he writes that “a creed may cover the whole ground of Christian doctrine and practice, or contain only such points as are deemed *fundamental* and *sufficient*”. That adoption has implicitly been deemed to be outwith the fundamental or sufficient elements that constitute creedal content strongly implies an inadequate understanding of the role and importance of adoption in the gospel, especially as described by Paul.

.2 Adoption in the Church’s corpus

Generally speaking the neglect of adoption has been masked by at least two factors: first, the numerous dictionary and lexical references to adoption, and, as stated earlier, the filial awareness that ought to characterise Christian belief, resultant from the possession of the Spirit of adoption. However, neither the proliferation of

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

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

37 Ibid., vol. 1, 4 (italics inserted).

38 The underlying point here is that only Paul uses the term *πατρίτις*. This observation lies consistently at the heart of my understanding of the doctrine. For the basic argument see especially “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation I”, 135-140.

dictionary entries nor the language of ἁγία in the household of faith has served to bring adoption into the regular theological currency of the church. It seems that the doctrine has become lost somewhere between etymological investigation and filial praise. Nowhere is this more evident than in a general perusal of historical theology, which more than confirms the story told by the creeds and confessions.

J I Packer states that, "it is a strange fact that the truth of adoption has been little regarded in Christian history." "There is", he continues, "no evangelical writing on [adoption], nor has there been at any time since the Reformation, any more than there was before." For all the names supplied by our computer-aided search of the Greek Fathers, the accuracy of Packer's assessment is generally attested by the sheer dearth of monographs devoted to adoption. To our knowledge there are but two, both of which are post-Reformation products of the Reformed faith, the first of which is a practical treatise. Generally speaking, throughout their writings pre and


41 The search through the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae for the stem τιθ- reveals that in addition to the five usages in the New Testament, the following employ or contain some form of τιθεωται: Lycophron (1) (4th-3rd century B.C.); Diodorus Siculus (3) (ante 3rd century B.C.? ); Herodianus et Pseudo-Her (1), Acta Pauli (3) and Irenaeus (4) (2nd century A.D.); Claudius Aelianus (2), Clemens Alexandrinus (17), Origenes (53) (2nd -3rd centuries A.D.); Diogenes Laertius (1) and Hippolytus (5) (3rd century A.D.); Gregorius Nyssenus (10), Eusebius (1), Epiphanius (12), Gregorius Nazianzenus (4), Marcellus (3), Pseudo-Macarius (14), Amphilochnus (6), Eutropius (1) and Severianus (1) (4th century A.D.); Joannes Chrysostomus (10), Palladius (1) and Theodoretus (46) (4th-5th centuries A.D.); Hesychius (2) (5th century); Joannes Laurentius (1) (6th century A.D.); Theophylactus Simocatta (1) (7th century); Joannes Damascenus (42) (7th-8th centuries A.D.); Georgius Monachi (6) and Photius (33) (9th century A.D.); Constantinus VII Porphyrogus (4) and Suda (6) (10th century A.D.); Michael Psellus (4) (11th century A.D.); Anna Comnena (3) 11th-12th centuries; Nicephorus Gregorios (5) (13th-14th centuries A.D.); Concilia Oecumenica (21) (varia). A computer-aided search of the Latin Fathers is, at the time of writing, unavailable to the author.

42 See T Houston, The Adoption of Sons, its Nature, Spirit, Privileges, and Effects: A Practical and Experimental Treatise. Paisley: Alex Gardner, 1872, and R A Webb, op. cit.. Both volumes are out of print. Mention could also be made of J L Girardeau's ninety pages on adoption in his Discussions of Theological Questions (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1986, 428-521). Evidence from the Blackburn Collection (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi), reveals, however, that Girardeau's treatment of adoption is composed of a collation of several papers written at various
post-Reformation theologians have alluded to adoption, but only fleetingly, and usually in reference to the discussion of other doctrines. Even where this has not been so, the sections on adoption have often been so obscure as to attract little if any attention in the church at large.

Edward McKinlay notes that “the failure to consider, and adequately to develop along satisfactory lines, the doctrine of adoption, can be traced back to the early Fathers of the Church.” When looking back that far, however, we find that McKinlay’s observation seems less true of the Greek fathers. J Scott Lidgett suggests, for example, that “nowhere can we find more emphatic and constant reference to the ‘adoption of sons’ as the characteristic gift to believers in Christ than in Irenaeus.” Although this claim is more appropriately made of Calvin (vide infra), nevertheless the adoption motif does figure in Irenaeus’s theology as a cognate theme of the Fatherhood of God. Regrettably, however, Irenaeus failed to work through the implications of divine paternity for his theology.

However, later third- and fourth-century Greek fathers of the Alexandrian tradition continued the interest in the Fatherhood of God. For example, Origen (c.185-c.254) keenly investigated the relationship between Christ’s only-begotten Sonship and the adoptive sonship of believers. According to Widdicombe, however,
"it was not until the fourth century with Athanasius [c.297-373] that the fatherhood of God became an issue of sustained and systematic analysis". The development of this theme inevitably precipitated some Alexandrian reflection on the Johannine model of rebirth and the Pauline model of adoption. These models became especially fundamental to "Athanassian" soteriology.

Meanwhile, Loughran claims that the Western fathers failed to follow the Eastern interest in adoption. Catholic scholars are divided on this however. Lyons claims that "adoptive sonship is no less clearly taught by the Latin fathers". Yet that is not saying much, for he argues that "even St. Augustine does not seem to grasp the richness of its implications nor does he integrate it into his teaching on grace." Lidgett is more critical still: "With the theology of Augustine the Fatherhood of God... passed entirely out of sight. It had been replaced by the conception of His sovereignty".

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

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49 Widdicombe, op. cit., 145. Contrast Lidgett's less favourable assessment of Athanasius: "The Father is insufficiently manifested in and through the Son to men; and men are insufficiently brought, in the Son, to the Father." (op. cit., 180).
53 Ibid., 377.
54 Ibid., 376. The consistency between Augustine and Irenaeus is interesting because Dietrich Ritschl attributes to Irenaeus's influence Hippolytus' development of a doctrine of participation in Christ, which he expressed in terms of deification and mystical union ("Hippolytus' Conception of Deification: Remarks on the Interpretation of Refutation X", Scottish Journal of Theology 12 (1959), 388).
Over the next millennium interest in the Fatherhood of God waned. The church became preoccupied with other disputed doctrines. Even the adoptionist controversy of the seventh and eighth centuries failed to extend its discussion of christology into the area of soteriology, even though the very nature of the examination of adoptionist Christology had important implications for the doctrine of salvation.

According to Louis Berkhof, the real champion of the adoptionist cause was bishop Felix of Urgella who regarded Christ as to His divine nature, that is the Logos, as the only begotten Son of God in the natural sense, but Christ on his human side as a Son of God by adoption. At the same time he sought to preserve the unity of the Person by stressing the fact that, from the time of his conception, the Son of Man was taken up into the unity of the Person of the Son of God.

In Berkhof’s opinion, Felix’s doctrine was founded on a view of the distinction of Christ’s two natures that implied a differentiation between each mode of sonship, the one supported by scriptural passages referring to Christ’s inferiority before his Father, the other by the fact that the sons of God by adoption are called the brethren of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

On the opposite side was Alcuin, the English monk and prominent adviser to Charlemagne, who, in his later refutation of the errors of adoptionism, insisted that no father could have a son by nature and adoption. Reasoning such as this prevailed, with the result that adoptionism was rejected at the Synod of Frankfurt in 794. Once this decision was made, however, all interest in the parallel notion of adoptive sonship seems, regrettably, to have ceased, only for the christological implications for redemptive sonship to surface again during the Candlish/Crawford encounter of the 1860s. The two Scotsmen could have benefited from insights drawn from a previous century.

55 McKinlay writes that, “no doubt it can be plausibly argued, that the Fathers were preoccupied with questions of greater weight - questions of real grace, rather than questions about relative grace - questions such as the true nature of the Word made flesh, or the relations of the Trinity within the Godhead.” (op.cit., 106).


If the dark ages witnessed the church’s pre-occupation with other disputed doctrines, it is also true to say that the sovereignty of God came to dominate dogmatic interest.\(^5\) Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* is said to illustrate this. Loughran argues that Anselm’s juridical view of redemption, which focuses on the necessary infinite satisfaction of Christ, drove him to begin with the premise of God’s sovereignty rather than his love.\(^5\) Similarly, Aquinas is said not only to have ignored the Fatherhood of God but to have consciously dispensed with it: “Every line of the theology of Aquinas has... gone, not only to make the Divine sovereignty the only conceivable relationship between God and man, but also to externalise and harden it.”\(^6\)

It appears, then, that by the time of the Reformation western soteriology had become thoroughly juridical. However, the Reformation era held forth the potential of a burgeoning and sustained interest in soteriology.\(^1\) In many ways this materialized, but with all the advances made in regard to justification, adoption became largely overshadowed. Understandably, the reformers invested many of their efforts in stating and contending for the new light gained. As Candlish sympathetically explains:

> The Reformers had enough to do to vindicate ‘the article of a standing or falling church’ - justification by faith alone; to recover it out of the chaos of Popish error and superstition; and to reassert it in its right connection with the Doctrine of the Absolute Divine Sovereignty which Augustine had so well established. Their hands were full.\(^6\)

Thus the rigorous and polemical dissection of justification only increased the attention given to the forensic element of the gospel and exacerbated neglect of adoption as an essential prospective and ultimately relational element of biblical soteriology. Consequently, among the Reformers “the subject of adoption, or the sonship of Christ’s disciples, did not,” Candlish rightly observes, “...occupy the place

\(^{59}\) “Adoption, Supernatural”, *op.cit.*, 139.  
\(^{60}\) Lidgett, *op.cit.*, 217 and 220.  
\(^{61}\) J McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992, 15-25. He draws attention to three such eras in church history: the Anselmic and Reformation eras, as well as the period stretching from the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, which he labels “the ethicising of the attributes of God” (*ibid.*, 22).  
and receive the prominence to which it is on scriptural grounds entitled.\textsuperscript{63} In a
similar vein Hugh Martin asks:

Why has the subject of Adoption - so rich and fertile in fine thought and feeling, so
susceptible also of beautiful theological treatment - been so little investigated and
illustrated? It belongs to the category of relative grace, and forms the sweet
complement and sparkling crown of Justification by faith. On Justification by faith
we have abundant and most precious authorship; for around that doctrine and
privilege the great battle of controversy has raged. But the conquerors seem to have
paused, exhausted or contented with the victory. Ought it not rather to commend
the subject of Adoption, that it may be treated apart from controversy?\textsuperscript{64}

Although Packer claims that “Luther’s grasp of adoption was as strong and
clear as his grasp of justification”,\textsuperscript{65} the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian
William Cunningham helps create a more balanced perception of the role of adoption
in Luther’s theology by noting that he “did not do much in the way of connecting the
doctrine of justification with the other great doctrines of the Christian system.”\textsuperscript{66}

George Hendry is even more explicitly critical:

There has sometimes been a tendency in Protestant theology, especially in the
Lutheran Church, to lean too heavily on the doctrine of justification. This is
understandable in view of the decisive importance of the doctrine at the
Reformation. But the fullness of the gospel is too rich to be compressed into the
framework of this doctrine alone. For when God extends his grace to us in Jesus
Christ, he not only releases us from our guilt, he also receives us into his family; and
the one thing cannot be separated from the other without the risk of serious
misunderstanding. The doctrine of adoption is sufficiently important to merit
treatment alongside the doctrine of justification.\textsuperscript{67}

Thus, despite the impact of Paul’s Roman and Galatian epistles on Luther
(which, we remember, contain four of the five NT uses of \textit{vlogeσστας}), Lidgett explains
that “the graciousness - and indeed fatherliness - of God in Christ is not, for the most


\textsuperscript{64} H Martin, \textit{Christ’s Presence in the Gospel History}. 2nd ed., Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1865, 80fn.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Op.cit.}, 255. Lidgett is closer to the truth when he observes that even when commenting on the
locus classicus of adoption, Gal. 4:1-7, Luther deals more with redemption from the law than the
Fatherhood of God. He elaborates by saying that, “salvation is not conceived by Luther prevailingly
under the form of realised and completed sonship, but as redemption, forgiveness, acceptance,
confidence, and freedom, especially this last.... Luther speaks much here of the gift of the Spirit, of
faith, of redemption, of freedom from the law of sin and death, of being heirs of God. All these
blessings cluster for him around the gift of the Spirit of adoption. He speaks of the filial cry of
believers, but he gives no exposition of the meaning of sonship, as the form, above all others, which
the Christian life assumes. The freedom, confidence, and sense of heirship, which are so vital to
Luther’s experience and so closely consequent on sonship, engage his attention, rather than the nature
of the relationship, which is their source.” (\textit{op.cit.}, 251-252).

\textsuperscript{66} W Cunningham, \textit{The Reformers and Theology of the Reformation}. First published 1862. Edinburgh:

\textsuperscript{67} George S Hendry, \textit{The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation}. The
part, expressed [by Luther]... strictly in terms of Fatherhood." He comes close to this in his commentary on Galatians, but this may have been as much to do with the fact that Paul's letter has as good a claim as any to be the epistle of adoption, as with the import of adoption in Luther's theology. According to Brigit Stolt, it was only on becoming a father himself that Luther realized the loving, comforting and joy-giving nature of the Fatherhood of God. Prior to that his understanding of divine paternity was affected by the austerity of his own experience of childhood, coupled with the overshadowing of its implications by his life-changing discovery of free justification in adult life.

In contrast to Luther, Lidgett rightly, but to many surprisingly, claims that "no other writer of the Reformation makes such use of the Fatherhood of God", or of adoption, we may add, as Calvin. Although the Genevan reformer provides no separate section on adoption in the Institutes, it is evident that the motif was most important for him.

In *The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom, and of Reforming the Church*, he boldly describes the grace of adoption as "not the cause merely of a partial salvation, but [that which] bestows salvation entire [and] which is afterwards

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ratified by baptism. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 1: 20, he asserts that chief of all the promises that in Christ are “yea” and “amen” is the one “by which He adopts us as His sons”. This means that Christ is “the cause and root of our adoption.” In the Institutes he asserts that the authority of the entire gospel is embraced in adoption and the effecting of salvation. This he unpacks in the preamble to his commentary on Ephesians: “God’s wonderful mercy shines forth in the fact that the salvation of men flows from His free adoption as its true and native source.” These are not just abstract theological assessments of adoption however. Calvin describes his conversion in very similar terms in his will written just prior to his death. There he recalls that he had “no other defence or refuge for salvation than [God’s] gratuitous adoption, on which alone [his] salvation depend[ed]”.

Although it is not entirely certain what the implications of these sentiments are for Calvin’s theology, they are certainly qualitative evaluations of the import of adoption that require greater attention than has been the case hitherto in Calvin scholarship. Garret Wilterdink states that, “for Calvin, adoption into the family of God is synonymous with salvation.” However, the fact that Calvin’s interest in adoption was not sustained in the Reformed tradition is largely due to his failure to apportion the doctrine a section in the Institutes.

It is not surprising that Knox (c.1515-1572), having spent a few years in Calvin’s Geneva, also mentions adoption, especially in his lengthy tract, On Predestination in Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist, 1560. His references

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73 CC 2 Cor., 22 [CO 50 (78): 23].
75 CC Eph., 121 [CO 51(79): 141].
76 “Life of John Calvin” (Tracts, vol. 1, cxxiv [CO 21 (49): 162]).
77 This statement is less bold than the position taken in my 1997 Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference paper (op.cit.). The matter is eagerly commended to Calvin scholars as a fruitful topic of research.
to the doctrine are reminiscent of Calvin's, in that he mentions it in the context of a more familial approach to Reformed theology than was to characterize later Calvinism, and specifically in connection with predestination, rather than in its own right. According to Knox, predestination is "the immutable and eternal decree of God, by which he hath once determined with himself what He will have to be done with everie man." Those called before all time God has loved in Christ. These are assured of their adoption by their justification through faith. Soteriac predestination formed then Knox's proof of the freeness of salvation. "We affirm, those whom he [God] judgeth worthie of participation of salvation to be adoptate and chosen of his free mercie for no respect of their own dignitie".

Calvin's older correspondent, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562), also dealt with adoption. In his Loci Communes he relates adoption to the old and new covenant, the differences between the Son and the sons, union with Christ, and in expounding Rom. 8:15. In the process he makes mention of Chrysostom, Augustine and Ambrose.

Otherwise, the general Protestant focus highlighted justification. During 1530-1570 Protestants were compelled to fight a tenacious rearguard action in defence of justification by faith alone. They were united on the doctrine's three

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

81 Ibid., 36.

82 Ibid., 26; cf. 169.

83 Ibid., 38.

84 In his foreword to Joseph C McLelland's volume, The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli A.D. 1500-1562 (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957, vi), T F Torrance writes: "Peter Martyr was undoubtedly one of the finest scholars and ablest theologians of his generation and must be ranked close to Calvin himself with whom he stood in the highest estimation and with whom he was in the fullest agreement." (cf. 35, 278-281).


86 Augustine: 594b, III:iii, 80b, III:iv, 153b; Chrysostom: 592b, 594a; Ambrose: 594b, 595a, III:iii, 82a.
essential elements: (i) That it is a forensic doctrine entailing God’s declaration of an individual as righteous in his sight, thereby granting them a change of status; (ii) that justifying righteousness, as it was called, is the alien righteousness of Christ external to man, but imputed to those who merely receive it by faith; (iii) that the external act of justification is distinguished from sanctification or regeneration, which is the internal process of renewal within man.

Before long the papacy convened the Council of Trent. The significance of the Tridentine decrees lies in the amount of attention allotted to a positive exposition of the Roman Catholic understanding of justification. Justification, it was agreed, refers to the Christian existence in its totality and therefore includes regeneration and adoption; that is, the sinner’s pardon and acceptance as well as an inner renewal. The infusing of God’s righteousness into the sinner through the instrument of baptism serves as its *unica formalis causa*. Their refusal to accept Luther’s view of justification meant, therefore, that Protestants were kept perpetually on guard against any aberrations that would impact on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

Proof of this is evident from the glaring omission of adoption from Heppe’s *Reformed Dogmatics*. Adoption, it is clear, struggled to maintain its locus in seventeenth-century continental Protestantism. Heppe alludes to adoption in connection with just three theologians: Andreas Hyperius (1511-1564), Franciscus Burman (1628-1679) and Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-98). We know, however, that there were at least two interested theologians of the Dutch Second Reformation. Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) of Rotterdam includes a chapter on adoption in the soteriological section of *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, while

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89 For further biographical details see *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. S.v. “Hyperius” by H Weissgerber; “Burman” by W.F. Dankbaar and “Heidegger” by J.F.G. Goeters.
91 Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated as well as the Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*. Vol. 2. Translated by Bartel Elshout based on the 3rd ed. of the original Dutchwork entitled *Redelijke Godsdienst* published
Alexander Comrie (1706-1774), a native of Scotland, focuses on the distinction between an assurance of the uprightness of faith and the assurance of adoption. Whereas the former depends on an indirect work of the Spirit to aid the believer's reasoning, the latter is a direct and immediate sealing of the Spirit, which is divinely reserved for a minority of believers.  

In England, meanwhile, the Puritans - who had been influential in the development of Dutch Puritanism through the work of Willem Teellinck (1579-1629) and others - were busy breaking new ground. By compiling a seminal creedal chapter on adoption the Westminster Assembly signaled a more formal recognition of the doctrine in Reformed theology. Ironically, by failing to permeate the Standards with the varied implications relevant to the Fatherhood of God, the filial status of his people and the corporate familial application, the commissioners undermined the prospects for further development of the doctrine. To all appearances the juridical still took precedence over the familial. Thus, despite their experimental emphases the Puritan teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, proved deficient, which is one reason why legalistic misunderstandings of Westminster Calvinism so easily arose thereafter.

It would be incorrect and unfair to claim that the Puritans did not deal with adoption. It was a theme they were cognizant of in sermons and expositions of the

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92 Beeke, op.cit., 298ff..

93 Ibid., 118ff..


Gordon Cooke’s paper “The Doctrine of Adoption and the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs” illustrates this (see Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone. Congregational Studies Conference Papers, 1998 (published by the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches)). Cooke notes that although Burroughs did not write a treatise on adoption, deep within his 41 sermons on the Beatitudes are two sermons on the adoption, taken from Matt 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God”. Cooke comments: “… - perhaps not the first verse from which we would preach adoption,” but unwisely adds that, “the Puritans didn’t preach in the exegetical straightjackets we impose upon ourselves!” (ibid., 25). Cooke betrays here, however, a lack of objectivity that too often characterizes an appreciation of the Puritans among the conservative Reformed. Had the Puritans, by acknowledging the authorial diversity of Scripture, curtailed themselves to the exposition of the Pauline use of viokeia in all likelihood they would have retained a
Shorter and Larger Catechism for instance, but too few of them dealt with the doctrine as a distinct theological locus. Notable exceptions include the Congregationalist William Ames (1576-1633) and his twenty-seven characteristics of adoption. Thomas Watson also includes a chapter on adoption in A Body of Divinity, as does Herman Witsius (1636-1708) in The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man. Other significant Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679) and John Owen (1616-1683) refer to the doctrine merely in connection with other issues such as predestination and communion with God. While it is a shame that two such prominent Puritans did not exemplify the importance of a distinctive treatment of adoption, Ferguson is of the opinion that as far as Owen was concerned this highest privilege of grace ("the spring and fountain" of all the other privileges enjoyed in Christ) is subsumed under communion with Christ precisely to emphasize that the grace of adoption is only possible through the Son.

Later in Scotland adoption was taken up to a limited extent by Thomas Boston (1676-1732). In his Complete Body of Divinity he regards adoption as a greater awareness of the redemptive-historical unfolding of adoption characteristic of the apostle's understanding and Calvin's exposition of it (see Part One).

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103 Although A T B McGowan's volume on Boston (The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston. Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology. Edinburgh: Paternoster Press (for Rutherford House), 1997) contains much helpful detail and argumentation, he falls into the same trap as many an orthodox Calvinist; that is, of discussing justification and sanctification without paying heed to the place of adoption in Boston's thought. He only introduces adoption as a foray into the thought of Stephen Charnock to show that in Reformed theology adoption is usually treated in connection with regeneration (ibid., 108 and 109; cf. 100).
distinct benefit of effectual calling. In his *View of the Covenant of Grace* he deals among other things with the promissory aspects of the covenant, part of which pledges a new and saving covenant-relationship to God that is built on reconciliation, adoption and Yahweh’s commitment to be the God of his people. Thus, Boston illustrates the importance of challenging the frequent charge that federal theology is exclusively forensic and prone to legalism.

Boston died just as Methodism was beginning its phenomenal rise. Although the Methodist revival was not distinguished by profound theological acumen, the experiential emphasis of both Wesleyan and Calvinistic Methodism on assurance, understood in terms of the “Spirit of adoption”, impacted upon the homiletics of the period. The relational and familial tenor of Methodist devotion is well illustrated in Howell Harris’ testimony of his conversion:

*June 18th. 1735, being in secret prayer, I felt suddenly my heart melting within me like wax before the fire with love to God my Saviour; and also felt not only love, peace, etc., but longing to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. Then was a cry in my inmost soul, which I was totally unacquainted with before, Abba, Father! Abba, Father! I could not help calling God my Father; I knew that I was His child, and that He loved me and heard me.*

George Whitefield’s too:

*About the end of the seventh week, after having undergone innumerable buffetings of Satan, and many months’ inexpressible trials, by night and day, under the spirit of bondage; God was pleased at length to remove the heavy load — to enable me to lay hold of His dear Son by a living faith, and, by giving me the spirit of adoption, to seal me, as I humbly hope, even to the day of everlasting adoption. But oh, with what joy — joy unspeakable, even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul. At first my joys were like a spring tide; and, as it were, overflowed the banks. So when I would, I could not avoid singing psalms almost aloud; afterwards they became*

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105 *Works,* vol. 8, 483-486.
106 The most ardent critic of late has been James B Torrance. He wrongly, but somewhat understandably claims that, “the federal scheme has substituted a legal understanding of man for a filial. That is, God’s prime purpose for man is legal, not filial, but this yields an impersonal view of man as the object of justice, rather than as primarily the object of love. We can give people their ‘legal rights’ but not see them as our brothers.” (“The concept of Federal Theology - Was Calvin a Federal Theologist?” in Wilhelm H Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor.* International Congress on Calvin Research. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1994, 35).
more settled, and blessed be God, saving a few casual intervals, have abode and increased in my soul ever since.\textsuperscript{109}

For others of the period, however, the implications of adoption ranged wider than simply the informing of praise. Baptists such as John Gill (1697-1771) found in adoption an added line of defence of the free and sovereign grace of God. As we shall see in chapter six the place of adoption in Gill’s \textit{Body of Doctrinal Divinity} contrasted markedly with the contradictory fortunes of the doctrine among Wesleyan Methodists.\textsuperscript{110}

This pattern was to be repeated in nineteenth-century Brethrenism. For all the thirty-four volumes in J N Darby’s \textit{Collected Writings},\textsuperscript{111} he has little to say specifically on adoption, yet his theology does retain something of the familial imagery and tenor of Scripture.\textsuperscript{112} This is certainly reflected in Brethren hymnody to a degree not found in Reformed compilations.\textsuperscript{113}

In the intervening period Presbyterians had almost universally settled unwittingly for a truncated proclamation of their confession’s soteriology. The effect was to increase significantly the juridical tenor of Westminster theology with the result that in the early nineteenth century there broke out an open revolt against Westminster Calvinism. In quick succession Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and John McLeod Campbell came to the fore as agitators for a renewed accent on the Fatherhood of God. So widespread did this romantic then Broad School emphasis become that when, in the 1860s, Robert Candlish confronted the issue from what he believed to be an orthodox Calvinistic standpoint he managed to evoke only a short-lived debate with his fellow Calvinist Thomas Crawford (see ch. 8). Even then, interest was not guaranteed. When Daniel Dewar (1788-1867), who was Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and a minister of the Church of Scotland, published

\textsuperscript{112} See, for instance, Darby’s treatments on “The Prodigal with the Father” (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 12); “Notes on Romans – Ch.8” (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 26); “Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians” (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 27); “Fellowship with the Father and with the Son” (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 28); “On Sealing with the Holy Ghost” (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 31).
his three-volume series entitled *Elements of Systematic Divinity* three years later, it is significant that his chapter on adoption made no mention of Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures.\(^{114}\) Not all were silent, however. In *Man’s Relations to God*\(^{115}\) the renowned Free Churchman John Kennedy of Dingwall attempted to cut through the dense complexities of the arguments involved.

Kennedy was not alone. Across the Atlantic the unexplored insights of James Henley Thornwell (1812-1862) and Robert J Breckinridge (1800-1871)\(^{116}\) coupled with interest in the Candlish/Crawford debate presented Southern Presbyterians John L Girardeau (1825-1898) and Robert A Webb (1856-1919)\(^{117}\) with a potentially fruitful line of inquiry into adoption. Their research was of limited success but at least they increased the amount of available resources from which any recovery can draw. The same can be said of the less polemical and short treatment of the Southern Baptist John L Dagg (1794-1884). In his *Manual of Theology* he lists adoption as a blessing of grace, but curtails his exposition to but an enumeration of adoption’s privileges.\(^{118}\)

We cannot end our survey, however, without briefly noting that the Candlish/Crawford debate ran exactly parallel with a bifurcation between two Roman Catholic theologians: Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-88) and Theodore Granderath (1839-1902). “Never before in the history of Roman Catholic theology”, writes Edwin Palmer, “was there such an extensive discussion of the formal cause of adoption as in the Granderath-Scheeben debate.”\(^{119}\) He adds that a better knowledge of Scheeben’s theory could help inform and dialectically challenge the Reformed

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\(^{114}\) For this reason Dewar’s treatment lacks the unhealthy and sometime speculative pre-occupation with Adam’s sonship and that of Christ’s, that marked the subsequent cause of the discussion. Daniel Dewar, *Elements of Systematic Divinity*. Vol. 2. Glasgow: Thomas Murray and Son, 1867, 488-503.

\(^{115}\) John Kennedy, *Man’s Relations to God: Traced in the Light of ‘the Present Truth’*. Reprinted from the 1869 ed. Edinburgh: J MacLaren. The James Begg Society, 1995. It was during the same period, but unrelated to the debate, that Thomas Houston published his experimental monograph on adoption in 1872.


\(^{117}\) See J L Girardeau’s *Discussions of Theological Questions*. Although the material found in Webb’s monograph dates back to lectures he delivered at Louisville Theological Seminary, Kentucky, it was not published until 1947, nearly thirty years after his death.


understanding of adoption. Not however if the Reformed remain barely cognisant of the undercurrent of adoption running through their own tradition.

.3 Adoption in the Church’s Consciousness

So much for the historical theology of adoption! All that need be said by way of a summary is that the burgeoning interest in adoption anticipated at various times in the history of the church has yet to materialize. None are probably more to blame for this than the systematic theologians. As yet they have failed to capitalize on the relevant advances made in biblical studies over recent centuries. Thus, the full integration of adoption into the theology of the church with a view to the benefit of the faith of her members (the prevalence of the language of ἐκδοτικός notwithstanding) remains a perennial desideratum. In fact, not even the ongoing transition towards a more familial understanding of the Bible’s theology has dispelled the neglect of adoption. This begs serious hermeneutical and exegetical questions as to how it has been possible for the church to perceive more clearly the parallel concepts of divine paternity (or nowadays even maternity) and human sonship without a commensurate development of her understanding of adoption, which is the very process of entrance into a filial relationship to God! The later chapters go some way to revealing the answer.

The rare and as yet unfulfilled hopes for the retrieval of adoption help explain the motivation behind the current study. In endeavouring to clear the ground for others to follow, it would be remiss not to mention the benefit this study has gained from the small but growing communis consensus of Reformed Christians that is calling for the recovery and integration of what is clearly one of the most underrated doctrines of Holy Scripture. Without the chapters, articles and popular books available, the present study would not have been as informed or as supported in its

120 John Dick was simply wrong to say that “a place is commonly assigned to [adoption] in systems of Theology.” (J Dick, Lectures on Theology. 2 vols. in 1. New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851, 224).
121 For details see the conclusion of my article “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation I”, 131 fn.10.
122 This communis consensus is found mainly among more popular treatments of the doctrine. To date little academic work has been undertaken among those appealing for the recovery of adoption, which partially explains why most of the available treatments have stepped so prematurely outwith the bounds of Pauline theology in explicating the doctrine. Contributors to the consensus are J I Packer.
assessment of adoption’s neglect. Not since the fallout from the unique but short-lived Crawford/Candlish debate of the 1860s has awareness of the gaping vacuum left in theology by the widespread and far-reaching historico-theological neglect of this doctrine been so keen. Although it is possible to over-estimate the current level of interest, this re-issuing of the call for its recovery manifestly reveals that the earlier plea fell on deaf ears. That it did is surprising given the favourable climate in which it was vocalised.123

Those Westminster Calvinists who initially heard the appeal would, at that time, have been in no frame of mind to favour what might have been perceived as an accommodation to the liberal espousal of the universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Nevertheless, the fact that the late nineteenth-/twentieth-century appeals were generally made by those of a Reformed persuasion is significant.124


123 Pannenberg’s claim that “modern Protestant theology... has stressed the comprehensive significance of this thought of being children of God” (op.cit., 212) could only have been made in the light of such a change of climate.

124 Exceptions include Thomas A Smail’s The Forgotten Father (first printed 1980. Reprint ed., London et al.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), and Mark Stibbe’s From Orphans to Heirs: Celebrating
They indicate that within the community there were those who realised the absence of the prospective element of the gospel from the general perception of Reformed soteriology, but who understood that the presence of rich resources in the valuable literary and creedal archives of the tradition could hold the key to the revitalisation of Westminster Calvinism.

Thus, in embarking on our study proper, our focus turns from the church at large to the particular history of Calvinism. What follows is a hitherto untold aspect of that history, which, beginning with Calvin’s profound theology of adoption, traces the fortunes of the doctrine over the most part of the last four centuries, culminating with the coup de grâce – Webb’s denial that the reformer ever taught the doctrine. That such a view was held within the very tradition associated with Calvin’s name is evidence of the extent to which the tenor of Reformed orthodoxy had changed over the preceding centuries. It also explains why historical-theologies of Calvinism have not done justice to the place of adoption in the theology of the tradition.

What stands out from this fresh perspective on the history of Calvinism is the methodological discontinuity that runs concurrent with the continuities of the tradition, and which is referred to as Scholasticism. Care is needed in explaining its development for, according to Muller,

we must recognise... that the gradual development of a Protestant scholasticism after the Reformation not only looked to the thought and method of pre-Reformation thinkers for its inspiration but to the thought and method of the Reformers themselves insofar as it partook of the scholastic past and insofar as it criticized and modified scholasticism. Thus, the modifications both of scholastic method and of the doctrinal contents of theological system by the Protestant theologians of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries indicate the impact of the Reformation (and The Renaissance as well) on scholasticism and on the scholastic form of theology[.]

J P Donnelly argues that three interrelated factors gave rise to Scholasticism: the continued use of Aristotle in Calvinistic undergraduate training, the polemical nature of theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the large scale adaptation of our Spiritual Adoption. Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1999. R T Kendall opens his foreword to this latter volume with the words: “The time is long overdue that the church generally should rediscover the New Testament teaching of adoption.”

of scholastic attitudes and teaching by Calvinistic theologians themselves,126 usually traced back to Theodore Beza.127

Although Scholasticism is rarely defined, it is more complex than is acknowledged by many of those enamoured by a cut and dried understanding of the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" debate.128 While acknowledging the close connection between Scholasticism, theology and philosophy, Muller claims that beyond the shared dialectical method, the evidence points to substantive theological and philosophical differences among scholastics whether of the thirteenth century or of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Accordingly, the difficulty in defining the term has been that it refers to a methodological approach rather than a set of beliefs.129 The scholastic method involved a technical and logical approach to theological system that subdivided the loci into components parts, subjecting those subdivisions to analysis by propositions.130 Yet all this is a far cry from the rationalism that Scholasticism is often accused of.131

For all the discussion that has for long enough fed the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" debate,132 it has nevertheless been poorer for the fact that adoption has not figured in it until now.133 Beside the discontinuity there are numerous unresolved

127 In accepting this, the reader is pointed to Robert Letham's balanced article "Theodore Beza: A Reassessment" in SJT 40 (1987), 25-40.
128 Muller complains that "much of the older scholarship has assumed an intrinsic relationship between 'scholasticism,' 'predestination,' and 'rationalism' or 'Aristotelianism.' Nonetheless, there is no historical justification for these associations." ("Calvin and the Calvinists": Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy – Part Two" CTJ 31 (1996), 126).
129 Lane, "The Quest for the Historical Calvin", 97; Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists' - Part One", 367.
131 Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists' - Part One", 358. Interacting with the work of Brian Armstrong, Muller acknowledges that Protestant Scholasticism involved "ratiocination" in order to formulate a logically coherent and defensible system, but it did not follow logic for logic's sake, nor set reason above other criteria such as Scripture, accepted authorities, known facts and the Christian faith (ibid., 367-368). Therefore, while it is true to say that the seeds of modern rationalism are found in the seventeenth century it is also important to recognise that orthodox or scholastic theology generally opposed rationalist philosophy (ibid., 373).
132 For summaries of this debate see, for instance, Jensen, op.cit., 3-7; T Lane, "The quest for the historical Calvin", EQ 55 (1983), 95-113.
133 A significant contributor to this debate has been Professor J B Torrance. On an occasion of hearing him lecture in Edinburgh in the late 1990s I asked him why it was that federal Calvinism could be so guilty of legalism given that the Westminster Standards included the first confession in the history of
issues of more special interest. The resolution of these has the potential to challenge both sides of the current discussion, which, in reference to the ecclesiastical implications of the debate, we may newly describe as orthodox and revisionist Calvinism respectively. While there are varying perspectives represented among both these parties, it may be noted fairly accurately that whereas the former (typically conservative Presbyterian) have too often left the impression that God has poured no more light on his Word since the Standards were first compiled, the latter (typically the neo-orthodox found in mainstream Presbyterian denominations, their colleges and seminaries) too frequently overlook the very nuances of Puritan thought wherein lie many of the answers to the charges they level against the Standards.

The following history suggests, by contrast, that the ecclesiastical implications of the “Calvin versus the Calvinists debate” are not so cut and dried. Rather, our study of adoption warrants the belief that there are in fact three parties to the debate. Occupying a mediating (centre-right) position between revisionist Calvinists to the left and orthodox Calvinists to the right are constructive Calvinists. Before explaining the essential nature of constructive Calvinism an explanation of my use of the term is in order. This is so not only because the term is as novel as the terms ‘orthodox’ and ‘revisionist Calvinism’, but primarily because this is, to our knowledge, the first occurrence of a threefold understanding of the theological and ecclesiastical responses to the “Calvin versus Calvinists debate” within the worldwide Presbyterian community.

the church to have a chapter on adoption. To his credit he confessed that he had not taken that into consideration.

Although these categories suffer the usual drawbacks, they are nevertheless helpful for bringing a general understanding to an often confused debate. Whereas the former group refers to that school of thought which teaches that the Puritans were generally faithful to Calvin’s thought, believing whatever differences there are to be largely developmental, the latter term refers to those who reject the federal theology of Westminster Calvinism in favour of the reformer’s more biblical theological approach. While both parties make valid points, neither is without either a case or a fault. Whereas orthodox Calvinists have sometimes come close to treating the Westminster Standards as a “paper Pope”, revisionist Calvinists have often found it difficult not to deride them for their shortcomings. For a succinct overview of the four major issues involved, viz., scholasticism, covenant theology, the extent of the atonement and faith and assurance, see Randall C Gleason, John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality. Studies in Church History, vol. 3. New York et al.: Peter Lang, 1995, 7-44.

The commissioners themselves talk of the prospect of God giving more light on his Word (MSAD, 1: i: 442).

I am indebted to my colleague Richard Gaffin for this qualification of the mediating position that constructive Calvinists occupy.
Six characteristics of the term constructive Calvinism are worth bearing in mind. First, constructive Calvinism is a *distinguishing* term. Whereas orthodox Calvinists (generally the equivalent of Lane’s “Calvinist reactionaries”) insist, either implicitly or explicitly, on a commitment to both the *form* and *content* of Westminster theology, and revisionist Calvinists (usually the equivalent to Lane’s “Barthian revisionists”)\(^{137}\) on an overall rejection of both, constructive Calvinism—which is an outgrowth of orthodox Calvinism—accepts that the form of Westminster theology is in certain respects regrettable, but insists that revisionist Calvinism has not always done justice to its content. Now while form inevitably affects content, a constructive-Calvinist perspective, being dissatisfied with the orthodox Calvinistic response to revisionist Calvinism, regards the impact of form on the actual theology of Westminster Calvinism as minimal, suggesting but a modest revision of the WCF;\(^{138}\) that is, consideration of the modern cultural challenges to confessionalism apart.\(^{139}\)

Secondly, the term constructive Calvinism, like the other two terms, is intended to convey the self-perception of those who evince its ethos. Accordingly, whereas revisionist Calvinists would in Presbyterian circles generally regard themselves as revising the Westminster legacy so that it reflects more of Calvin and Barth, orthodox Calvinists, considering themselves to be just that, espouse the respective continuities between Westminster Calvinism and Calvin, the Calvinistic tradition in general and Scripture. As the name suggests, those of a constructive Calvinistic mindset opt (whether consciously or not), by contrast, for a constructive approach to the history of the tradition that acknowledges some of the revisionist concerns while nevertheless sharing the orthodox love for Westminster Calvinism. Thus, in their openness to the fresh light that has fallen on Scripture over the past 350 years they are rendered capable of discerning the kernel of truth veiled in the revisionist protest against Westminster Calvinism. Consequently, constructive Calvinists are distinguished from orthodox Calvinists by their attempts to work

\(^{137}\) "The quest for the historical Calvin", 107.

\(^{138}\) John Murray set the tone of constructive Calvinism *vis à vis* the WCF when he wrote: “If we ever regard them as in themselves sacrosanct and authoritative, then we have committed idolatry and have fallen into the error of the Church of Rome.” (*Collected Writings*. Vol. 1. First published 1976. Reprint ed.; Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, 314.

positively towards the 'pristination' of the tradition, realising that in terms of its historical trajectory what, in short, may well be required is an overall synthesis of Calvin's biblical-theological methodology with the best doctrinal insights of the Puritan era.

Thirdly, 'constructive Calvinism' is a related term. As a mediating position constructive Calvinism inevitably relates to both revisionist Calvinism and orthodox Calvinism. Nevertheless, while giving revisionist Calvinists a genuine hearing, constructive Calvinism – while originating in orthodox Calvinism and occupying a close-at-hand centre-right position nevertheless remains primarily interactive with orthodox Calvinism. In fact, constructive Calvinism functions as a wiser and more effective approach to the furtherance of Westminster Calvinism than that traditionally offered by orthodox Calvinists. Thus the goal of constructive Calvinism is not the regurgitation of Westminster Calvinism but its repristination. Only once this goal has been achieved will Westminster Calvinism be better placed to provide a more winsome alternative at denominational and congregational level to the discontinuities of the confessional commitments of neo-orthodox theology.

Fourthly, 'constructive Calvinism' is intentionally a temporary term. Perhaps its greatest present usefulness is its attempt to explain the tensions that consistently exist among conservative Presbyterians the world over. At first sight, however, the claim that there are two quite distinct schools of thought among conservative Presbyterians may be understood to speak up the very divisions that require resolving. Nonetheless, the reality of the situation is that the divisions are already there as can be plainly seen in any denomination where subscription to the Westminster Standards is taken seriously. Thus, far from speaking up division, recognition of the benefits of the constructive Calvinistic position holds out the fresh possibility for the effective propagation and defence of Westminster Calvinism where, to date, orthodox Calvinists have largely failed. Presently, however, the growth of the constructive Calvinistic ethos is dependent on the orthodox Calvinistic recognition that their siege mentality has in fact played a significant part in the emergence of revisionist Calvinism (see Part Two). Only once this has been laid aside and those subtle insights accepted that could better enrich and make defensible
the theology of Westminster Calvinism can the prospects of Westminster Calvinism improve.

Fifthly, ‘constructive Calvinism’ has primary reference to the question of method. For the constructive Calvinist the price of defending the theology of Westminster Calvinism is the concession that the form in which it has come down to us has been regrettable. This concession becomes somewhat pain-free, however, once the benefits of the renaissance in Calvin studies for the future prospects of Westminster Calvinism have sunk in. At no point is this clearer than in the consideration of Calvin’s biblical theology, which echoed in large measure not only the details of a Scripture-based theology but also, significantly, its tenor.

Sixthly, the term ‘constructive Calvinism’, having not simply a methodological reference but also an attitudinal one, need not be applied entirely uniformly. In America, for instance, it has relevance to the trajectory of the old Princeton tradition running from Geerhardus Vos to John Murray to Richard Gaffin and onwards, aided along the way by the additional Dutch insights of Herman Ridderbos (and to a lesser extent Oscar Cullmann) and the renaissance in Calvin studies. In Scotland alternatively, constructive Calvinism has revolved less around a biblical-theological methodology as around the various attitudes to the Westminster Confession. At the risk of painting brush strokes too broadly, vital in the Scottish context for the distinguishing of the orthodox Calvinistic mindset from that of the constructive Calvinistic ethos is the approach to the WCF vis à vis Scripture. Whereas the orthodox Calvinist tends, however well intentioned, to read Scripture through the WCF, the constructive Calvinist seeks to reverse the trend by reading the WCF through Scripture. This explains in part how Donald Macleod, for instance, can lead the defence of federal theology in the face of the Torrancian critique, yet find himself beset by opposition not from revisionist Calvinists but from fellow Westminster Calvinists of the orthodox variety. This explanation for this lies in his questioning of the WCF’s teaching on issues such as divine passibility and the Man of Sin etc. that appears to call into question his fidelity to Westminster Calvinism, his defence of federal theology notwithstanding. All to say that in the Scottish context the difference of approach to the WCF, while subtle, nevertheless determines one’s brand of Calvinism.
Bearing all this in mind, it must yet be said that in what follows our intention is not, first and foremost, the resolution of the current tensions among the Reformed (as desirable as that would be), but the resurrection of adoption from the annals of the Calvinistic tradition. Thus, our attention will focus more on the nineteenth than on the seventeenth century, although such has been the staying power of the Westminster Standards that the later era cannot be understood without an acquaintance with the earlier period. Accordingly, contemplation of the “Calvin versus the Calvinists” debate will result as a by-product of the history of adoption in the tradition, and not as its rationale.

In tracing the trajectory of the tradition the reader ought to be cognisant of the unresolved issues that will become apparent. From the start the history reveals, first of all, an ambiguous understanding of biblical metaphors. The tradition never settled the question relating to the diversity of filial models present in the New Testament literature. Although Calvin’s use of the humanist tools gave him all the expository equipment needed to expound the distinctive Pauline contours of the doctrine, the evidence indicates that in paying heed to the various constituent parts of Scripture, he failed to acknowledge sufficiently the differences between the various authorial perspectives on the gospel, which are so essential to an accurate perception of the biblical models.\(^{140}\)

Secondly, the facts record the organisational differences between the Institutes and the documents of the Westminster Assembly. Whereas Calvin omitted a separate locus on adoption but peppered his references to adoption throughout his

\(^{140}\) Support of this position is found in the Dutch tradition. See particularly the work of Herman Ridderbos, especially his chapter on adoption in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*. Translated by John Richard de Witt. First British ed.; London: SPCK, 1977, 197-204; compare his comments on Jn 1:12-13, a text often confused among theologians by the juxtaposing of new birth and adoption: “In John being a child is always rooted in a new birth ‘of God,’ ‘of the Spirit’ or ‘from above’ (cf. vs. 13; 3:3ff.)” (*The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. See also Herman Bavinck’s comments in *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*: “When John speaks of this [the right to eternal life], he is thinking particularly of the new life which is born of God and planted in us by the Holy Spirit (John 1:13 and 3:5). This being children of God, of which he speaks, comes up out of regeneration and consists especially of being conformed to God (John 1:13 and 1 John 1:1-3). But Paul usually speaks of this being children of God in another sense. He takes it to mean that God on the basis of the righteousness in Christ accepts us as His children and heirs.” This he goes on to mention in terms of adoption (Translated by Henry Zylstra. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956. Ppbk ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977, 464-465).
work, the Assembly dealt with the doctrine distinctively but could have done more to weave its implications throughout the documents produced.

Thirdly, the tradition clearly evinces two different methods at work. In Calvin we find adoption worked out in terms of historia salutis, but in the WCF primarily in regard to ordo salutis. Thus there remains to this day a methodological tension between the respective uses of the two models.

Fourthly, the history uncovers a discernible polemical irony. With the gradual fading of adoption from theological discourse, the delayed but ineluctable backlash focused on the familial themes of the gospel. Yet, instead of ransacking the resources of the earlier tradition in order to offset the lopsidedness of later Calvinism, there was a turning to Luther for help, which renders uncertain the Reformed credentials of those early revisionist Calvinists.

Fifthly, there is a perspectival variance between Calvin’s clear emphasis on the believer’s status in Christ, and the later Calvinistic pre-occupation with the original status of the adopted in Eden. By force of circumstances, especially the onset of Victorian liberalism, their attention was drawn to discussions ad nauseam whether Adam was a son of God or a subject of God or both.

Taking note of all these factors our attention now turns to the documentation of the history of adoption in the development of Calvinism.
Part One

The Evidence of Adoption in the Theological History of Calvinism
Section One

John Calvin and "the Good News of Adoption"
Chapter One

The Search for Adoption

... students of Calvin’s theology have too rarely recognised how important the concept of sonship was to his understanding of the Christian life.

Sinclair B Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship”.

Were any other doctrine to be traced out in the history of Calvinism it would be assumed with some confidence that we could begin with John Calvin, the theologian par excellence of the Reformed tradition. In fact, an a priori idea of the reformer’s theology would shape many an expectation of how such a history would at least begin. Not so in the case of adoption however. Whereas Reformed theologians demonstrate little to no awareness of its history prior to the Westminster Assembly, Calvin scholarship has yet to recognise to any significant degree the pervasiveness of the doctrine in the reformer’s theology. The purpose of the early chapters of this study is, then, to reveal that the evidence of the doctrine’s presence in the tradition can be traced back to Calvin himself.

To prove the point there are two immediate issues that require addressing: the reasons for the neglect of adoption in the study of Calvin and the investigation of those influences that may have shaped his interest in the doctrine. Regrettably, justice cannot be done to the complexity of this latter issue. Not only does space not allow for the inclusion of, for instance, Calvin’s use of the Fathers, there is little that can be concluded with certainty from the influences we have investigated. Nevertheless, for all its limitations, the inquiry is worth undertaking even if only to set the context for the exposition that follows.

1.1 Calvin: The Sources

There are at least four reasons why due attention has not been accorded Calvin’s doctrine of adoption.
Broadly speaking, the discernment of adoption in Calvin has been hindered by the inadequate development of the discipline of soteriology. We pointed in the introduction to John McIntyre who has argued that there is lacking a generally accepted soteriological definition comparable to the trinitarian and christological statements found in the creeds. Among the various reasons for this, the first McIntyre proffers is that the death of Christ was understood eucharistically and liturgically, so defining the role of the atonement in the church.¹ Perhaps more relevant, secondly, is the absence of any protracted heretical attacks on established soteriological positions during the patristic era.² According to McIntyre not until the Anselmic period did soteriology become a matter of controversy. Thereafter the Reformation spawned much intensive discussion of soteriology, as has the last one hundred and fifty years in Britain (since the publication of John McLeod Campbell’s *Nature of the Atonement* (1856)), during which time some fifty plus works on soteriology have been produced. Yet these periods have been the exception and together illustrate why there remain unresolved controversies and disagreements in the field.

Needless to say, the history of soteriology has inevitably had some bearing on the study of Calvin. Although it may rightly be assumed that the reformer’s soteriology provides a fruitful area of research, the general neglect of soteriology has had a negative impact on Calvin studies. It is little wonder then that Calvin scholarship has yet to catch up with the more recent burgeoning of soteriological interest. As Tjarko Stadtland has noted: “Das Interesse an Prädestination, theologia naturalis, Ekklesiologie und Pneumatologie überwiegt in der Calvinforschung. Andere Themen, denen Calvin schon rein raummäßig in der Institutio von 1559 einen viel größeren Platz zuteilt, finden seltsamerweise nur wenig Interesse.”³ Reflection on Calvin’s soteriology confirms this.

Two factors are demonstrative. In the first place, there is most obviously the absence of awareness and interest in Calvin’s doctrine of adoption, although as pervasive as references to adoption are in Calvin’s corpus it cannot be said that

1 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 10.

adoption occupies a significant part of his literary output. That itself is of significance, as we shall consider below.

Secondly, while somewhat more attention has been accorded to Calvin’s views on justification and regeneration/sanctification, the differing interpretations of these doctrines has not been resolved. In the words of Cornelis Venema:

There is no consensus on the place, the importance, and the nature of the doctrine of justification and regeneration [and, we may add, adoption] in Calvin’s thought. Despite the relative neglect of this subject by students of Calvin’s theology, it nonetheless shares an unclear status in the literature with such oft-discussed subjects as predestination, Scripture, and the knowledge of God.

Writing in 1985, Venema complained that with the exception of Stadtland’s Rechtfertigung und Heiligung bei Calvin there have been only a few short studies addressing a limited range of interpretative questions. Of particular relevance is the comparison with Luther wherein the significance of Calvin’s doctrine of justification is often said to be centrifugal. In Venema’s opinion this is regrettable, and does not do justice to the importance of the inseparable doctrines of justification and regeneration (duplex gratia Dei) in Calvin’s theology.

Although treated primarily in the Institutes Book III, these doctrines are clearly connected with the surrounding material. Indeed, argues Venema, duplex gratia dei refers not simply to a doctrinal couplet, but to “a particular perspective upon something more pervasive and fundamental, namely, the being and action of the Triune Creator and Redeemer toward us as his redeemed creatures.” However, the realisation of this does not clarify the more intricate details of the obviously

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6 In general, the questions usually addressed relate to the place and importance of justification and regeneration in Calvin’s theology, the precise relation between justification and regeneration, the question of the relation between Calvin’s understanding of union with Christ and his forensic definition of justification, the nature and relation of law and gospel and the syllogismus practicus in Calvin’s theology (Venema, op.cit., 18ff.).
7 Ibid., 66.
essential aspects of *duplex gratia Dei*. If then the neglect of soteriology has left uncertain the comparative importance of justification and regeneration for the general understanding of Calvin’s theology, how much more is this the case with adoption. Consequently, we have resisted the temptation to try to determine the hermeneutical key to Calvin, even assuming the legitimacy of the query.\(^8\) Rather, our intention is more modest. It is to lay out some of the evidence for the pervasiveness of adoption in his corpus, and to raise the question in the mind of the reader as to how traditional interpretations of Calvin ought to be understood in the light of this fresh perspective.

(ii) *Calvin studies have been influenced by the general neglect of adoption*

Reflecting more narrowly, it follows that if adoption had enjoyed a securer place in the church’s consciousness and a more pervasive usage in her theological currency, then, in all likelihood, interest in Calvin’s theology (and, more particularly, his soteriology), would have been shaped accordingly. As it stands, however, Calvin scholarship has mirrored the church’s neglect of the doctrine. Not surprisingly then, among Calvin scholars substantive references to the reformer’s interest in adoption are few and far between.

Over the years several widely different assumptions have been posited in regard to the status of adoption in Calvin. On the one extreme, the Southern Presbyterian Robert Webb claimed categorically that “Calvin ...makes no allusion whatever to adoption”.\(^9\) This was an astonishing claim, not least because John Girardeau, his mentor, made passing reference to adoption in Calvin (see ch. 9). Less extreme, and certainly closer to the truth, was John Kennedy’s assessment of the 1860s. He denied that Calvin traced distinctly the relation of adoption.\(^10\) By this

\(^8\) In the light of what follows we nevertheless suggest the legitimacy of claiming for adoption what Göhler claims for sanctification, namely that “gerade die Lehre von der Heiligung ein Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Theologie Calvins ist.” (op.cit., 10 (italics inserted)). According to François Wendel, however, the legitimacy of the pursuit of a more definite key is determined by the extent to which Calvin’s theology is believed to constitute a system (Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought. Translated by Philip Mairet. London: Collins, 1963, 357).

\(^9\) *RDA.*, 17. Such assessments seem largely influenced by the absence in the *Institutio* of an exclusive chapter on adoption. See for example Thomas Law’s article, “The Grace of Adoption”, *SPR* 30 (1879), 277. See below.

\(^10\) *Man’s Relations to God*, 71.
we understand him to have meant that Calvin did not trace out the contours of adoption in its own right.

With the flourishing of Calvin research over recent decades a growing awareness of the importance of adoption in Calvin has begun to emerge. Significant in this development has been Brian Gerrish’s bold assertion that Calvin describes the gospel as “quite simply, the good news of adoption.”

He says that “the theme of adoption, the new birth, the transition from ‘children of wrath’ to ‘children of grace’, takes us to the heart of the reformer’s protest against the prevailing gospel of the day”. However, he adds, “one cannot say ... that gratuitous adoption is Calvin’s central dogma, as though everything else in his system were deduced from it. Rather it is a complex of ideas, or (better) of images, that shape the system from beginning to end.”

(iii) Calvin appears not to have written on adoption.

When we turn to Calvin himself, we realise that it is unfair to apportion the entire blame for the neglect of his doctrine of adoption on either the Reformed tradition or Calvin scholarship. Although those interested in adoption from both parties of interpreters could have broadened their search beyond the Institutes, the fact is that for all the verbal importance that Calvin attaches to the doctrine (see Introduction), nowhere does the doctrine have a distinctive place in his writings. Obviously, this omission is most noticeable in the Christianae Religionis Institutio where there is not a single chapter dedicated to adoption.

This is intriguing and not a little remarkable, for surely Calvin’s summa would have been the ideal medium for the provision of a commonplace on adoption. The Institutes were, after all, primarily designed from the start to be catechetical rather than apologetic. Not surprisingly then their final form purported to give a

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12 Ibid, 90. In passing we ought to note from this quotation that Gerrish does leave the door open for regeneration (the "new birth") to be included as part of Calvin’s definition of the gospel.
13 Ibid., 123.
complete account of Christian teaching. In his epistle to the reader (Inst. (1559)) Calvin writes:

I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents.

It is perplexing then why Calvin should have omitted a specific locus on adoption from his writing.

Calvin’s fundamental aim, being constructive not destructive, was to retrieve elements of truth from the prevailing error so as to construct a more biblically based theology. Thus, as Calvin’s evolving *Institutio* grew in length and depth it turned into a monumental restatement of Augustinian principles and a massively authoritative survey of God, man and Christ, Scripture, faith, hope and charity. Yet, given the uncertainty regarding the extent of Augustine’s interest in adoption, it is not surprising that Calvin’s interaction with Augustine has done little to uncover the pervasiveness of the doctrine in the reformer’s thought. If anything, the connection between the two theologians has probably confirmed the assumption of their mutual silence about adoption.

Whatever the truth about Augustine, the following exposition uncovers the irrefutable evidence of adoption in Calvin. According to McKinlay, while “it is true that ... Calvin has no chapter heading on adoption in *The Institutes*, nevertheless adoption holds a relatively important place in his scheme of doctrine.” Yet such evidence has not been collated before from the fleeting but significant allusions scattered throughout his works. The content of such *membra disjecta* reveals the clear ambiguity in Calvin’s allusions to adoption. There may be no chapter on

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15 Wendel, op. cit., 111.
17 Ibid., xxxii.
18 McGrath has said that the English translation of “institution” “perhaps conveys another of Calvin’s concerns - to return to a more authentic form of Christianity than that encountered in the late medieval period. It is Christianity as originally instituted which concerns Calvin, not as it was developed (or deformed, in his view) in the Middle Ages.” (A E McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 137). Yet Warfield is surely correct in saying that Calvin “wished to rebuild the Church on its true foundations, not to destroy its edifice. But like certain early rebuilders of the Holy City, he needed to work with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other.” (B B Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*. Edited by Samuel G Craig. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956, 10).
19 McKinlay, op. cit., 100. What he notes about the omission of adoption is also true of the Fatherhood of God (Wilterdink, “The Fatherhood of God in Calvin’s Thought”, 176).
adoption, nevertheless, according to Griffith’s recent article, “the adoption of believers is at the heart of John Calvin’s understanding of salvation.”

What is the evidence of these allusions? If we look first at the *Institutes*, we learn from the earliest edition (1536) that Calvin was disposed toward a familial perspective on the gospel. Regarding the *Institutes* as both a catechetical tool for the comfort of suffering Protestants as well as an apologetic pronouncement in support of those being martyred by Francis I, King of France, Battles explains that “at the heart of Calvin’s thought was the relation between the King and the King of Kings, between the providential rule of our Heavenly Father and the sometimes capricious and cruel rule of him who should be the father of his country.”

Consistent with this, Calvin mentions adoption in four of the six chapters. What is surprising, however, given what we shall consider later, Calvin omits the use of the motif in chapter four (“The Sacraments”) and in chapter six (“Christian Freedom, Ecclesiastical Power, and Political Administration”). This contrasts markedly with the last edition of the *Institutes* (1559). There, according to the index of the LCC edition, although there are no citations listed for Book One - “The Knowledge of God the Creator”, for Book Two - “The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ, First Disclosed to the Fathers Under the Law, and Then to us in the Gospel” - adoption is cited as being referred to in five chapters. Unsurprisingly, in Book

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20 "‘The First Title of the Spirit’", 135. He concludes his brief essay even more boldly: “We have seen that for Calvin, adoption is a fundamental structural category for the doctrine of salvation.” (Ibid., 152).


22 Note, in what follows we have opted for the simpler method of listing the use of the English translation ‘adoption’. The reason being that some form of the stem ‘adopt-’ has been used to translate at least four Latin terms employed by Calvin: adopto, coopto, ascisco, and assumo. For the full use of these terms in relation to the *Institutes* (1559) see *A Concordance to Calvin’s Institutes 1559*. Based on the Critical Text of Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel. Vol. 1. Compiled by Richard F Weavers. Grand Rapids, MI: Digamma Publishers, 1992.

23 Ch. 1 (“The Law: Containing an Explanation of the Decalogue”): 3 (*Inst.* (1536), 1, 37, 40 [CO 1 (29): 30, 51, 54 (cooptati and adoptionem)]. Note hereafter that unless otherwise stated the Latin renderings of adoption follow some stem of the verb adopto. The other verbs usually rendered adoption include coopto, assumo and ascisco. See ch. 3 for more on their particular nuances.); ch. 2 (“Faith: Containing an Explanation of the Creed (Called Apostolic)”: 5 (ibid., 50, 51, 58, 62, 63 [CO 1 (29): 64, 65, 73 (cooptarentur), 76 (cooptantur), 78 (asciti)]); ch. 3 (“Prayer: With an Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer”): 2 (ibid., 76 (x2) [CO 1 (29): 90]); ch. 5 (“The Five false Sacraments”): 1 (ibid., 161 [CO 1 (29): 180]).

24 The following figures are based on the LCC index. The index, however, is not entirely reliable. The following data have been altered to reflect this. For example, Calvin does mention adoption in Bk 1. See for example *Inst.* I: vi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 54].

Three - “The Way in which we Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to us from it, and what Effects follow” - adoption is mentioned in as many as thirteen of the twenty-five chapters. By Book Four - “The External Means or Aids by which God invites Us into the Society of Christ and holds us therein” - the number of citations wanes considerably, with adoption being referred to in connection with only two chapters.

Next, the tracts or treatises mention adoption but only in relation to other doctrines. Without an overall knowledge of Calvin’s understanding of adoption these references can easily be overlooked. Nevertheless they are found even in selections drawn from Calvin’s tracts and treatises. Although the setting of the following comments will become clearer in later chapters, they are typical of what is found throughout Calvin’s shorter writings. For example, in his Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments Calvin speaks of the Holy Spirit as the “internal minister” who feeds the souls of the faithful with the body and blood of the Lord. In his short Articles Concerning Predestination adoption is explicitly mentioned in relation to predestination. The same is true of the Reply to Sadolet (1539). In the Necessity of Reforming the Church adoption is referred to at least on two occasions.

Sometimes the allusions do not even amount to direct references to adoption but only to related issues. For example, in Calvin’s Short Treatise on the Holy

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27 Inst. IV: xv [CO 2 (30): 962 (cooptamus), 967, 974]; xvi: 3, 4, 7, 9, 24, 31 [CO 2 (30): 978, 979, 981 (cooptati), 982, 983 (cooptati), 999 and 1000]. Given the above we can say that the footnote to Inst. III: ii: 11 is correct. There we read: “Calvin’s use of the Pauline concept of ‘adoption’ as sons of God (Rom. 8:15, 23; Rom. 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; cf. John 1:12) is frequent in the Institutes. The principal references are: II. vi. 1; II. vii. 15; II. xi. 9; II. xii. 2; III. I. 3; III. ii. 22; III. xi. 6; III. xiv. 18; III. xvii. 6; III. xviii. 2; III. xx. 36f.; III. xxi. 7; III. xxii. 1, 4.” For a similar overview of the general familial contours of the gospel as found throughout the four books of the Institutes see Leonard de Moor’s article “John Calvin’s View of Revelation” in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 6, Calvin and Hermeneutics, 317-318.

28 For the significance of the tracts and treatises see Gamble, op.cit., vol. 5, Calvin’s Opponents, 74. While sample references are made in what follows to selections from the treatises, the exposition found in chs 2-4 has drawn from a systematic perusal of the tracts and treatises.


30 Ibid, 179.

31 Ibid., 237.
Supper of our Lord and only Saviour Jesus Christ (1541) the nearest there is to any mention of adoption is Calvin’s description of the Lord’s Supper as the Father’s loving nourishment of his children. Here, however, Calvin has regeneration in view and not adoption. Nonetheless, it is to the tracts and treatises that we are indebted for Calvin’s single most important description of adoption. As noted in the Introduction, in The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom, and of Reforming the Church he says that the gift of adoption is “not the cause merely of a partial salvation, but bestows salvation entire”.

In Calvin’s letters the same pattern is multiplied. Given the nature of the doctrine this is to be expected. Calvin was, after all, pre-eminently a pastor, his work as a theologian being directed to that end. As such his letters were addressed to a wide cross-section of people including kings, queens, noblemen and ladies as well as prisoners and those awaiting martyrdom. It ought not to be assumed, however, that the letters are devoid of doctrine. As Benoit assures us, “if we had their testimony alone to go by, they would be enough to acquaint us with the main drift of Calvin’s thinking. In them, principles are applied to particular individuals and circumstances, and so they can be considered as a sort of illustration of the message of the Institutes.”

In Calvin’s correspondence there is more explicit mention of the doctrine than in the tracts and treatises, particularly in relation to the predestinating will of God, faith, and baptism, as also to regeneration, justification, Christian living, the means through which the Father places his own in the family, and the

32 Ibid., 199.
33 Ibid., 143-144.
36 Ibid., 20-62.
37 Ibid., 64. It goes without saying that these principles of conduct were derived from the Scriptures (ibid., 83ff.).
39 Ibid.
42 “To the Ministers of Switzerland”, dated October, 1551 (Letters, vol. 2, 324).
full confidence or assurance possessed by the sons and daughters of the Father. While it would be wrong to exaggerate the frequency of these references, nevertheless the pervasive familial tenor of the letters suggests that adoption was never far from their author's mind. The many remarks he makes therein are utterly compatible with what we know of his understanding of adoption and its manifold application to life. Regularly he signs off his letters with reference to the Father and his providential protection and edification of his children. These parting words really form prayers in print, and are most compatible with those first uttered audibly and later committed to print. He commits his correspondents to the will of the Father who, out of his paternal love, adopted his children in his only begotten Son.

Once more, a similar pattern occurs in Calvin's confession and catechism. While The Genevan Confession (1536) contains no mention of adoption, baptism is nevertheless referred to in a way compatible it. That is, as "an external sign by which our Lord testifies that he desires to receive us for his children, as members of his Son Jesus." Although this may appear a tenuous link, a comparison of the Confession with The Catechism of the Church of Geneva (1545) reveals a substantial increase in the use of familial epithets. There he writes of adoptive sonship as contrary to that by nature, and of baptism as that which brings us into the Father's household, which is commonly regarded as the Church.

Finally (for our present purposes), there are the commentaries. Naturally Calvin's comments on the apposite texts are significant, but in addition there appear throughout a whole host of references to adoption. While the systematic trawling of the entirety of Calvin's commentaries awaits another occasion, it is increasingly apparent that the commentaries are indispensable to an appreciation of Calvin's theology of adoption. Indeed, the study of the motif further demonstrates that the

44 "To the King of France", dated October 1557 (Letters, vol. 3, 374).
46 "To William Cecil", dated May 1559 (Letters, vol. 4, 18, 48). Dahm complains that of the 600 prayers Calvin made on the occasions of his lectures on the major and minor prophets only 14 were published in the CR (ibid., V).
48 Calvin: Theological Treatises, 30. For Calvin's views on the necessity of Catechisms see his letter to the Protector of Somerset, dated May, 1559 (Letters, vol. 2, 191).
49 Calvin: Theological Treatises, 96.
50 Ibid., 138.
Institutes do not contain the whole Calvin.\footnote{Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide, Translated by Lyle D. Bierma. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books and Leicester: Apollos, 1993,7.} Indeed, the frequency of the references in both his Old and New Testament commentaries only increases the perplexity surrounding Calvin’s omission of adoption from his magnum opus. In fact, it is the fragmented nature of Calvin’s treatment of adoption that makes the commentaries so essential. For example, in the preamble to his commentary on Ephesians he expands a little on what he had elsewhere claimed (see Introduction), namely that adoption “bestows salvation entire”: “God’s wonderful mercy shines forth in the fact that the salvation of men flows from His free adoption \textit{[gratuita adoptione]} as its true and native source.”\footnote{Although the preamble to Calvin’s commentary is not the same as his introduction (French edition, 1562) to his sermons both contain this identical statement \textit{(cf. CC Eph., 121 [CO 29 (51): 141] and Sermons, Eph., 4 (the introduction is not in CO 29 (51)) ).} Calvin’s Institutes, tracts and treatises, letters, Confession and Catechism, and select portions of his commentaries mark out the scope of our study. Were it about Calvin rather than adoption, an exhaustive study of the commentaries as well as the sermons would also be in order. As it stands, the following exposition is substantive enough to reveal the pervasiveness of Calvin’s references, and, equally so, how integral they are to a fair representation of his thought. What is intriguing is the contrast between the weighty statements that he makes about adoption and the manner in which the doctrine lies partially hidden in his works. We cannot move on without at least some brief conjecture as to Calvin’s reasoning in organising his thought. Three issues come to mind.

Quite feasibly there lay, firstly, a polemical \textit{rationale} behind Calvin’s method. This may explain the significant contrast between the way that he deals with justification and adoption respectively. Whereas Calvin’s allusions to adoption are random yet pervasive, his treatment of justification occupies eight consecutive chapters (\textit{Inst. III: xi-xviii}), thus highlighting his contrasting approaches to the two doctrines which may be explained by the import of justification for the reformers’ protest over and above its usual salvific and devotional significance.

Although the initial debates with Rome had begun to subside by the time Calvin began to make his own contribution to the protest,\footnote{We are not forgetting the Colloqy of Ratisbon (1541) or the Council of Trent (1545-1563).} skirmishes had already
broken out over justification within Protestantism. Consequently, Calvin "methodically set down all the problems that were presented to his reflection, or that a deepening of his own thought led him to examine more closely." Adoption, by contrast, was neither disputed, nor problematic (at least not to Calvin). Furthermore, from the brief references he makes to the doctrine in his earliest post-conversion writings, it appears that he had a mature grasp of the doctrine from the start. This could possibly explain the absence of a specific and detailed focus on the doctrine.

Secondly, Calvin's method may have been shaped by theological considerations. As a second-generation reformer, he was a consolidator rather than an originator. Although he proved sufficiently innovative to have made more of adoption than any other reformer, it is perhaps unfair to expect him to have provided a detailed systematisation of adoption, as was characteristic of his treatments of some of the more commonly taught doctrines of Protestant theology. In fact, it may not have been his intention to discuss adoption distinctly. As we shall see in chapters three and four, Calvin's soteriological emphasis on *duplex gratia Dei* rather than *triplex gratia Dei* may not have warranted a separate section on adoption.

The tension between Calvin's profuse references to familial terminology in the context of his understanding of *duplex gratia Dei* suggests that he was referring to adoption in a broader sense than was to be the case in later Calvinism. This is consistent with his reference to adoption as "salvation entire", as also with Garret Wilterdink's interpretation of him: "For Calvin, adoption into the family of God is synonymous with salvation." What Calvin precisely meant by his comment is not

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54 When McGrath writes that: "No longer was it necessary to debate the issues, such as that of justification, which had so preoccupied Luther: the soteriological question had given way to the ecclesiological question", he has in mind the internal debates within Protestantism (Alister E McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought: A Study in Late Medieval Influences Upon Calvin's Theological Development" in Gamble, op. cit., vol. 4, *Influences Upon Calvin and Discussion of the 1559 Institutes*, 24).

55 Wendel, op. cit.,


58 Garret A Wilterdink, "The Fatherhood of God in Calvin's Thought", 185; see also *Tyrant or Father?*, 21. Similarly, although in reference to the Institutes, Sinclair Ferguson writes: "While there is no separate chapter on sonship in the *Institutes*, *adoptio* (sonship) is one of the expressions by which he most frequently designates the idea of being a Christian. He does not treat sonship as a
certain, but it may indicate that in referring to the doctrine he often had the entire gospel in mind. This is the impression gained from his testimony, where he recalled that he had “no other defence or refuge for salvation than [God’s] gratuitous adoption, on which alone [his] salvation depend[ed]”. There is a sense, then, in which Calvin’s life’s work was a statement of adoption, consistent with which he may have thought it superfluous to discuss the motif separately. It is quite plausible, therefore, that the Institutes, being a summary of the gospel, were but an expanded treatment of adoption.

Thirdly, Calvin’s method could have been decided by a metaphorical criterion. Whereas Dennis Tamburello describes Calvin’s use of adoption as “a powerful metaphorical expression of union with Christ”, Jane Dempsey Douglass comments that metaphors were “not ...a functional part of his systematic theology”. Was it then adoption’s metaphorical standing that determined its treatment? After all, the new birth does not have a separate chapter in the Institutes either. All, however, is not that simple. Other chapters have metaphorical titles if not also content.

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64 Take Inst. IV: i, for instance: “The True Church with Which as Mother of All the Godly we Must Keep Unity”.
Although Calvin mentions figures of speech frequently (*metaphorae, figurae, similitudines, comparatines*) (see the conclusion of Section One)), we have never encountered him referring to adoption as either a metaphor or any other kind of trope. There could be several explanations for this. Perhaps he was working with some early but undefined modern-day distinction between models (root or dominant metaphors) and metaphors (one-time analogies). On this reckoning Dempsey is correct, but that fact does not explain the absence of a chapter on adoption. In any case, further and broader discussion of Calvin’s use of language is requisite before anything more can be asserted here.

(iv) *Calvin’s theology continues to be obscured by caricatures*

Added to, and partly resulting from, the general impact of the neglect of soteriology (and especially adoption) and also the specific effect of Calvin’s own theological arrangement, the widespread study of his doctrine has been hindered by the well-established caricatures of his theology. Alexandre Ganoczy has summed up the general impression created by such portrayals both within and without the church:

> When his name comes up in the course of a conversation, one thinks almost automatically of the Genevan “theocracy,” of the protagonist of absolute predestination, of the ingenious organizer of the Protestant movement, of the harsh and inflexible man who sent Servetus to the stake and the libertines to prison, and finally the initiator of a rigid and uncompromising morality.

Needless to say such an impression of Calvin has done nothing for expectations of finding the welcome familial themes of Scripture in his writings. Irrespective of the approach utilised by Calvin scholars, there has been a marked silence concerning the pervasiveness of adoption in the reformer’s writings. Neither the traditional approach with its search for a central theme or key doctrine, nor the hermeneutical

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65 Frye observes that “metaphors are cited more frequently than any other rhetorical term in Calvin’s writings” (“Calvin’s Theological Use of Figurative Language”, 178).


67 Calvin’s use of biblical language is apparently naively realistic as is apparent from comments he makes on the Fatherhood of God (see ch. 2.2).


69 For the problems of which see Wendel, *op.cit.*, 357f.
approach with its interest in the form of Calvin’s theology, nor the combined neo-orthodox approach with its Barthian emphasis on both the form and content of Calvin studies has exposed the extent of Calvin’s interest in adoption.\textsuperscript{70}

This longstanding oversight by both the Reformed and the scholarly community has contributed to the acceptance of the various caricatures that have developed. Although the history of Calvin studies is too vast and complex to document them, it should be no surprise to discover that the reformer’s supposed theological austerity has been often identified in folklore and among scholars as predestinarianism, to give but one example.\textsuperscript{71} Predestination, it has been regularly assumed, is Calvin’s central creed.\textsuperscript{72} A more balanced perspective would have to acknowledge, however, that while predestination was important for Calvin (and double predestination at that), the resultant clamour that has railed against him has not been reasonable enough to take into account the ecclesiological and pastoral factors that shaped his proclamation of the *decretum horribile*.\textsuperscript{73} Accordingly, following the apostle Paul (see below), Calvin’s emphasis on the warm familial themes of Scripture is often set within a predestinarian context. A close reading of his thought is actually an effective means of alerting the open-minded reader to the presence of adoption in his theology.\textsuperscript{74}

Gerrish remarks that the blame for this familiar caricature lies as much with Calvin’s friends as with his enemies.\textsuperscript{75} Both have regularly over-emphasised his view of the sovereign power of God to the detriment of his grasp of God’s paternal love. Yet, what Calvin’s friends have failed to highlight others have forthrightly

\textsuperscript{70} Venema, *op.cit.*, 3-16. This last approach is not to be confused with the constructive Calvinistic approach to Westminster Calvinism.
\textsuperscript{72} Wendel, *op.cit.*, 263-265. See also Hyma, *op.cit.*, 399 and 407.
\textsuperscript{73} In the nineteenth century we do find Paul Henry, for instance, seeking to do justice to “the necessities of the age” that helped shaped the tenor of Calvin’s work (*The Life and Times of John Calvin, the Great Reformer*. Vol. 2. Translated by Henry Stebbing. London: Whittaker and Co., 1849, 103-108).
\textsuperscript{74} It was the very connection between predestination and adoption that seems to have determined Wesley’s elimination of the questions on adoption from his revision of the Shorter Catechism (see ch. 6).
\textsuperscript{75} Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 1.
denied: “In Calvin’s theology”, asserts Max Weber, “the Father in heaven of the New Testament, so human and understanding ... is gone”.\textsuperscript{76}

More recently Garret Wilterdink has strenuously sought to present a more faithful portrayal of Calvin’s views.\textsuperscript{77} He suggests that it is precisely because the reformer emphasises God’s fatherly love that problems arise in explicating the nexus between God’s paternal love and his divine power. Calvin scholarship, by contrast, has resolved the tension by simply neglecting his emphasis on the Fatherhood of God and the adoption of sons.\textsuperscript{78} In the process, however, the lopsided attention to God’s sovereignty has unfairly caricatured Calvin’s theology.

Care is needed here. The word caricature may be too loaded when used in reference to the scholarly pursuit of a better understanding of Calvin. The caricaturing of Calvin, we suggest, has been the indirect result of the interests that have governed some of the research. It has not been the direct result of malicious intention. The following summary of Calvin’s doctrine of adoption seeks, then, simply to reveal the fact that full justice has not been done to the warm familial emphasis both felt and seen in his theology. It is not our purpose to provide a definitive statement on the location and import of adoption in Calvin’s work. That can only be achieved once a large measure of consensus has been achieved with respect to what he says. Thus, our present concern is somewhat modest. It is to unveil the basic evidence and shape of Calvin’s theology of adoption. The confirmation of this evidence together with the enumeration and unpacking of its many far-reaching implications has been left to other Calvin scholars to investigate.

The work at hand, although original, self-consciously seeks to build on the preliminary studies that have already been undertaken. Particularly influential has been Brian Gerrish, especially in his treatment of Calvin’s eucharistic theology and, more generally, in his inspiring of Randall Zachman whose work \textit{The Assurance of Faith} is to date the most detailed treatment of adoption available.\textsuperscript{79} Therein Zachman demonstrates how the reformer dealt with assurance largely in terms of

\textsuperscript{76} Cited in \textit{Renaissance and Reformation}, 409. For a longer citation see Zachman, \textit{op.cit.}, 3.

\textsuperscript{77} Wilterdink, “The Fatherhood of God in Calvin’s Thought”, 175-188.

\textsuperscript{78} That the solution posed by Calvin scholars has been superficial is seen in the fact that the tension is left unresolved in Scripture (Wilterdink, \textit{Tyrant or Father?}, 2).

\textsuperscript{79} Zachman, \textit{op.cit.}. 53
the adoption motif. However, his treatment is not of adoption in se. In fact, only two brief articles come near to dealing with the doctrine for its own sake, which reveals just how overdue is the tracing out of Calvin’s understanding of it. Thus, for all the limitations of the following section it forms the first substantive attempt to do justice to adoption in Calvin. While not definitive, the exposition is timely, for in Wendel’s now dated yet ever-relevant estimation, Calvin’s writings have probably more readers than at any time since the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding, a full and distinct examination of Calvin on adoption remains a desideratum.

1.2 Calvin: The Influences

The general neglect of adoption in the theology of the church evokes the question as to why the doctrine was particularly significant for Calvin. When we consider that no other Protestant theologian of the Reformation seems to have used the motif so liberally, it is natural to ask why he made so much of it. From what we have read, he does not so much as hint as to the reasons for his fondness for adoption. Thus, in the apparent absence of any explicit rationale it is only possible to proffer some informed conjecture. Consequently, what follows is little more than a preliminary and somewhat sketchy inquiry into the immediate context out of which Calvin wrote.

The earliest reference to adoption is found in Calvin’s French preface to Olivétan’s New Testament (1535). According to some this was written just a year after his subita conversio. Gerrish claims that this was Calvin’s first personal statement of Evangelical faith:

80 Ibid. Cf. The shorter articles of Westhead and Griffith (op. cit.). It is worth noting that the direction of Zachman’s research was influenced in part by Brian Gerrish (Zachman, op. cit., vii-viii).
81 See Westhead, op. cit. and Griffith op. cit.
83 For instance, we have omitted an investigation of the patristic sources on which Calvin was dependent.
85 Assessments vary considerably as to the date of Calvin’s conversion. For a brief and limited overview of some of the positions taken see Ganoczy, op. cit., 41. Otherwise, see Beza (Ganoczy, op. cit., 35 (1528); de Greef, op. cit., 23 (1533)).
Scripture is also called gospel, that is, new and joyful news, because in it is declared that Christ, the sole true and eternal Son of the living God, was made man, to make us children of God by adoption. \(^{87}\)

The statement appears in the midst of the young reformer's sketch of salvation-history - a sort of *Heilsgeschichte*. "This preface," says Gerrish, "sets out the fundamental ideas that never ceased to determine his view of the Christian religion." \(^{88}\) According to Battles, it "expressed in a succinct fashion the familiar Pauline-Augustinian summary of human history: man's creation in the image of God... continuing mercy of God through conscience (Gentiles) and law (Israel)... further apostasy... coming of the Saviour... call of the Gospel." \(^{89}\) Among these is adoption as well as baptism its sacrament. \(^{90}\)

Although Calvin refers to adoption just the once in his preface to Olivétan's New Testament, its implications undergird much of what he writes in this his earliest statement of the Faith. Not only does he frequently refer to the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ (which, on its own, proves little), he actually defines the gospel in terms of adoption. Furthermore, he supplements his definition by compatible references to the way that Paul understood adoption, *viz.*, in terms of the inheritance and the privileges of heirship. It looks very much then as if Calvin had a strong sense of adoption from almost the very earliest of his Christian writings. Assuming this to be the case, it means that the quest for formative influences must focus on the pre-1535 years – when so much of Calvin's development remains obscure.

Certainly, all we can say at present is that there was probably no one single influence upon him. It seems more likely that several coalesced in his mind, thereby producing a preference for the motif over and above other more familiar descriptions of the gospel. As congealed as these various influences may have been, for the extent Calvin was involved in the composition of Nicholas Cop's inaugural address as rector of the University of Paris (*ibid.*, 120-139 and 245). The address was really a sermon on Matt. 5: 1-12. While the address makes reference to the familial elements of the gospel in a way compatible with Calvin there is no mention of adoption (*ibid.*, 131-132; *Inst.* (1536), 366-367; See de Greef, *op. cit.*, 86-87).

\(^{87}\) Calvin: *Commentaries*, 64.

\(^{88}\) *Grace and Gratitude*, 87.


\(^{90}\) Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 87; also "John Calvin and the Meaning of the Reformation," *op. cit.*, 34. Similarly, in explaining the title of his Calvin biography, Bouwsma writes: "I have called this book a portrait rather than a biography because I think that in what mattered most to him, Calvin developed little between his break with the Church that had nurtured him and his death some thirty years later." (*op. cit.*, 9).
present purpose we have attempted to isolate a number of possible sources, thereby introducing Calvin's theology.

(i) The Methodological Influences

(a) The Jurist influence. Lying at the heart and serving as the climactic expression of the intellectual revolution then sweeping across renaissance Europe was the Humanist movement. Originating in Italy, its heterogeneous development was felt pervasively across society including the jurisprudence of the age. Prominent in this field were humanists such as Andrea Alciati and Ulrich Zasius. Also relevant are non-jurists like Lorenzo Valla and Guillaume Budé who, nonetheless, were interested in Roman law.

Although the young Calvin was initially sent to study theology, it is a well-known fact that his father, Gerard Calvin, later directed him to study law because of the lucrative nature of the profession to which it led. Undertaking legal studies at Orléans and Bourges Calvin came under the influence of his teachers, Pierre Taisan d'Estoile and Alciati, as also his studies of Roman culture, inclusive its legal system. While he was especially drawn to the thought of Seneca and Cicero - whose work provided the two principal sources for his Commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* - his interest in Roman law was confirmed by Budé, a friend and mentor, who had sought to bring French law into line with the basic principles of natural law and Roman jurisprudence.

When Calvin eventually returned to the study of theology, he did so as one accompanied by a legal training that was to prove invaluable for his subsequent labours. Certainly his mind was shaped by the principles of Roman law, as is seen, according to Monheit, "in the systematic structure of the arguments of the *Institutes* and in his many relentless logical attacks on his opponents. This structure and style are unique among the reformers." It is plausible to argue, then, that the Humanist

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91 For Battles' helpful compilation of the meagre autobiographical details left by Calvin see his article "Introduction to John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, op. cit., 256-262.
93 Hesselink, op. cit., 1f.
impact on Calvin’s study of Roman law naturally inclined the reformer towards the apostle’s adoption motif. Certainly, David Willis suggests that Calvin’s portrayal of God stirring his people to live out their adoption as his free sons is attributable to his legal training.95

Two factors, however, militate against deducing too much from Calvin’s legal training. For one thing, despite Tamburello’s description of Calvin’s doctrine of adoption as a most powerful metaphorical expression of union with Christ, it is not certain whether in fact Calvin regarded adoption metaphorically. Even supposing he did, another supposition is required, namely that Calvin understood Paul’s references to adoption to follow the Roman practice of _adoptio._96 As little is known of the Roman practice,97 Dowey is probably right to conclude that, “recognizing the humanistic-rhetorical-juristic elements in Calvin’s work appears, at the present state, not to revolutionize the understanding of his teaching.”98

(b) The Humanist influence. It is possible that Calvin simply derived his use of adoption from Scripture.99 As an independent thinker his interest may have arisen merely from an individualistic reading of his Bible.100 This may explain why he wrote of adoption seemingly more than any other reformer including Peter Martyr Vermigli. However, as independent a thinker as Calvin undoubtedly was his thought could not have been moulded in a vacuum. Nobody’s is.

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95 E David Willis, “Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin’s Theology” in Gamble, _op. cit._, vol. 4, 88.
96 This is not to presume that Paul’s references did. The jury is still out on the matter.
97 “Almost all our evidence from adoption in the Hellenistic and Roman periods comes from numerous inscriptions from throughout the Greek world, especially Rhodes. These reveal a bewildering inconsistency in terminology, even within the same community, perhaps attesting to differences in formal procedures and consequences now unclear.” (_The Oxford Classical Dictionary._ S.v. “adoption” by Albert Bosworth (or Adrian Barker), Barry Nicholas and Susan Tregiari). Cf. James M Scott’s comments in _Adoption as Sons of God, An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus,_ Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 48, Tübingen, J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992, 8-9.
99 Wendel writes that “it is to [Calvin’s] assiduous reading of the Bible, and especially of the Prophets and of St. Paul, that we must look for the source of many a subtle shade of meaning his theology and, more generally, for light upon his religious mentality.” (_op. cit._, 123).
100 In Ganoczy’s view, Calvin “was a self-taught, independent thinker who made judgements for himself. He was more a passionate seeker for truth than the disciple of a man or a school.” (_op. cit._, 133.)
Calvin’s emphasis on Scripture was strongly aided by the early influence of Humanism. Particularly noteworthy here, is the emergence of Christian Humanism under the foremost leadership of Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1467-1536). Subsequently, however, Calvin experienced his sudden conversion, and thereafter sought to explicate the Christian faith by employing the hermeneutical and exegetical tools acquired under Humanist influence. In Ganoczy’s opinion, Calvin first gave evidence of being a “biblical Humanist” in his work entitled *Psychopannychia* (1534). Biblical humanists were known for several things, all of which could have contributed to Calvin’s use of the adoption motif. First, they gave priority to Scripture in applying the principle of *ad fontes*. While they were prepared to use the church Fathers, their main concern was to re-establish the predominance of Scripture over its commentators, especially those of the Middle Age. Thus, in after years Calvin refused to allow the meaning

101 For succinct overviews of the development of Humanism see Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation*, 14-23; McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 52-58. For the connection between the Italian origins of Humanism and its Erasmian version see Albert Hyma, *op. cit.*, 139-150.


103 Monheit tells us that Calvin’s conversion underwent two phases. Beginning with extreme guilt and despair resulting from the failure of the Seneca commentary, the repression of moderate reform and events at Münster, it culminated in the tranquillity that resulted from God’s providential intervention in his embracing of justification by faith (*op. cit.*, 222).


105 Ganoczy, *op. cit.*, 179. *Psychopannychia* was not published, however, until 1542 and we cannot be certain how far Calvin revised it.

of Scripture to be clouded by traditional assumptions.\textsuperscript{107} He therefore resisted the compromise of his independent appreciation of the supremacy of Scripture by misappropriation of the Church’s exegetical tradition.\textsuperscript{108} According to Ganoczy, “the works he read... moved him to integrate his ideas into a powerful synthesis”\textsuperscript{109}, thus providing his exegesis and his theology with a distinctive vitality.

Secondly, the application of the principle of \textit{ad fontes} required \textit{eruditio}. A true exegete must acquire a philological mastery of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin in order to avoid silly pieces of fallacious exegesis.\textsuperscript{110} Calvin’s writings give ample evidence of his knowledge of both the original languages of the \textit{apographa} and of the Classics, as well as his willingness to seek the best text available.\textsuperscript{111}

Thirdly, Calvin adopted the hermeneutical principles of biblical Humanism. These recognised the organic unity of scriptural revelation as well as the diversity of its various constituent parts.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, the analysis of any particular biblical book required an appreciation of the authorial diversity of Scripture. In principle Calvin understood this. He thought it “almost the only duty of the exegete to make truly understandable the meaning of the writer whom he is explaining.”\textsuperscript{113} Yet, his theology of adoption reveals that he was not as rigorous in the application of this as he might have been. That said, an awareness of the rich humanness of Scripture was not to be set against its divineness, as is evident from Calvin’s application of the \textit{analogia fidei}, and as was recommended by Erasmus for the unlocking of otherwise obscure passages.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{107} For a treatment of Calvin’s contact with humanism see Peter Opitz, \textit{Calvins theologische Hermeneutik}. Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994, 47-98.
\textsuperscript{108} In general, he was particularly indebted to Augustine (David Steinmetz, \textit{Calvin in Context}. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 110; A. N. S. Lane, “Calvin’s Use of Fathers and Medievals,” \textit{CTJ} 16 (1981), 158-159; Hans-Joachim Kraus, “Calvin’s Exegetical Principles,” \textit{Interpretation} 31 (1977), 11); Kraus is in danger of denying the Reformer’s independence when he writes of Calvin as “bound by the exegetical tradition of the church,” and as “unwilling to give up the consensus of interpretation.” For the statistics of Calvin’s citations from the Church Fathers see Pieter A. Verhoef, “Luther’s and Calvin’s Exegetical Library,” \textit{CTJ} 3 (1968), 10.
\textsuperscript{109} Ganoczy, \textit{op. cit.}, 133.
\textsuperscript{110} Bouwsma says: “It disturbed him that there were still ‘great theologians’ who ‘furiously’ denounced language study ‘with as many insults as they can muster.’” Ignorance of languages resulted, he believed, in mistakes in matters “easy and obvious to anyone” (\textit{John Calvin}, 117); Kraus, \textit{op.cit.}, 12 and 14.
\textsuperscript{111} Bouwsma, \textit{John Calvin}, 118; Ganoczy, \textit{op.cit.}, 94.
\textsuperscript{113} Kraus, \textit{op.cit.}, 13.
\textsuperscript{114} Peter Opitz, \textit{Calvins theologische Hermeneutik}. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994, 227-290.
Fourthly, and most relevantly, biblical Humanists contributed to a renaissance of Pauline studies. The Pauline epistles (especially Romans) were regarded as valuable sources for understanding the gospel and central to the Protestant emphasis on justification by faith alone. Calvin was pleased to continue the renaissance begun by Lefèvre d'Étaples, Guillaume Briçonnet and more immediately Guillaume Farel. So closely did he follow the contours of the apostle's thought that it has been fairly claimed that Paul and Calvin "look out towards each other from the distance of sixteen centuries, and are felt to be essentially the same."\(^{115}\)

Like Paul, Calvin was a practical theologian rather than a speculative one.\(^{116}\) As Wallace observes, his "pastoral concern never fails to manifest itself in his theological writing",\(^{117}\) and, it may be added, was much more compatible with a biblical than a philosophical or even dogmatic approach to theology.\(^{118}\) Hence, Calvin employed the apostle's understanding of God's dealings with humankind throughout salvation-history as the pattern for many of his biblico-theological labours. He understood, therefore, Paul's perspective on the protracted period that stretched from Abraham to the ἐσχατον. Whatever, then, may be fairly said of Calvin as a dogmatic theologian he was first and foremost a biblical theologian.\(^{119}\)

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\(^{115}\) William Graham, "Calvin and Calvinism", *BFER* 23 (1874), 355. Cf. 357-358. Even in the order of the publication of Calvin's commentaries there can be seen the humanist interest in Paulinism. Calvin's commentary on the epistle to the Romans was published first during exile in Strasbourg (1539). This was followed by commentaries on most of the other Pauline epistles before Calvin branched out to comment on the other New Testament Epistles (2 and 3 John and Revelation excepted). Contrast the order given by JLM Haire ("John Calvin as an Expositor") and John K Mickelson ("The Relationship Between the Commentaries of John Calvin and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and the bearing of that Relationship on the Study of Calvin's Doctrine of Scripture") in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 6, 75 and 365-366, 376.

\(^{116}\) Steinmetz, *op.cit.*, 27. Leith notes our indebtedness to Herman Bauke for demolishing the notion that Calvin was a speculative systematiser who deduced a system of theology from one or two principles (John H Leith, "Calvin's Theological Method and the Ambiguity in His Theology" in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 7, 265).


\(^{118}\) Warfield, *op.cit.*, 141, 481. Warfield also cites P J Muller (140fl.): "Calvin, whose pride it was to be a 'biblical theologian', does not follow the method of the philosophers, - the aprioristic method. He is therefore sober in his conceptions of the nature of God, since he had noted that in the Scriptures God speaks little of His nature, that He may teach us sobriety".

Thus, it is quite possible that Calvin's liking for adoption was stimulated by nothing else than his reading and exposition of Scripture, informed as it was by humanist principles. Although he later became critical of the pride and vanity of some Humanists, his Treatise on Scandals demonstrates that he never forsook their methodology. Whatever else he became, he forever remained a biblical Humanist.120

(ii) The Personal Influences

In all likelihood, the influences that were at work upon Calvin were mediated personally. Rarely if ever is theology moulded in a social vacuum. Although an independent thinker, Calvin's early wanderings indicate that he was no isolationist. We know for sure that during his most formative years he came into contact with several influential figures. As Ganoczy notes, however, there is difficulty in documenting Calvin's movements prior to 1532. Nevertheless, he mentions a number who influenced Calvin early on: Pierre de l'Estoile, du Tillet, Claude de Hangest, Cordier, the family of Nicholas Cop, François Daniel, Duchemin and de Connan, to name but some of them.

(a) Jacques Lefèvre d'Étapes (Lat. Faber Stapulensis). Although it is a highly debateable point, Hughes claims that "the heart of Lefèvre's theology was essentially in harmony with, and... in large measure precursory to what came to be known as Reformed theology."121 Certainly, Lefèvre exercised substantial influence over the reformers at large,122 making both a direct and indirect impact on Calvin's development. It is known, for instance, that in 1534 the young reformer met and conferred with Lefèvre in Nerac, in the South West of France. Nothing else is

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120 Wendel, op.cit., 34-35, 44; Harbison, op. cit., 146.
121 Lefevre, 132.
122 One of the more obvious areas in which this was so was that of exegesis (ibid., 62-63).
known of their acquaintance except for Beza’s record of Lefèvre’s prediction that Calvin would be a major influence for good in France.123

The connection between the young Calvin and the elderly Lefèvre is worth mentioning in view of the 1512 Parisian publication of Lefèvre’s “massive and masterly” Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul.124 “His work,” writes Hughes, “marked the turning of the tide that would come in to the full in the following decades, ...with the sanity and wealth of the exegesis of the Reformation theologians.”125 It is possible, then, that Lefèvre’s commentary was instrumental in the development of Calvin’s understanding of the gospel, as well as in his specific choice of theological interests.126 “The doctrines which such men would proclaim as belonging to the very heart of the Gospel Lefèvre had already proclaimed with assurance in his commentary on St. Paul’s Epistles.”127

“Theologically,” Hughes comments, Calvin “followed closely the path that had been pioneered by Lefèvre.”128 Whether this included a focus on adoption we cannot be entirely certain. Certainly, Lefèvre mentions numerous forms of the stem ‘adopt-’ in every chapter in which vloOeista is found.129 Commenting on Romans eight and nine he employs the forms spiritu adoptionis (2)130; adoptione (3)131; adoptius132; adoptareris133; adoptius filios134; adoptionis filiorum135;

123 Cited by P E Hughes in “Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples (c.1455-1536). Calvin's Forerunner in France”, Gamble, op.cit., vol. 2, 1 (cf. 64). McNeill estimates that that Calvin’s conversion took place between this visit and Calvin’s return to his native city of Noyon in Picardy to resign his benefice (ibid., 250).
125 Lefèvre, 60.
126 Ibid., 97.
127 “Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples”, 9. In Lefèvre, 98, he quotes Kenneth Strand who points out that “in some respects, Calvin’s thought is even more similar than Luther’s to that of Lefèvre”.
128 “Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples”, 15.
130 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 87:66 and 89:66. Not all these references are necessarily relevant. Please note the unusual page numbering (the page numbers are only on the right hand page). The method of citation should become clear with use.
131 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 87: 66 (2), 69.
132 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 87: 66.
133 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 87: 66/67.
134 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 87: 67.
135 S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarit, 89: 66.
adoptionem\textsuperscript{136}; adoptio\textsuperscript{137} and adoptate\textsuperscript{138}. Surprisingly, Lefèvre’s commentary on Galatians uses just the feminine third declension form - adoptionem, and only on one occasion.\textsuperscript{139} He does, however, use various forms of accepto that carry a related meaning.\textsuperscript{140} In his commentary on Ephesians he uses the forms adoptarentur\textsuperscript{141}; adoptaremur\textsuperscript{142}; adoptionem filiorum\textsuperscript{143} and adoptione.\textsuperscript{144}

Further research could profit, then, from a thorough perusal of Lefèvre’s commentary on the Pauline epistles by taking in all the verbs and vocabulary that Calvin later used to write of adoption. As we have seen these include coopto, assumo and ascisco as well as derivatives of accepto, accommodo, participio, together with the whole range of familial terms such as pater and filius. Further research ought also to take into account Lefèvre’s Commentarii initiatorii in Quatuor Evangelia (1522), in Epistolae Catholicas (1527), and his Épistres & Évangiles Pour les Cinquante & Deux Sepmaines de l’An (1525).

(b) Gérard Roussel. Numbered among Calvin’s friends were some of Lefèvre’s keenest disciples. Roussel was one such disciple. According to August Lang, Calvin was converted under Roussel’s ministry at a time when his preaching was shocking to the Parisian circle to which the young Frenchman belonged.\textsuperscript{145} Ganoczy writes that between 1532-1535 “nothing is more characteristic of the future reformer than his growing love of Scripture and his admiration for men such as Gérard Roussel.”\textsuperscript{146} Although the link is tenuous and also contingent on the prominence of adoption in Lefèvre’s theology, it is likely that Calvin could have indirectly imbibed Lefèvre’s influence through Roussel’s preaching. To what extent this could have helped stimulate his interest in adoption it is not possible to tell.

\textsuperscript{136} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 89: 69.
\textsuperscript{137} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 90: 77 and 92: A79.
\textsuperscript{138} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 90: 77. In addition he uses forms derived from the stem coopto. See for instance: cooperabatur (ibid., 76: 29); cooperantur (ibid., 89: 72); cooperatur (ibid., 89: 72 and 90: 80); cooperari (ibid., 93: 90).
\textsuperscript{139} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 158: 18.
\textsuperscript{140} Accepisset (S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 153: 3); accepissie (ibid., 154: 4); acceperat (ibid., 154: 5); acceptatorum (ibid., 154: 6); acceperut (ibid., 154: 6); accepistis (ibid., 156: 10); acceperunt (ibid., 156: 13).
\textsuperscript{141} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 163: 2.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} S. Pauli Epistolae XIV... Commentarii, 164: B2.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Cited by Ganoczy, op.cit., 37.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 129.
(c) Pierre Robert Olivétan (Olivetanus). It is said of Olivétan that he "stood alongside Lefèvre as one of the most stalwart and religiously most zealous champions of Humanistic biblicism in Paris."\(^{147}\) In fact, it was Lefèvre who inspired Olivétan’s famous translation of the Bible, published in June 1535.\(^{148}\) According to Beza, Olivétan had been responsible for instructing Calvin in true religion.\(^{149}\) It testifies to the speed of Calvin’s rapid emergence that he wrote two prefaces for Olivétan’s French translation.\(^{150}\) In the Latin preface Calvin describes himself as a “relative” of Olivétan and an “intimate friend of long standing.”\(^{151}\) Going by the strength of this connection we would expect to detect Lefèvre’s influence mediated through Olivétan.

However, Ganoczy observes that Calvin does not attribute his Evangelical views to Olivétan’s influence. Hughes, by contrast, highlights Calvin’s prefaces as evidence of the affinity between the theologies of the two men. This affinity was either directly stimulated by Lefèvre, or indirectly by Olivétan and/or others such as Roussel. Whichever, the significance of the fact that Calvin’s French preface contains his earliest mention of adoption is increased. It is possible, then, that Hughes is right to claim that Calvin’s participation in Olivétan’s work continued that begun by Lefèvre.\(^{152}\) It is for others to discern whether this line of thought can be taken further.

(d) Guillaume Farel (1489-1565). Having initially been won over to the Evangelical faith under Lefèvre’s influence,\(^{153}\) Farel later went on to become one of his students in Paris\(^{154}\) before eventually exercising a famous, dramatic and life-changing influence over Calvin’s decision to stay in Geneva. It is often forgotten,
however, that until the publication of Calvin’s *Institutes*, Farel’s *Sommaire et Briefve Declaration* stood alone in French-speaking Protestant theology as “the first extensive statement of the Reformed doctrine in French.” Indeed, once the publication of successive editions of the *Institutes* was under way, Farel willingly advised readers of his *Sommaire* to transfer to Calvin’s evolving *magnum opus*.

Farel mentions adoption (l’adoption) on three occasions. The first occurs in the fifth chapter “De L’evangile” where he refers to the “adoption des enfants de dieu.” Similarly, in the thirty-seventh chapter (“Du glaive i puissance de justice et superiorite corporelle”) he again writes of “ladoption [sic.] des enfants de dieu.” Interestingly the margins of both chapters refer to Galatians 3, and although Farel’s comments are brief, they echo something of the atmosphere of Calvin’s later approach to adoption. The third reference is found in the forty-second and last chapter “Du iour du iugement.” In addition to the *Sommaire*, Farel also published expositions of *Le pater Noster* (the Lord’s Prayer) and *Le Credo*. Although these contain no references to adoption, Farel’s use of familial terms such as prere, frere and fils naturally signifies that even prior to Calvin it was the norm for the reformers to prominently employ the familial language of Scripture in expounding the gospel.  

However, Farel’s influence on Calvin extended beyond terminological similarities. There are also general theological parallels that are worth noting. Charles Partee observes that

Farel’s theological influence on Calvin can be suggested but not easily documented. That is to say, some of the themes, especially election and faith, which Farel treats in the *Sommaire* are dealt with more systematically by Calvin after their association had begun. But one may conclude that at least certain views which were instructive and inchoate in Farel’s theology later found careful exposition in Calvin’s.  


156 Higman, *op.cit.*, 100. Charles Partee states that “with the possible exception of the 1529 *Somme Chrestienne* of Francis Lambert of Avignon, Farel’s *Sommaire* was the most sophisticated attempt to expound theology among the French-speaking Protestants before Calvin’s *Institutes* were written.” (“Farel’s influence on Calvin: A Prolusion” in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, 75). Francis Higman writes: “C’est Farel lui-meme qui declare que son plus important ouvrage, le *Sommaire et briefve declaration* (1529) a ete rendu superflu par Institution de Calvin” (Guillaume Farel, *Le Pater Noster et le Credo en Francoys*. Textes Litteraires Francais. Publie d’apres l’exemplaire unique nouvellement retrouve par Francis Higman. Genve: Librairie Droz S.A., 1982, 7).

157 See *Le Pater Noster et Le Credo en Francoys*, 33-63. The nearest reference to adoption is found in the description of Christ as “notre frere” (ibid., 61).

158 “Farel’s Influence on Calvin”, *op.cit.*, 84-85. It is also worth noting that according to Ganoczy, Calvin sent Farel the manuscript of *Psychopannychia* and discussed with him the text of Olivétan’s
Anticipating Calvin, Farel rejects confidence in human merit as an arrogant substitute for what the grace of “our very good Father” can alone bestow through Christ.\textsuperscript{159} Furthermore, he deals with predestination in personal and practical terms rather than abstract ones (\textit{cf.} ch. 2.1). Moreover, he greatly stresses the need for union with Christ and faith, the ground of such a union, together with the accompanying assurance of God’s infinite goodwill in which his children must trust (\textit{cf.} chs 3 and 4). Thus, a life of love to both the Father and the brethren is characteristic of the Christian life.

Besides these candidates, other possible influences upon Calvin include Martin Luther (1483-1546), Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). However, for one reason or another their influences on Calvin’s fondness for the adoption motif are less likely. At most, they contributed to the formulation of the familial tenor of the young reformer’s theology. Although Calvin considered Luther an apostle, we have already seen that his interest in \textit{Kindschaft} was negligible. That said, the Saxon’s emphasis on justification paved the way for the spiritual liberty that nonetheless characterises the adoptive state. Of interest, then, is the fact that Calvin’s 1536 edition of the \textit{Institutes} follows the order of Luther’s \textit{Enchiridion: Der Kleine Catechismus} (1529): “Law”, “Faith”, “Prayer” and “The Sacraments”. Ganoczy observes that the chapter on faith contains particular similarities in the way each deals with God’s generous paternal blessings.\textsuperscript{160} Thus, although Calvin may have regarded his personal interest in adoption as a logical furtherance of Luther’s thought, the \textit{Enchiridion} contains no reference to the doctrine.\textsuperscript{161}

In following through the soteriological implications of Luther’s thought, Calvin may well have been aided by a greater affinity to Melanchthon.\textsuperscript{162} Certainly, during Calvin’s formative years Melanchthon’s \textit{Loci Communes} enjoyed greatest

\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid.}, 78ff..
\textsuperscript{160} He eventually concludes that although an evaluation is difficult, the Saxon reformer influenced Calvin more than any other Evangelical theologian (Ganoczy, \textit{op.	extit{cit.}}, 138 and 145).
\textsuperscript{161} In the second part (on the Apostles’ Creed (\textit{Der Glaube})) he connects paternity with divine providence (the first article). Most of his familial comments, however, are found in the third part (the Lord’s Prayer (\textit{Das Vaterunser})). See Schaff, \textit{The Creeds of Christendom}, vol. 3, 78 and 80-84. For additional information on the \textit{Enchiridion} \textit{ibid.}, vol. 1, 247-253.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Ibid.}, 146 and 151; Wendel, \textit{op.	extit{cit.}}, 63.
authority among Evangelicals. Originally published in 1521, the initial edition contains no references to adoption apart from in a citation of Romans 8:15.163 Other than that the nearest he comes to mentioning adoption is in his reference to Romans 8:23 where he refers to the harvest of the Spirit as the consummation of justification.164 He does, however, make numerous uses of familial terms based primarily on Pauline theology.165 These include the usual allusions to the Fatherhood of God,166 the children of God167 and the notion of brotherhood.168

The nature of Calvin’s initial relationship with Bucer is unclear. Nevertheless, Ganoczy argues that Bucer was as influential as Melanchthon in Calvin’s theological education.169 Although Ganoczy acknowledges that Bucer and Calvin did not become closely acquainted until Calvin’s stay in Strasbourg (1539-1541),170 he states that “the only biblical commentary whose influence on Calvin’s compendium [Inst. (1536)] can be established with certainty is Bucer’s Enarrationes.”171 The Enarrationes perpetuae in sacra quatuor evangelia had appeared in 1530 and quickly became influential in French-speaking lands. Ganoczy claims that interesting traces of Bucer’s thought from the Enarrationes are found in Calvin’s passages on the Church, the Lord’s Prayer and the false sacraments.172 Of most relevance is the chapter on prayer in which Calvin was evidently influenced by Luther’s Kleine Catechismus and Bucer’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6).

164 Ibid., 106.
165 For Melanchthon’s dependence on Pauline theology see Wilhelm Pauck’s editorial introduction to the Loci Communes Theologici (ibid., 7, 10, and 14). In Melanchthon’s dedicatory letter, he writes: “This study was prepared for the sole purpose of indicating as cogently as possible to my private students the issues at stake in Paul’s theology.” (Ibid., 18).
166 Ibid., 24, 88, 93, 94, 96, 107, 109, 118 and 122.
167 Ibid., 36, 88, and 118. Cf. Melanchthon’s references to the “children” or “sons of wrath” (ibid., 40 and 47).
168 Ibid., 110.
169 Ganoczy, op.cit., 167. This argument is refuted at length by Hastings Eells in his article “Martin Bucer and the Conversion of John Calvin” in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 2, 18ff.. Denying Bucer’s influence in Calvin’s conversion, he claims that the misinterpretation has been due to the lopsided interest in the movements of the young Calvin rather than in those of the German (ibid., 19).
170 Ganoczy, op.cit., 158; cf. 131. Although Eells denies the influence of Bucer in Calvin’s conversion, he nevertheless argues that Bucer and Calvin became personally acquainted at the Synod of Bern in 1537.
171 Ibid., 180.
172 Ibid., 159-167.
"Just as Bucer did, Calvin approaches the ‘Our Father’ by drawing attention to our adoption as sons in Christ, the direct source of our fraternal feelings toward the other elect." However, the passages cited carry no references to adoption. This, then, is the nearest we come presently to discovering a direct Bucerian influence on Calvin.

Other factors, however, reduce the likelihood of Bucer’s influence. To mention one; there are only three extant letters attesting the relationship between Bucer and Calvin prior to the Synod of Bern (1537). Each of them is dated 1536, and strongly suggest that Calvin knew of Bucer only by reputation prior to that year. As Calvin had by that stage already begun to refer to adoption, Bucer could have influenced the Frenchman only through the publication of the *Enarrationes*. Even allowing for this indirect influence, Calvin’s disagreement with Bucer over the Lord’s Supper has to be taken into account.

All in all, this briefest of preliminary investigations has failed to highlight any definitive contemporary influence on Calvin’s appropriation of the adoption motif. There remain almost endless possibilities yet to be investigated, especially those from among the Fathers. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, however, that somewhere hidden among Calvin’s commentaries or sermons he tells us plainly what prompted his interest, but this is unlikely given his reticence to speak personally. In the meantime, it has to be acknowledged that reaching a consensus on the origin of any aspect of his thought is a notoriously difficult and elusive pursuit. Nevertheless, by proffering several suggestions derived from the immediate historical context of Calvin’s work, we have endeavoured to pave the way for further research, even if by means of a process of elimination. At the end of the day, there may in fact be no definitive answer available.

Nevertheless, our search has not been in vain. Contrary to Webb, we have already established in principle that Calvin not only mentions the doctrine, he makes some bold claims about its importance, so making at least plausible Gerrish’s claim that Calvin defines the gospel as “the good news of adoption”. Given the nature of

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173 Ibid., 164.
174 For the implications of these letters see Eells, *op. cit.*, 20ff.; Ganoczy, *op. cit.*, 88 and 111.
175 Wendel, *op. cit.*, 122.
176 Steinmetz rightly complains that “traditional Calvin scholarship has frequently been satisfied to study Calvin in greater or lesser isolation from his historical context and to reconstruct his theology with little or no reference to his contemporaries.” (*Op. cit.*, 211; cf. 209).
this study, we have not sought to resolve the question as to the exact significance of adoption for his theology. Rather, by tracing out fully but not exhaustively the major contours of Calvin’s understanding of adoption, we have attempted to provide a reliable framework of reference, thereby introducing the doctrine more formally into the arena of Calvin scholarship in the hope of arousing sufficient interest for the community to fill in its details and implications. Although Calvin specialists may yearn for a more expansive treatment, the primary focus of this study remains adoption. Whereas dissertations on Calvin are almost endless, a wide-ranging theological history of adoption is unheard of.

To that end, the following chapters generally seek to expound Calvin’s doctrine on its own terms rather than as Muller fears through a Barthian, Schleiermacherian, “rhetorical” or, we may add, a Westminster grid. While seeking to resist the temptation of imposing on Calvin’s thought a structure alien to him, we have nevertheless asked of him - consistent with Muller’s insistence that Calvin has a systematic structure coherently organised around loci communes and disputationes - questions that arise from statements that he makes. As we are all creatures of the age we live in, it cannot be guaranteed that such questions are devoid of the influence of the theological perspective of the author. Nonetheless the primary objective has been to listen to Calvin.

178 Ibid., 177 and 181.
Chapter Two

The Context of Adoption

This was the actual youth of the church [ecclesiae adolescentia] and next follows the age of manhood [virilis aetas] down to Christ's last coming, when all things shall be fully accomplished.

John Calvin (CTS Isa., vol. 4, 136 [CO 15 (37): 270]).

2.1 The Protological Context

Having previously noted the caricaturing of Calvin by the pre-eminence given to predestination when understood as his central dogma, our exposition nevertheless begins with the interface between adoption and Calvin's decretum horribile. Three factors have determined the choice of starting point. First, the following study examines just one integral aspect of Calvin's soteriology. Despite the wide-ranging implications of adoption, the following study is not intended, therefore, as a survey of his entire theology. Thus, to commence with predestination signifies nothing as to the overall status of predestination in Calvin's theology. It does, however, reflect Calvin's persistent interest in soteriological rather than cosmic predestination.

Secondly, the choice of starting point must be compatible with Calvin's general approach to theology. As a biblical theologian he had a special interest in the history of Redemption. That history begins with protology. It makes sense, then, to commence

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1 The Institutes do not begin with predestination. Calvin's discussion is subsumed under the doctrine of salvation (Inst. III: xxi-xxiv [CO 2 (30): 678-728]) and not the doctrine of God (Inst. I) (Inst., vol. 2, 920fn.; Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, 483-484). Parker observes that in the final edition of the Institutio Calvin relocated predestination either because he had no developed doctrine of predestination or that he dedicated no separate section to its exposition (cf. Timothy George's comment on Psychopannychia (“Calvin's Psychopannychia: Another Look”, op.cit., 109) with Wilhelm Niesel's comments on the 1536 Institutio (The Theology of Calvin, 165)). In the 1539-50 recensions, predestination is treated as part of Providence. By the 1559 edition, predestination is found in Bk. III between the chapters on prayer and the final resurrection (Parker, Calvin, 113-114). James Torrance states that Calvin's decision was intended to highlight the unconditional nature of God's grace in salvation. See “The concept of Federal Theology - Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?”, op.cit., 18-19. More recently, however, Muller has categorically denied the moving of predestination for the 1559 edition. Predestination, he argues, remained in the 1559 edition exactly where it was in the 1539 edition. His placement of predestination in the 1559 edition had little if anything to do with a redefinition of doctrine and everything to do with the proper order of teaching (The Unaccommodated Calvin, 183).

2 Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, 483.

3 Although it is appropriate to speak loosely of Calvin’s thought as a system of theology (ibid., 21-22), Marcellus Kik rightly says that “it is a false representation of Calvin to picture him as a cold intellect who
with the nexus between predestination and adoption. In fact, Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination determines his approach to adoption. “We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.” If God’s eternal election to adoption forms, then, the positive side of Calvin’s double predestination. Indeed, without this eternal election there can be no adoptive sonship. Thus, Calvin applies the title of Inst. III: xxi, “God has predestined some to salvation, others to destruction”, to adoption in particular: “God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences others to eternal death.” It seems obvious then that Calvin would have us begin with the nexus between adoption and predestination, for as he confirms elsewhere “adoption flows from the eternal election of God”. It begins with electing grace and culminates in consummating glory. Any treatment of the reformer’s doctrine must trace his understanding of adoption along the path that he himself had in mind.

Thirdly, the unpacking of the interface between adoption and predestination must echo Calvin’s explicit statements. We have already seen that some of these portray divine predeterminism as the source of adoption. The most relevant text in this regard is Ephesians 1:4-6. These verses serve as a most apt starting point because, contrary to...
many of the later discussions, Calvin emphasises it in order to be able to approach predestination pastorally and evangelistically. He prefers to ground the doctrine on divine revelation rather than abstract reasoning. Exegesis is therefore crucial to the explication of predestination. Thus, referring to Ephesians 1:4, 6 and 7, Calvin writes: “Paul, indeed, not only recounts for what purpose [Christ] was sent, but soars to the lofty mystery of predestination and fitly restrains all the wantonness and itching curiosity of human nature.” Thus, in expounding Paul, Calvin seeks to demonstrate how predestination reflects God’s electing grace. According to Niesel, election “is the ultimate and essential expression of the evangelical doctrine of grace.”

Had Calvin been more speculative he may have regarded Romans 9 as the *locus classicus* of predestination, not so however. Debating with Arminius in 1597, Franciscus Junius denied that Calvin regards predestination as God’s primary decree. Rather, God’s desire has forever been to bring a people into filial relationship with himself through Jesus Christ. To this end the divine decrees were directed. Calvin confirms this when he comments on Ephesians 1:5 that “God has predestined us in Himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the Beloved”. See Parker, *Calvin*, 116.


10 “Let this... first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if any one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste [cf. Job 12:24], or to see in darkness. And let us not be ashamed to be ignorant of something in this matter, wherein there is a somewhat learned ignorance.” (*Inst.* III: xxi: 2 [CO 2 (30): 680]).

11 *Inst.* II: xii: 5 [CO 2 (30): 344]. At the commencement of his treatment of predestination Calvin warns against two dangers: speculation and silence. On the one hand, to “inquire into predestination” is to penetrate “the sacred precincts of divine wisdom”. On the other hand, he criticises others who in wishing to guard against speculation “require that every mention of predestination be buried” (*Inst.*, III: xxi: 1-3 [CO 2 (30): 678-61]).

12 Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 168. Breen reminds us that Calvin’s emphasis on predestination was the final argument against the Roman instrumentality in effecting salvation. In this he followed Gottschalk, Wycliffe, as well as Luther (*John Calvin*, 73).

13 Calvin himself says of Paul’s use of the verb προοιμισθεν in Rom. 8: 29 that, “God had determined that all whom He has adopted should bear the image of Christ.” (*CC Rom.*, 181 [CO 49 (77): 160]).

14 See Bernard Woudenberg, “Eternal Adoption”, *The Standard Bearer* (September 1, 1990), 475-477. Junius believed Beza to have dealt with predestination likewise.
good pleasure of His will, unto adoption, and has made us accepted by His grace.”

Thus grace underpins divine pre-horizoning and enhances its importance: “We did not yet exist and therefore there was no merit of ours. Hence the cause of our salvation did not proceed from us, but from God alone.”

Ephesians 1:5 is referenced, then, throughout the *Institutio* as a restraint against unhealthy speculation.

But what exactly does Calvin mean by predestination? “We call predestination”, he says, “God’s eternal decree by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man.”

Predestination is, therefore, grounded upon divine foreknowledge. “All things were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present.” Predestination has nothing to do with personal merit. Therefore, Calvin opposes those who taught that God “adopts as sons those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace; [but] appoints to the damnation of death those whose dispositions he discerns will be inclined to evil intention and ungodliness.”

The “fundamental principle”, he says, is “that we are pleasing to God, inasmuch as he has been pleased to adopt us as his children [enfans] before we were born, and has by this means delivered us by special privilege from the general curse under which all men have fallen.”

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15 *CC Eph.*, 126-127 [CO 51 (79): 148]. Zachman writes: “In light of Eph.1:3-8, Calvin claims that the decree of the Father upon which the incarnation depends has as its purpose God’s adoption of sinners by their election into Christ.” *(The Assurance of Faith, 160).*

16 He is as forceful on Eph.1:11: Paul “shows that, from first to last as they say, all have obtained salvation by mere grace, because they have been freely adopted according to eternal election.” *(CC Eph., 130 [CO 51 (79): 152]). What Oberman says of predestination in relation to justification is equally true of adoption: “It is the traditional task of the doctrine of predestination to form a protective wall around the doctrine of justification by grace alone - a doctrine which does not necessarily imply justification by faith alone.” (H A Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, 196; Gamble, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, 10-11).

17 “Paul... not only recounts for what purpose he was sent, but soars to the lofty mystery of predestination and firmly restrains all the wantonness and itching curiosity of human nature.” *(Inst. II: xii: 5 [CO 2 (30): 344]). Contrast A M Fairbairn in “The Westminster Confession of Faith and Scotch Theology”, *CR* 21 (1872), 66.

18 *Inst. III: xxi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 683]. Thus, Gerrish only gives one side of the picture when discussing the placement of predestination in the *Institutio* (1559) he argues that “The doctrine of election, far from being the first principle of Calvin’s theology, is rather its final consequence.” (Cited by Wilterdink, *Tyrant or Father?*, vol. 1, 91).


20 “Confession of Faith (1562)”, *Tracts*, vol. 2, 142 [CO 9 (37): 756].
The value of Calvin's doctrine of foreknowledge is that it brings to light the sheer grace of God. He describes it in Aristotelian fashion. First, the good pleasure of God's will serves as the efficient cause of grace. Predestination is εἰς άυτον: "By this he means that God did not seek a cause out of Himself, but predestined us because such was His will." This is illustrated in the life of Jacob who was adopted not by works but by divine call.

The material cause is Christ. It is by "the Beloved" that God's electing love is revealed in adoption. "Since among all the offspring of Adam, the Heavenly Father found nothing worthy of his election, he turned his eyes upon His Anointed, to choose from that body as members those whom he was to take into the fellowship of life. Let this reasoning, then, prevail among believers; we were adopted in Christ into the eternal inheritance because in ourselves we were not capable of such great excellence." In his commentary on Ephesians, Calvin adds a formal cause of salvation, viz., "the preaching of the Gospel, by which the goodness of God flows out to us." "By faith", he explains, "is communicated to us Christ, through whom we come to God, and through whom we enjoy the benefit of adoption." The final cause of the believer's salvation is that we should be to "the praise of his grace". The ultimate purpose of predestination to adoption is then, "the glorious praise of such abundant grace", and is manifest in the riches received by each believer adopted, which are shared with all God's family. However, the end of predestination is not grace per se, but glory.

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21 This Aristotelian method of discussion was common to both sides of the Reformation debate. See for instance, the delineation of the causes of Justification in the Acts of the Council of Trent. 6th Session. (Tracts, vol. 3, 95-96 [CO 7 (35): 432-433]).
22 While the good pleasure of his will is the efficient cause of adoption, alternatively the divine will is the intrinsic cause of election (Tracts, vol. 2, 142 [CO 9 (37): 756]). Worth noting is that many of these terms are encountered again among some of the nineteenth-century theologians (see Part Two).
24 Inst., III: xxii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 688]. Lest a Barthian construction be put on this, whereby "the eternal divine predestination is identical with the election of Jesus Christ" (Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics. A Selection with Introduction by Helmut Gollwitzer. Translated and Edited by G W Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961, 121), there ought to be borne in mind Calvin's statement that "the elect are said to have been the Father's before he gave them his only-begotten Son." (Inst., III: xxii: 7 [CO 2 (30): 693]).
25 CC Eph., 128 [CO 51 (79): 150].
26 The depth and breadth of divine riches are illustrated in one of Calvin's letters where he writes of a certain Louis that, "the Lord himself, who is the Father of us all, had willed that Louis should be put among the children as a son of his adoption". "To Monsieur de Richebourg", dated April 1541, Letters, vol. 1, 249 (italics inserted).
Thus, "to sum up", Calvin concludes that, "by free adoption God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself, for he is content with his own secret good pleasure."28

2.2 The Relational Context

Divine pre-horizoning is activated on the stage of world history. It begins with creation and Adam’s short-lived experience of Eden. The question of Adam’s status and Edenic relationship to God forms a precursor to the discussion of the believer’s status in Christ. Although Paul does not explicitly link Adam’s pre-Fall status with adoption, three reasons again determine the need for an understanding of Adam’s original relationship to his Maker.

Firstly, Calvin’s doctrine of revelation makes it appropriate to begin with Adam. His concept focuses on the duplex cognito Dei. That is, the revelation of God in creation and in Christ.29 While Adam could not know God without a revelation of him,30 the question arises as to how much God revealed of himself in Eden? Two things are certain. Before Adam felt the impact of the noetic effects of the Fall he could naturally and clearly discern God’s revelation.31 At that stage he had no need of the revelation later given salvifically in Christ. Thus, in Eden Adam willingly appropriated the knowledge of God from what was divinely revealed to him in the works of creation. This does not

27 It is “predestination to glory [that] is the cause of predestination to grace, rather than the converse.” (Inst. III: xxii: 9 [CO 2 (30): 695]).


29 Dowey is surely right to protest against the “uncalvinian” use of the “two-fold” knowledge in which it is applied to the “knowledge of God and of ourselves”. He suggests that of this latter division the term correlative knowledge may be more appropriate (Edward A Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology, x). For proof of his understanding of the duplex cognitio Domini he points to Inst. I: ii: 1: “Therefore, since the Lord first appears, both in the formation of the world and in the general doctrine of Scripture (in generali Scripturae doctrina) simply as the Creator, and afterwards as the Redeemer in the person of Christ - from this arises a twofold knowledge of him (hinc duplex emergit eius cognitio), of which the former is first to be considered, and the other will follow in its proper order.” (ibid., 43).

30 Calvin’s doctrines of revelation and the knowledge of God are thoroughly intertwined. According to Parker, “the problem of the knowledge of God is the problem of revelation.” (The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1952, 13).

31 Postema writes: “The function of ‘natural theology’ before the Fall was to lead man to know (in the sense of being committed to) God. God revealed himself clearly and unambiguously and man was completely open to this revelation.” (Gerald J Postema, “Calvin’s Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology” in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 7, 140).
tell us, however, whether Adam knew God as his Father or solely as the Creator who possessed sovereign prerogatives of rulership over him.\(^{32}\)

Secondly, the discussion of Adam’s Edenic status is germane because Calvin explicitly says it is. “We cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accompanied by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves. This knowledge of ourselves is twofold: namely, to know what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam.”\(^{33}\)

Thirdly, the discussion allows Calvin to speak to an issue that was later to become excessively predominant in nineteenth-century treatments of adoption. It quickly becomes obvious that Calvin was far less pre-occupied with the question than those who later formulated their theologies under his name. For instance, unlike his nineteenth-century counterparts, he reads nothing of direct relevance into Luke’s description of Adam as the son of God (Lk. 3:38).\(^{34}\) It is nevertheless of interest to discover as far as is possible from the other apposite texts what Calvin understood of Adam’s initial *sitz-im-Leben*.

Certainly, Calvin regarded the knowledge of God as relational rather than propositional; that is, in terms of knowing God rather than merely knowing about him.\(^{35}\) According to Postema, the knowledge of God is the created relationship that humankind bears to God. It “has two moments (1) an acknowledgement of God’s stance of love and benevolence toward [them], and (2) their response of obedience and worship.”\(^{36}\) The question of interest is whether that love and benevolence was manifested paternally, and whether Adam responded to it in any sense as a son.

\(^{32}\) The answer determines whether salvation involves the restoration of the filial relationship that Adam enjoyed to God, or whether it entails the elevation of the adopted to a higher relation (of sonship) than the servitude that our first parent knew in Eden. What it does not determine, however, is whether an Adamic sonship in Eden was the same as that received in Christ.

\(^{33}\) *Inst. I*: xv: 1 [CO 2 (30): 134]. Note that despite Dowey’s distinguishing of the *duplex cognito Dei* from the correlative nature of the knowledge of God and ourselves, the citation makes the latter dependant on the former.

\(^{34}\) *CC Gospels*, vol. 1, 52-61 [CO 45 (73): 53-61]. His comparison of the Matthean and Lucan genealogies is of indirect relevance. Whereas the former describes the line legally, the latter describes its natural descent (*CTS Evangelists*, vol. 1, 84 [CO 45 (73): 56]).

\(^{35}\) Postema, *op.cit.*, 136. While the propositional is not entirely excluded (cf.142-143; see also T A Noble, “Our Knowledge of God According to John Calvin” in Gamble, vol. 7, 323), it potentially breeds mere speculation (Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 25).

Zachman argues that "Calvin... sets his discussion of salvation within the context of the Fatherhood of God." However, this does not tell us how the term Father is defined, or whether a redemptive or creative Fatherhood is in view. It was the failure to define divine paternity that did more than anything else to obscure the complex discussions of the nineteenth century (see ch. 8).

Wilterdink reminds us that there is a fine distinction to be observed in the use of the term Father. Naturally, it refers specifically to the first person of the Trinity (*fons ac principium deitatis*). However, it can also refer to all three persons of the Trinity. Divine paternity is, in this sense, "embodied" equally in the Son as well as in the Spirit. It resides in the essence of God and complements his sovereign Lordship. Divine Fatherhood cannot, therefore, be simply regarded as a metaphorical accommodation to human understanding. Rather, it is an ontological reality within the Godhead. Thus, Wilterdink claims that Calvin “consistently indicates that the divine fatherhood is the sum and substance of true knowledge of God”.

Strictly speaking, then, it is improper to refer to human fatherhood:

> This name father is so honorable, that it belongeth to none, but to God onely.... And therefore, when we say that they which have begotten us, according to the flesh, are our fathers, it is an unproper kind of speech: for no mortal creature deserveth this so high and excellent dignity: yet so it is, that God of his singular goodness advanceth men, to this so high a step that he will that they be called fathers...

The honoured title father is a blessed privilege that accompanies the granting of children. This earthly paternity, however, pertains solely to the infant’s body, whereas God’s Fatherhood, being archetypal, has reference both to the human body and soul.

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38 Wilterdink, *Tyrant or Father?*, 11. *Cf.* Zachman, who does not explicitly note the distinction although it is implicit in what he writes (*op. cit.*, 132-133 and 135). In using the term sovereign, we note Battles’ words (*Inst. I*: xiii: 1 fn.1): “The reader will probably look in vain for the noun ‘sovereignty’ applied to God in Calvin’s writings. God is usually referred to by the traditional term ‘omnipotent’ and this is usually discussed under providence.” See ch. 4.4.
40 Wilterdink, *Tyrant or Father?*, 32. “Nowhere”, he writes, “does Calvin give any indication that he includes the notion of fatherhood in these anthropomorphic accommodations.” Dowey, however, is more restrained: “More positive terms, such as God’s love and fatherhood, although still treated at times with a view to their analogical character, are generally regarded as much more adequate to the meaning they are meant to carry, thus are frequently used without warnings about their metaphorical quality.” (*op. cit.*, 261).
41 *BT (Sermons)* 1 Tim., 9 [CO 53 (81): 13].
42 *CC 1 Cor.* , 98 [CO 49 (77): 373].
However, Calvin is not always so dogmatic or clear on the nature of God’s Fatherhood. In fact, his use of the term tends towards the dialectical and seems to move in the direction of a complexio oppositorum. If the term Father expresses the sum and substance of our knowledge of God, how does Calvin understand Isaiah’s description of God’s love as maternal (Isa. 49: 15)? He certainly acknowledges that God may be compared to a mother “whose love toward her offspring is so strong and ardent as to leave far behind it a father’s love”.43 “Thus”, he observes, God “did not satisfy himself with proposing the example of a father, (which on other occasions he very frequently employs,) but in order to express his very strong affection, he chose to liken himself to a mother”. This seems to imply two things. First, that the example of a human father can be employed metaphorically to speak of the love of God. Secondly, when used in this way, the term father is not as strong as the term mother. Therefore, the maternal example enriches our understanding of God’s paternal love.

Whether Calvin suggests an ontological reality or a metaphorical example in any given use of Father, it is evident that he so concentrates on the redemptive paternity of God revealed in Christ that he sometimes implies that there has never existed anything other than it. In one of his catechisms, for instance, the minister asks the child why covenant members are called the children of God when they are encouraged to call Christ the only Son of God? To this the child responds: “We are God’s children... not... by nature, but only by his fatherly adoption and grace in that God doth accept us for his children: now our Lord Jesus being begotten of the substance of his Father, and being of the same nature, may justly be called God’s only sonne, for there is none other that is so by nature.”44 Thus, although the child is taught that he or she cannot be a natural son or daughter of God in the same way that Christ is, nevertheless in Christ the adopted also come to know God as their Father.45

Elsewhere, however, Calvin clearly acknowledges the creative Fatherhood of God. “At their creation angels and men were so constituted that God was their common

43 CTS Isaiah, vol. 4, 30 [CO 37 (65): 204].
44 The Catechisme, or Manner to Teach Children the Christian Religion. Middleburgh: Robert Schilders, 1597, 4 (italics inserted).
Commenting on Paul’s description of humanity as God’s offspring (Acts 17:28-29), Calvin refers to God as the “one Creator and Father of all”. He states in effect that as God’s children Adam and Eve knew their Maker as their Father. This filial relationship was moulded by their creation in the image of God.

Although Calvin believed Scripture to give no definitive definition of the *imago Dei*, Noble claims that Calvin uses the notion as a relational concept expressive of the correlative nature of knowledge. It is used in a twofold manner: First, in a general sense in which all creation serves to mirror the glory of God, and, secondly, in a specific sense in which humankind images God. It is this latter sense that is of particular relevance.

At the highest level in which humankind images God, Calvin understood Adam’s original possession of the knowledge of God, pure righteousness and holiness. “To begin with”, he writes, “God’s image was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.” In other words, Adam was created in the moral image of God. However, in disputing with Andreas Osiander over the *imago Dei*, Calvin makes reference to the natural image in which Adam was created: “I admit that Adam bore God’s image, in so far as he was joined to God.... Nevertheless, I maintain that this likeness ought to be sought only in those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all other living creatures.” Thus, whereas

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46 Inst., II: xiv: 5 [CO 2 (30): 357].
48 As Bouwsma notes, “Calvin, unlike some of his contemporaries, made no attempt to describe their remarkable knowledge before the fall”. Significantly, in the light of the later debates, the reason Bouwsma gives is that by playing down the extent of their knowledge Calvin sought to emphasise “the absolute distance and difference between creature and Creator.” (William J Bouwsma, “Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing”. Gamble, op. cit., vol. 7, 238).
49 T A Noble, *op. cit.*, 325. While this ought not to be confused with Dowey’s description of the knowledge of God and ourselves as correlative, it reminds us that there is a correlative aspect to the creational side of the *duplex cognito Dei*.
50 Inst. I: v: 14 [CO 2 (30): 51-52]. It does so by bearing the impression of the *opus Dei*, of which Parker writes: “These certae notae consist in the beauty, skillful arrangement and usefulness of the creation, which Calvin calls the image of God, or a mirror in which God is to be seen, or the effigies Dei.” (*The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 18).
53 Inst. II: xii: 6 [CO 2 (30): 345].
animals can only look earthward, Adam could also gaze heavenward. Calvin says little of the knowledge that Adam derived from his additional perspective, except that it gave him the capacity to take in the knowledge of God. Even in his unfallen state, however, this knowledge had to be mediated through the revelation of the Word in the *opera Dei* (Gen. 2:16-17). Thus, in spite of all the advantages of Edenic life Adam was unable to receive divine revelation without it being accommodated to his creaturely finitude. The ability to call God his Father was not, however, due to this accommodation.

From Adam’s possession of the *imago Dei*, Calvin deduces Adam’s sonship before God. Although silent about this connection in his comments on Genesis 1:26-27, Calvin elsewhere states in passing that, “because Adam was made in the image of God, his posterity were always reckoned, in a certain sense, to be the children of God [*Dei filios*].” Thus, the familial aspect of Edenic life is often to the fore in his thought. In fact, God must have been called “Father” from the beginning at least in one sense, for how otherwise could there have been “a reciprocal relationship to the Son ‘from whom all kinship or fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named’ [Eph. 3:15p.]”.

Yet, instead of expounding the nature of Adam’s filial knowledge of his Father, Calvin’s greater concern is to ensure that the acknowledgement of the familial relationship does not undermine the yawning chasm that exists between the Creator and his intelligent creatures. This he maintains not by denying the creative Fatherhood of God, but by focusing on Adam’s utter dependence on God’s paternal providence. In this way he combines his dual emphases on the greatness of God and the reality of Adam’s filial relationship. Nowhere is God’s original providential care of Adam more liberally...

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54 *Inst. I*: xv: 3 [*CO 2* (30): 136-138]. “When his image is placed in man a tacit antithesis is introduced which raises man above all other creatures and, as it were, separates him from the common mass.”

55 Dowey, *op. cit.*, 9. He observes that for Calvin there are two varieties of accommodation: to man’s finite comprehension (hence even in Eden God accommodated himself to Adam’s level of understanding), and to man’s sinfulness subsequent to the Fall (*ibid.*, 4). While the former has reference to the knowledge of God derived from creation, the latter corresponds to the knowledge of God derived from Scripture (*ibid.*, 50f.).

56 “The dignity... conferred upon man belonged also to the angels. When we hear the angels called ‘children of God’ [Ps. 82:6] it would be inappropriate to deny that they were endowed with some quality resembling their Father.” (*Inst. II*: xii: 6 [*CO 2* (30): 345]). Noting the same text he also says that “Scripture calls the angels ‘sons of God’ [Ps.82: 6], whose high dignity did not depend upon the coming redemption.” (*Inst. II*: xiv: 5 [*CO 2* (30): 357]).

57 *CTS Pentateuch*, vol. 1, 103 [*CO 24* (52): 63].

seen than in the ordering of creation. By creating Adam last, God enabled him to enter a
world that was already furnished with all that he would need as God’s child:

We ought in the very order of things diligently to contemplate God’s fatherly love
toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe
all manner of good things. For if he had put him in an earth yet sterile and empty, if he
had given him life before light, he would have seemed to provide insufficiently for his
welfare. Now when he disposed the movements of the sun and stars to human uses,
filled the earth, waters, and air with living things, and brought forth an abundance of
fruits to suffice as foods, in thus assuming the responsibility of a foreseeing and diligent
father of the family he shows his wonderful goodness towards us. 59

The Fall, however, marred Adam’s sonship. “Man was far different at the first
creation from his whole posterity, who, deriving their origin from him in his corrupted
state, have contracted from him a hereditary taint.” 60 Anticipating the objection that the
Fall and its effects on Adam were all foreknown by God, Calvin reminds his readers that
although paternal, God is also just. “What reason is there to accuse the Heavenly Judge
because he was not ignorant of what was to happen?” 61 Adam’s fall was due to a
voluntary exercise of his own will that resulted in unfaithfulness. 62 Disbelieving the very
Word of God that had hitherto restrained his passions, he became dissatisfied with God’s
providential bounty. His unfaithfulness made him ambitious, proud and ungrateful. “To
have been made in the likeness of God seemed a small matter to a son of earth unless he
also attained equality with God - a monstrous wickedness!” 63

However, the fact that Adam was able to fall meant that there must have been
something less than perfect about the original constitution of humankind. “The state of
man was not perfected in the person of Adam”, says Calvin. “The image of God was
only shadowed forth in man till he should arrive at his perfection.” 64 That perfection,
which is celestial, can only be found now in Christ. 65 Thus, whereas nineteenth-century
Calvinists were to assess the elevating power of salvation by whether Adam had enjoyed
an Edenic sonship before God, Calvin argues that even though he did, salvation

60 Inst. I: xv: 8 [CO 2 (30): 143].
61 Inst. III: xxiii: 7 [CO 30: 704].
62 1nst. I: xv: 8 [CO 2 (30): 142-143].
63 Inst. II: i: 4 [CO 2 (30): 179].
64 CTS Gen., vol. 1, 95 [CO 23 (51): 27].
65 The perfected state is “a peculiar benefit conferred by Christ, that we may be renewed to a life which is
celestial”. (CTS Gen., vol. 1, 112-113 [CO 23 (51): 36]).
nevertheless brings the adopted into a higher state, because – unlike in Eden - the adoptive experience is secure in Christ.

Adam’s sin affected all his posterity. That this was possible was attributable to Adam’s federal headship of the human race. Yet care is needed in ascertaining the extent to which the image was affected. On the one hand Calvin says that the imago Dei was obliterated by the Fall. On the other hand he states that “even though we grant that God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.” These assessments are not contradictory. Stripped in Adam of the supernatural gifts of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth and justice, and incapacitated by spiritual blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, unjustness and the most filthy plagues, humankind retains their natural gifts, only they are now corrupted through sin. Thus, Adam and his posterity retain but vestiges of the humanum which distinguishes humankind from the beasts, viz., the faculties of reason and will.

The corruption of reason has left humankind incapable of receiving God’s revelation. Although the creative Fatherhood of God is still operative, humankind can no longer recognise God’s paternity: “After man’s rebellion, our eyes - wherever they turn - encounter God’s curse. This curse, while it seizes and envelops innocent creatures through our fault, must overwhelm our souls with despair. For even if God wills to manifest his fatherly favor to us in many ways, yet we cannot by contemplating the universe infer that he is Father. Rather, conscience presses us within and shows in our sin just cause for his disowning us and not regarding or recognising us as his sons.”

Thus, the original revelation of Eden was replaced by the actual revelation given in the fallen world. Born in original sin, men and women have lost the freedom of their wills. Although they still possess the religionis semen they have opted to choke the

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66 Inst. II: i: 5 [CO 2 (30): 179-180]. Wendel writes: “Adam... represented the whole of the human race, which was summed up, as it were, in his person, and therefore the whole of mankind was condemned at the same time as Adam.” (op.cit., 195).
70 Inst. II: vi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 247].
71 Parker, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, 26-27.
72 Calvin defines original sin as “a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God’s wrath, then also brings forth in us those works
light they have received. Thus, they now act in "dense ignorance". Nevertheless, God continues to give them light. However, they do not and cannot respond to it effectively.\textsuperscript{73} "All", says Calvin, "degenerate from the true knowledge of [God].... The blindness under which they labor is almost always mixed with proud vanity and obstinacy."\textsuperscript{74} However, the \textit{religionis semen} ensures the inability of humankind to eradicate the fact of their creation by their divine Father. The \textit{sensus divinitatis} continually reminds them of their Creator whose majesty is to be worshipped and adored. Yet, through sin they shrink back from this belief and are thus alienated from their original knowledge of God. In other words, they broke loose from God, the common Father.\textsuperscript{75} Although they retain the knowledge of God, they have lost the awareness of his paternity. Thus, they no longer know him as their \textit{Father}. Not surprisingly, then, Calvin asserts that humankind remains "the offspring of God", for even in their rebellion they retain "something divine in the superiority of [their] nature". Thus the Father testifies that humankind is still his offspring:\textsuperscript{76} "All mortal men, without distinction, are called 'sons', because they resemble God in mind and intelligence".\textsuperscript{77}

Calvin's concept of the creative Fatherhood of God exhibits, then, none of the paranoia that was to afflict certain of the later orthodox Calvinists who regarded the notion as a concession to Universalism and an undermining of the infinite Creator/creature divide. Despite possessing the \textit{religionis semen}, humankind is hindered by the stupor of sin from seeing God mirrored in his works of creation. The \textit{imago Dei} no longer ensures that humankind knows God. Yet, according to Parker, "although we are ignorant, we think we know; we see no need to be taught, as though we were little children."\textsuperscript{78}

Redemption is designed to cope with our ignorance. "Since we have fallen from life unto death, the whole knowledge of God the Creator... would be useless unless faith

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\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Inst.} II: ii: 12 \textsuperscript{[CO 2 (30): 195-196].}
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Inst.} I: iv: 1 \textsuperscript{[CO 2 (30): 38].}
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{CC Acts}, vol. 2, 117 \textsuperscript{[CO 48 (76): 414].}
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Inst.} I: v: 3 \textsuperscript{[CO 2 (30): 43].}
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{CC Acts}, vol. 2, 121 \textsuperscript{[CO 48 (76): 418].}
\textsuperscript{78} T H L Parker, "Calvin's Concept of Revelation". Gamble, \textit{op.cit.}, vol. 6, 340.
also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ.” 79 Only Christ, the object of the believer’s faith, can bring fallen sinners back to the Father:

Although the preaching of the cross does not agree with our human inclination, if we desire to return to God our Author and Maker, from whom we have been estranged, in order that he may again begin to be our Father, we ought nevertheless to embrace it humbly. Surely, after the fall of the first man no knowledge of God apart from the Mediator has had power unto salvation. 80

Without faith in Christ, sinners remain estranged from God and outside of his family: “It is quite unfitting that those not engrafted into the body of the only begotten Son are considered to have the place and rank of children [filiorum].” 81 For this reason Calvin insists that God acknowledges us none to be his children except and only in so far as there is genuine membership of his Son. There can be no membership in the household of God without membership of Christ. Any alternative sonship belongs to the children of wrath (Eph. 2:2) who, if they die as such, are at length cast into hell by the just judgement of God. Thus, Calvin explains how humankind can be at one and the same time the offspring of God and yet be outside of his family. Outwith the household God can only be known as judge. Thus, unless sinners are adopted into God’s family, they continue to live in fear of the one they will face at death.

2.3 The Covenantal Context

Humankind’s dire predicament rendered redemption essential. Although undeserving, sinners require restoring to the filial relationship that Adam initially enjoyed with his Father. Salvation-history explains how this process has been divinely outworked in world history. It focuses on God’s freely provided covenant of grace through which the elect are adopted as his own. 82 “Whenever God declares that he will be our God, he offers to us his paternal favour, and declares that our salvation is become the object of his care”. 83

80 Inst. II: vi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 247-248] (italics inserted). As Zachman writes, “God the Creator cannot be known as Father by creatures who have by their sin destroyed themselves as children of God, unless God sets himself forth as the Father of sinners in the person of the only-begotten Son.” (op. cit., 140).
81 Inst. II: vi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 248].
82 Inst. II: vi: 4 [CO 2 (30): 251-252].
83 CTS Jer., vol. 4, 133 [CO 38 (66): 692].
Although Calvin teaches neither a covenant of redemption (a pre-temporal *pactum salutis*) nor a covenant of works as later taught by federal theologians,\(^\text{84}\) nevertheless the covenant of grace is most significant in his theology.\(^\text{85}\) It provides the key to salvation-history because it links together the various phases of God’s covenantal dealings with his people,\(^\text{86}\) thereby underpinning the unity of Scripture.\(^\text{87}\) Furthermore, it speaks of God’s accommodation to human weakness in which he paternally and strategically adjusts his dealings with his people for his glory in their salvation.\(^\text{88}\) The

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\(^\text{85}\) Anthony A Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin’s Teaching”, *CTJ* 2 (1967), 133-134. Hoekema says of Calvin’s covenant theology what we are saying of his doctrine of adoption, namely, that although it plays a significant role in his theology there is no separate chapter in the *Institutio* on the Covenant of Grace (*ibid.*, 135). Parker also notes the importance of covenant for Calvin but denies that it is the “basic and all-embracing doctrine” that it became in the seventeenth century (*Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries*, 84). Similarly James Torrance writes that the covenant of grace “is in no way a key concept in his theology”. However, Torrance insufficiently stresses the importance that covenant has for Calvin. He simply notes that “the concept of ‘the covenant of grace’ or ‘covenant of life’ appears frequently in his writings, particularly in his discussion of the relation between the Old and New Testaments and of baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (*op.cit.*, 16; cf. 34). These are by no means insignificant topics in Calvin’s theology. While Calvin was not the first Reformed theologian to use the concept it was the widespread influence of his writings that, according to Arie Brouwer, “makes his treatment of signal importance” (“Calvin’s Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: Foundation for Christian Education”. Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 8, 24).

\(^\text{86}\) J Wayne Baker argues that Calvin’s covenant theology was really a theology of testament: “The new testament or covenant, the gospel, was equivalent to the spiritual covenant by which God adopted the elect in all ages.” (*Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980, 197; see also more recently Baker’s article entitled “Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998), 359-376). “Calvin’s idea of testament... simply served to unify God’s grace from one dispensation to the other. It was the framework within which God dealt with His elect in all ages.” (*ibid.*; cf. Steinmetz, 168). Calvin’s doctrine of the covenant of grace reflects the strength of his emphasis on the Old Testament. See Wendel, *op.cit.*, 123 and 159.

\(^\text{87}\) For example, Calvin writes that, “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.” (*Inst.* II: x: 2 [*CO* 2 (30): 313]). As Parker reminds us: “The relation between the Testaments is in no way peripheral to his theology.” (*Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries*, 44). His assessment of Calvin’s view is that “the difference between the Testaments lies, not in the two stages of the Church, but in the clarity of the Christ’s revelation and therefore the assurance of the Church’s knowledge” (*ibid.*, 46). See *Inst.* II: x-xi [*CO* 2 (30): 313-340].

\(^\text{88}\) E David Willis, “Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin’s Theology”, *op.cit.*, 93.
covenant provides evidence of Calvin’s fully developed concept of testament and is akin to what is nowadays called the *Heilsgeschichte* model of biblical theology.\(^89\)

It is fascinating to observe the way that Calvin sees the outworking of God’s adoptive dealings with his people throughout the development of each *modus administrationis* of the covenant of grace.\(^90\) Although there is no covenant of works in his theology Calvin makes it clear that God’s encounter with his people began at the dawn of world-history. However, rather than speak of the Edenic scenario in terms of a covenant of works, Calvin prefers to subsume all redemptive history under the covenant of grace. Immediately noticeable is the integral connection that he draws between the covenant of grace and adoption.\(^91\) “All men adopted [*cooptat*] by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted [*foederatos*] to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us.”\(^92\)

Calvin also apparently says nothing of a Noachic covenant after Eden. Only with the advent of the Abrahamic and Mosaic eras does he begin to regularly mention the covenant,\(^93\) and then commonly in the same breath as adoption. In fact, his writings abundantly evince his belief that the covenant of grace was promised to Abraham, confirmed with Moses and fulfilled in Christ.

\(i\) *The Abrahamic Era*

In endeavouring to faithfully exegete the *corpus Paulinum* it was inevitable that Calvin would make much of God’s covenant with Abraham. However, as Paul only

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\(^90\) On the relationship between the concepts of *Heilsgeschichte* and covenant see H H Wolf, *Die Einheit des Bundes: Das Verhältnis von Altem und Neuem Testament bei Calvin*. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche. Zehnterband. Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1958, especially 64-65. Worthy of note in this regard is Parker’s observation that the production of Calvin’s Old Testament commentaries fall within the last fifteen years or so of his life (*Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries*, 9). Thus, it was inevitable that the reformer would interpret Old Testament historical theology so liberally in terms of adoption.


\(^93\) “God has never made any other covenant than that which he made [*initio*] formerly with Abraham and confirmed [*consignavit*] by the hand of Moses.” (*CTS Jer.*, vol. 4, 127 [*CO 38* (66): 688]).
mentions Abraham in the context of  νικεσια in Galatians 3:7, 26 and 29 it is surprising that Calvin regards the Abrahamic covenant in terms of adoption. 94 In Galatians 3 Paul teaches that it was the promise of the inheritance not the actuality of adoption that was first given to Abraham. Only hundreds of years later were the children of Israel adopted at Mount Sinai. 95 Thus, Calvin is guilty of imposing adoption on the covenant with Abraham. He does so almost inadvertently as he attempts to expound Paul’s illustrative use of Abraham’s justification (see particularly Rom. 4 and Gal. 3:1-9). This, we suggest in the next chapter is perhaps because Calvin understood justification to include what may be called the adoptive act; that is, the initial acceptance of a sinner as righteous in God’s sight and therefore not only justified but also now a son of God.

The key passage for the whole covenantal context of adoption is Galatians 3-4: 7. 96 In seeking to prove that justification is through faith alone, Paul draws on Old Testament history and on Abraham in particular. Abraham’s faith “was reckoned to him for righteousness”(3:6), not because he believed God when he was told that his seed would be as the sand of the seashore, but because he “embraced the grace of God, trusting to the promised Mediator”. 97 Significantly, Paul’s allusion to Abraham’s faith is taken from Genesis 15:6 at which verse Calvin’s commentary begins to make the connection between the Abrahamic covenant and adoption. Whereas God can and does on occasion grant special benefits to unbelievers, they are typically “without the taste of his paternal love”. 98 Believing Abraham was different, however:

We do not say that Abram was justified because he laid hold on a single word, respecting the offspring to be brought forth, but because he embraced God as his Father. 99

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94 “God... long ago made a covenant with Abraham, and the adoption of the people was founded upon it.” (CTS Ezek., vol. 2, 104; cf. 95 [CO 40 (68): 342; 335-336]). This is confirmed by Niesel (op.cit., 92-93) and Wendel, op.cit., 196).
96 Parker notes how that Gal. 3-4 provided Calvin with the cognate theme of preparation between the Old and the New Covenant as seen in the epistle to the Hebrews (Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, 52).
97 Ibid., 51.
98 CTS Gen., vol. 1, 406 [CO 23 (51): 212].
99 “It is... to be maintained as an axiom, that all the promises of God made to the faithful, flow from the free mercy of God, and are evidences of that paternal love, and of that gratuitous adoption, on which their salvation is founded.” (CTS Gen., vol. 1, 407 [CO 23 (51): 212]).
In justifying Abraham God entered into a covenant of promise with him. This
covenant was so foundational to the covenant of grace that Calvin asserts (on the basis of
Mal. 2:10) that it is Abraham and not Jehovah who is in view as the father of his people.
"God had chosen the race of Abraham and adopted them as his people... because he had
deposited his covenant with Abraham and the fathers". Unilaterally initiated, the
covenant was nevertheless bilaterally maintained: "The foundation... of the divine
calling, is a gratuitous promise [unilateral aspect]; but it follows immediately after, that
they whom he has chosen as a peculiar people to himself, should devote themselves to
the righteousness of God [bilateral aspect]. For on this condition, he adopts his children
as his own that he may in return obtain the place and honour, of a Father." The
covenant consists, therefore, of two parts:
The first was a declaration of gratuitous love; to which was annexed the promise of a
happy life. But the other was an exhortation to the sincere endeavour to cultivate
uprightness, since God had given, in a single word only, a slight taste of his grace; and
then immediately had descended to the design of his calling; namely, that Abram should
be upright.  

100 CTS Mal., 540 [CO 44 (72): 444]. In the significant clause the question asked is "Have we not all one
father? hath not one God created us?". In view of the nineteenth-century wranglings as to whether this text
teaches a redemptive or creative Fatherhood of God, it is ironic that Calvin himself did not believe any
form of the divine paternity to be in view.
101 BT Gen., 444 [CO 43 (51): 235]; For more on the election and adoption of God's ancient people see
CTS Hab., 138 [CO 43 (71): 567].
102 BT Gen., 444 [CO 43 (51): 235]. See Beeke, op. cit., 75-76. There is some confusion over the nature of
the covenant. It suits James Torrance's polemic against federal theology to insist that Calvin regarded the
covenant of grace as unilateral: "God binds himself in unconditional promises to man, binds man to
himself under unconditional obligations, and undertakes to fulfil those promises and obligations for man
in Christ." This enables Torrance to make an unfavourable contrast with what he sees as the mistaken
Federal view of the covenant as a contract (op. cit., 23 and 32). In fairness to Torrance, orthodox Calvinist
John Murray also regarded the covenant as unilateral, but he did so on biblico-theological grounds and not
Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988). Hoekema, however, writes that, "the covenant of
grace rests upon God's promise [unilateral aspect]; at the same time, however, it involves our response to
God's promise in faith and obedience [bilateral aspect] - so much so that Calvin can say that there is a
sense in which the blessings of God are conditional." He goes further and states that later covenant
theologians agreed with Calvin in their belief in the unilateral or monopleuric origin and the bilateral or
dipleuric fulfilment of the covenant of grace (op. cit., 146 and 140). Calvin himself writes of the
confirmation of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:2) that God "now subjoins a more ample declaration
of his grace [unilateral aspect], in order that Abram may endeavour more willingly to form his mind and
his life, both to reverence towards God, and to the cultivation of uprightness; as if God had said, 'See how
kindly I indulge thee: for I do not require integrity from thee simply on account of my authority [unilateral
aspect], which I might justly do; but whereas I owe thee nothing, I condescend graciously [unilateral
aspect] to engage in a mutual covenant [bilateral aspect].'" (CTS Gen., vol. 1, 444 [CO 43 (51): 235]).
Baker, however, criticises Hoekema for claiming too much for the Calvinian citations on a bilateral
covenant claiming that he fails to take into account Calvin's testamentary framework which involves
God's unilateral promise of electing grace (op. cit., 197). This may be so, but due weight must be given to
The covenant was also made with Abraham's seed. "He begins to be called Abraham," says Calvin, "in order that the name itself may teach him, that he should not be the father of one family only; but that a progeny should rise up to him from an immense multitude, beyond the common course of nature." Consequently, it is "without doubt [that God] counts as his children the children of those to whose seed he promised to be a father" (Gen. 17:5 and 7). When God entered into the covenant with Abraham and his seed, the church "was separated from other nations" so that the dignity of the gratuita adoptio belonged to all her members in common.

However, if faith was a necessary prerequisite of Abraham's membership of the covenant, why did God allow his descendants entrance into covenant on the basis of lineage? In response, Calvin openly and frankly explains that there are distinct degrees of adoption (distinctos adoptionis gradus) that take into account the fact, as Paul later complains, that some Hebrews were only Abraham's children in an external sense (Rom. 9:6). They were not the children of Abraham by faith. His explanation of the two degrees of adoption is worth quoting at length, not least because it constitutes part of the most extensive treatment of adoption that we have encountered in Calvin's writings:

In the epistle to the Galatians, chap. ii. ver. 15, and elsewhere, Paul calls them [the Israelites] saints "by nature," because God was willing that his grace should descend, by a continual succession, to the whole seed. In this sense, they who were unbelievers among the Jews, are yet called the children of the celestial kingdom, by Christ. (Matth. viii.12) Nor does what St Paul says contradict this; namely, that not all who are from Abraham are to be esteemed legitimate children; because they are not children of the promise, but only of the flesh. (Rom.ix.8.) For there, the promise is not taken generally for that outward word, by which God conferred his favour as well upon the reprobate as upon the elect; but must be restricted to that efficacious calling, which he inwardly seals by his Spirit. And that this is the case, is proved without difficulty; for the promise by which the Lord had adopted them all as his children, was common to all: and in that promise, it cannot be denied, that eternal salvation was offered to all. What, therefore, can be the meaning of Paul, when he denies that certain persons have any right to be reckoned among children, except that he is no longer reasoning about the externally

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103 BT Gen., 447 [CO 43 (51): 237].
104 Inst. IV: xvi: 24 [CO 2 (30): 993].
105 BT Gen., 448 [CO 43 (51): 237].
106 And in addition with all those under Abraham's roof (Gen. 17:12): "We know that formerly slaves were scarcely reckoned among the number of men. But God, out of regard to his servant Abraham, adopts them as his own sons: to this mercy nothing whatever can be added." (BT Gen., 455).
107 BT Gen., 448 [CO 23 (51): 237].
offered grace, but about that which only the elect effectually partake? Here, then, a twofold class of sons presents itself to us, in the Church; for since the whole body of the people is gathered together into the fold of God, by one and the same voice, all without exception, are, in this respect, accounted children; the name of the Church is applicable in common to them all: but in the innermost sanctuary of God, none others are reckoned the sons of God, than they in whom the promise is ratified by faith. And although this difference flows from the fountain of gratuitous election, whence also faith itself springs; yet, since the counsel of God is in itself hidden from us, we therefore distinguish the true from the spurious children, by the respective marks of faith and unbelief. This method and dispensation continued even to the promulgation of the gospel.\(^\text{108}\)

Confident of this explanation, Calvin concludes his exposition by declaring that the “succession of generations clearly proves that the posterity of Abraham were taken into the Church, in such a manner that sons might be born to them, who should be heirs of the same grace.” The enjoyment of the grace of God entitles them to share in its benefits: “For those whom God adopts to himself, from among a people - seeing that he makes them partakers of his righteousness and of all good things - he also constitutes heirs of celestial life.”

While this “life” is eternal, Abraham - and later Isaac and Jacob - were assured a more immanent blessing, namely, the “Promised Land”. “When... [God] adopted [cooptavit] Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants into the hope of immortality, he promised them the land of Canaan as an inheritance. It was not to be the final goal of their hopes, but was to exercise and confirm them, as they contemplated it, in hope of their true inheritance, an inheritance not yet manifested to them. And that they might not be deceived, a higher promise was given, attesting that the land was not God’s supreme benefit. Thus Abraham is not allowed to sit idly by when he receives the promise of the land, but his mind is elevated to the Lord by a greater promise.”\(^\text{109}\)

The Abrahamic covenant was sealed by circumcision divinely inscribed in Abraham’s flesh.\(^\text{110}\) Consistent with his view of the covenant with Abraham, Calvin

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\(^\text{108}\) BT Gen., 448-450 [CO 23 (51): 237-238]. Similarly, Calvin writes of children born to the Jewish idolaters of Ezekiel’s day, that, they “were spurious, instead of being worthy of such honour that God should call them his sons; this is true with respect to them, but as concerns the covenant they are called the sons of God.” (CTS Ezek., vol. 2, 120 [CO 40 (68): 354]).

\(^\text{109}\) Inst. II: xi: 2 [CO 2 (30): 330].

\(^\text{110}\) Calvin provides two reasons for the choice of circumcision as the seal: “First, to show that whatever is born of man is polluted; then, that salvation would proceed from the blessed seed of Abraham.” (CTS Gen., vol. 1, 453-454 [CO 23 (51): 241]). It did not justify but was rather a sign of the righteousness of faith (Inst. IV: xiv: 5 and 21 [CO 2 (30): 944 and 957-958]). As he elsewhere puts it: “The Lord also, when he adopts [cooptat] Abraham, does not begin with circumcision, meanwhile concealing what he
explains that “circumcision was as a solemn memorial [or pledge] of that adoption, by which the family of Abraham had been elected to be the peculiar people of God.”

Although a painful process, the fact that the operation occurred as early as the eighth day signified “that [God] had respect to their tender age, in order to prove to the Jews his paternal love towards their children.” Thus, despite its inconvenience, circumcision conveyed something of the Lord’s covenantal love towards Abraham and his descendants: “When God commands Abraham to circumcise all whom he has under his power, his special love towards holy Abraham is conspicuous in this, that He embraces his whole family in His grace.”

The importance of the covenantal sign ought not to be underestimated. It was, says Calvin, “for the Jews their first entry into the church, because it was a token to them by which they were assured of adoption as the people and household of God, and they in turn professed to enlist in God’s service.” Any male children left uncircumcised were to be cut off from the people (Gen. 17:14). “We ought not to press this divine declaration too closely, as if God held the infants as chargeable with a fault of their own: but we must observe the antithesis, that as God adopts the infant son in the person of his father, so when the father repudiates the benefit, the infant is said to be cut off from the Church.” Not until the Mosaic era was the circumcision of the foreskin said to be inadequate without the accompanying circumcision of the heart, wherein the rite found its true meaning.

(ii) The Mosaic Era

Advancing chronologically to the time of Moses necessitates our return from the Old Testament background of the Abrahamic era to the Pauline theology of Galatians
3:19-4:7. Other appropriate texts, supplemented by Calvin’s treatment of the law in the *Institutes* (especially *Inst. II*:vii-ix), naturally enrich his perspective on the Mosaic era. However, as a Pauline scholar Calvin could not overlook the significance of Galatians 3 and 4.

Nevertheless, our understanding of this passage is impoverished without the light shed on it by Romans 9:4 where Paul describes the adoption as a unique privilege that had been given to Israel. Scott has recently noted that the privileges listed by Paul in Rom. 9:4 divide into two groups. The first of each form a parallelism ending in -οθεσία: ἡ νομοθεσία and ἡ νομοθέσια. On this basis Scott asserts that Paul traces the adoption (ἡ νομοθεσία) back to the giving of the law (ἡ νομοθέσια) at Sinai.118

Calvin says little of relevance in his comments on Romans 9:4. Significantly, what he does say relates more to the Abrahamic era: "The Jews had now stripped themselves of all these privileges, so that it was of no advantage to them to be called the children of Abraham."119 This is consistent with his reading of adoption into God’s initiation of the Abrahamic covenant. The nearest he comes to mentioning the importance of Sinai for the adoption of the children of Israel is in a general allusion to the Exodus:

The Lord had passed by all other nations, and selected them as a people peculiar to Himself, and had adopted them as His children, as He often testifies by Moses and the prophets. And not content simply to name them sons [filios], He sometimes calls them His first-begotten, and sometimes His beloved. Thus the Lord says in Exod. 4.22f, "Israel is my son [filius], my firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me"; "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer. 31.9); and again, "Is Ephraim my dear son [filius]? is he a pleasant child [puer]? for as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:20).120

118 Scott, *op. cit.*, 148-149.
119 *CC Rom.*, 194 [CO 49 (77): 172] (italics inserted). Indeed, elsewhere Calvin explicitly says that “God... adopted them as His people in the person of Abraham.... He was then ever the Father of the Church” (*CTS Jer.*, vol. 4, 74 [CO 38 (66): 655]).
120 *CC Rom.*, 194 [CO 49 (77): 172]. In his remarks on Exodus 4:22 Calvin describes the reference to Israel as God’s firstborn as an eschatological portend of the entrance of the Gentiles into the church. “By this honourable title [firstborn] He unquestionably prefers him [Israel] to the other nations; as though He had said, that he was raised to the degree of the primogeniture, and was superior to all the world. This passage, then, may be accommodated to the calling of the Gentiles, whom God had already decreed to bring into fellowship with his elect people, so that, although they were younger, they might be united with his first-born.” (*CTS Pentateuch*, vol. 1, 103 [CO 24 (52): 63]). More immediately, the designation “firstborn” serves as a divine theodicy for the Exodus: “In order... to shew that he took nothing away unjustly or unreasonably from Pharaoh, God alleges the privilege by which the Israelites were excepted from ordinary laws; for by calling them His sons, He claims liberty for them ; since it would be absurd
The adoption of Israel as God’s firstborn opens up the question of the relationship of the adoption and new birth motifs. Of Hosea 11:1, Calvin writes: “The nativity of the people was their coming out of Egypt.”

I not only loved him when a child, but before he was born I began to love him: for the liberation from Egypt was the nativity, and my love preceded that. It then appears, that the people had been loved by me, before they came forth to the light; for Egypt was like a grave without any spark of life; and the condition this miserable people was in was worse than a thousand deaths. Then by calling my people from Egypt, I sufficiently proved that my love was gratuitous before they were born.

Yet, in spite of the emphasis on birth, Calvin comments on the very same verse that “adoption made the children of God”. The logic of Calvin’s thought would seem to suggest that although God had adopted Abraham and his descendants hundreds of years earlier, only at Sinai did the nation of Israel come to birth. However, in commenting on Matthew’s citation of Hosea 11:1 (Matt. 2:15), Calvin describes the Exodus “as a sort of birth of the nation”, but adds, “then were openly produced letters of adoption”.

Two problematic questions arise at this juncture. The first concerns a conundrum that has been sidestepped in previous Reformed discussions of adoption. It concerns the plausibility of the dual process of entrance of the children of Israel into sonship with God, namely by birth and adoption. Supposing these two elements are non-metaphorical realities, then there is a divine logic that surpasses a human understanding of birth and adoption. In the earthly realm a son is not born and adopted into the same family. Alternatively, if we assume that Calvin regards the birth and adoption of the children of God itself, the supreme Ruler of heaven and earth, should be deprived of the sons whom he had designed to adopt. He, therefore, indirectly compares his own paternal power with Pharaoh’s earthly rule; because nothing could be less reasonable than that a mortal should refuse to yield to the Maker of himself and all the world.” He continues: “Still this is not applicable to all believers in general; as if it were wrong for them to be subject for kings, or as if their temporal subjection deprived them of their inheritance of the world; but mention is here only made of the special prerogative with which God had honoured the posterity of Abraham, when he gave them the dominion of the land of Canaan. Therefore not content with the simple appellation of son, He calls Israel his first-born.” (CTS Pentateuch, vol. 1, 103 [CO 24 (52): 62-63]).

121 Hos. 11:1: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” (CTS Hos., 386 [CO 42 (70): 432]).
122 Parker helpfully defines Old Testament history as “the story of the children of Israel, adopted to be the Church and so separated from all other peoples, on the one hand persecuted and afflicted but yet preserved by the hand of God, and on the other hand at conflict within themselves, in that a remnant is faithful while the majority are ‘hypocrites’ - by which is meant in the present context those who were members of the Church outwardly but not at heart.” (Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, 90).
123 CTS Evangelists, vol. 1, 157 [CO 45 (73): 98].
Israel as models of salvation, then we immediately encounter a problem as to their inter-connectedness. The only other possibility is that there is some exegetical solution to this conundrum. Whatever the solution, the problem cannot be resolved here, not least because it was not a priority for Calvin. Enough to say that Calvin would probably not have posited its resolution in the recognition of the distinctive structure of the various models of Scripture. The only basis we have for saying this is his somewhat curt equating of the filial models of John and Paul, which he alludes to in his sermon on Galatians 3:26-29.¹²⁴

Secondly, why were the children of Israel adopted at the Exodus if they had already been adopted in Abraham? It is assumed that whereas God’s adoption of Abraham and his seed had reference to his family, at Sinai the process was repeated at the official formation or inauguration of the nation.¹²⁵ The Mosaic era therefore marked a broadening out of the Abrahamic adoption to include the nation. It testified to a new phase in the development of God’s adoptive dealings with his people. For Calvin, then, adoption is initiated in the Abrahamic covenant and now also by Mosaic covenant. It originates with Abraham, but is ratified under Moses after the liberation of the children of Israel from Egypt and the subsequent birth of the nation.¹²⁶

Thus, we finally come to Calvin’s commentary on Galatians 3, in which Paul describes the conditions under which Israel lived as God’s son. While the Mosaic modus administrationis involved a conceptual shift from covenant to law, the unfolding of the history of redemption suffered no contradiction or retrogression.¹²⁷ “Moses was not made a lawgiver to wipe out the blessing promised to the race of Abraham. Rather, we see him repeatedly reminding the Jews of that freely given covenant made with their

¹²⁴ BT (Sermons), Gal., 341.
¹²⁶ For this reason Calvin can write that God “favoured the children of Abraham above all other nations, when he adopted them as his peculiar people.” (Italics inserted; CTS Jer., vol. 4, 151 [CO 38 (66): 704]). Cf. Calvin’s description of the Jews as “children of... the same Father” and “separated by the privilege of adoption from the rest of the nations, so as to be God’s sacred heritage” (CTS Evangelists, vol. 3, 61 [CO 45 (73): 613]).
¹²⁷ It ought not to be thought, however, that Calvin perceived the law to originate with the revelation given to Moses. For Calvin’s view of natural law see Hesselink, Calvin’s Concept of Law., 51-85.
fathers of which they were the heirs. It was as if he were sent to renew it. This fact was very clearly revealed in the ceremonies.”

According to Hesselink, Calvin believed the covenant was renewed in Moses’ day for two reasons; to increase the desire of the Israelites for a deliverer and to remind them of the covenant made with Abraham. “Due to the lapse of time and the indifference of humankind, it was necessary”, writes Hesselink, “for God to engrave his covenant on tables of stone and have it written in a book ‘so that the unique grace which God bestowed upon Abraham might never again sink into oblivion.’”

Mention of the place of the law in the Mosaic economy immediately introduces us to Paul’s complicated use of νομος. Generally Calvin applies the term broadly. “I understand by the word ‘law’ not only the Ten commandments, which set forth a godly and righteous rule of living, but the form of religion handed down by God through Moses.” The context of particular Pauline statements can on occasion signify a narrower meaning, as Calvin realises when variously referring to Galatians 3:19 in his commentary and the Institutes. On the one hand, he writes in his commentary “that Paul does not speak of the moral law only but of the whole ministry of Moses”. Conversely, he says in the Institutes that Paul “was sometimes compelled to take the bare law in a narrow sense, even though it was otherwise graced with the covenant of free adoption.” Whichever way Paul ought to be taken, Calvin sought to clarify Paul’s reasons for the giving of the law. Paul, however, confines himself to just one. The law was given “because of transgressions”. This means, interprets Calvin, that “the law was given in order to make transgressions obvious, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt.”

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129 Hesselink, Calvin’s Concept of the Law, 89.
131 There the apostle asks: “What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator.”
132 CC Gal., 60 [CO 50 (78): 214-215].
133 Inst. II: vii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 254].
From Galatians 3:23-25 Paul really begins to expand on the use of the law under the old covenant. As he does so the confusion regarding his use of νομος fades into the background as the affect of the law’s application comes to the fore:

Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up under the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

However, Calvin feels constrained to make clear that “Paul is not speaking only of ceremonies or of the moral law, but... the whole economy by which the Lord governed His people under the old covenant.” The law is described by the use of three metaphors: a prison or guardhouse (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφραυχόμεθα), a schoolmaster (παιδαγωγός) and tutors (ἐπιφρόσυναι [tutoribus] and οἰκονόμους [curatoribus]) (4:1-2). According to Calvin, these metaphors together unitedly convey the temporary nature of the dispensation of the law under the old covenant.

The law beneficently operated as a prison (legis custodiam) to protect the children of Israel from the curse of sin that besieged them on every side. Secondly, it acted as a schoolmaster:

A schoolmaster [paedagogus] is not appointed for a person’s whole life, but only for childhood, as the etymology of the word shows. Besides, in training a boy, the object is to prepare him by childish elements for greater things. The comparison applies in both respects to the law, for its authority was limited to a fixed age and its purpose was to advance its scholars only to the stage where, when the elements had been learned, they could make progress in further education.

Inevitably, then, the children of Israel had less light than do new covenant believers. The ceremonies of the law were designed to mirror what the church has now in substance, viz., Christ. They were only applicable while the church was in its childhood. “The grammarian [grammaticus] trains a boy and then hands him over to someone else who polishes him in the higher disciplines. Thus the law was as it were the grammarian who

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134 CC Gal., 65-66 [CO 50 (78): 219-220].
135 CC Gal., 66 [CO 50 (78): 220]. Elsewhere he writes: “We know that the ancient people were like children, and hence God kept them in the rudiments of knowledge” (CTS Jer., vol. 4, 135 [CO 38 (66): 693]).
136 Inst. II: vii: 16f. [CO 2 (30): 264f.].
started its pupils off and then handed them over to the theology of faith for their completion. 137

The law’s instruction, when given by the schoolmaster or grammarian, is twofold: 138 First, it serves as a mirror to reflect the righteousness of God, thereby convicting the children of Israel of their unworthiness. The reflection taught them to seek that righteousness which was outside of their own incomplete and imperfect fulfilment of the law, the hope of which was promised in the law. 139 Secondly, the threatenings promised for breakage of the law compelled them to seek refuge from the wrath and curse of God. “Indeed, it gave them no rest till they were constrained to seek the grace of Christ.” 140 Thus the combined testimony of the law and the promises pointed the children of Israel to the great need of faith as that which alone reckons righteous before God. 141

Thirdly, the law acted as a tutor (tutoris): “So long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant, though he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed of the father.” (4:1-2):

The pupil, although he is free and even lord of all his father’s family, is still like a slave, for he is under the government of tutors. But this subjection under a guardian [tutela] lasts only until the time appointed by the father, after which he enjoys his freedom. In this respect the fathers under the old covenant, being the sons of God, were free. But they were not in possession of freedom, since the law like a tutor kept them under its yoke. The slavery of the law lasted as long as God pleased and He put an end to it at the coming of Christ. Lawyers enumerate various methods by which guardianship [tutelam] is brought to a close; but of them all, the only one that fits this comparison is that which Paul puts here, the appointment by the father. 142

During the Mosaic era, then, the children of Israel underwent the sort of filial development that characterises years of minority. “Since they had not yet come to know Christ intimately, they were like children whose weakness could not yet bear the full

137 CC Gal., 66 [CC Gal., 50 (78): 220].
138 This is to be compared with what Calvin says of the threefold use of the Moral law (triplex usus legis) as outlined in the Institutes (II: vii: 6-17 [CO 2 (30): 257-266]). For more on this see ch. 4.5.
141 Just as Paul’s portrayal of the vital necessity of faith enabled him to confront the Judaizers so Calvin’s exegesis gave him ammunition against the Papacy.
142 CC Gal., 70 [CO 50 (78): 223-224].
knowledge of heavenly things." Hence, the ceremonial laws were accommodated to the church's elementary mentality: "It was not in vain that God willed of Old, through expiations and sacrifices, to attest that he was Father, and to set apart for himself a chosen people." "It was the Lord's will that this childhood be trained in the elements of this world and in little external observances, as rules for children's instruction, until Christ should shine forth, through whom the knowledge of believers was to mature". Thus, the law's instruction as tutor coincided with its education as schoolmaster, and entailed the first two of the three functions of the Moral Law.

Although adopted into the covenant of grace, the children of Israel were often rebellious covenant-breakers. Over the centuries their frequent violation of the covenant led to its entire disintegration, so much so that a New Covenant was needed. In his abundant grace God provided a "better and more excellent" one.

(iii) The New Covenant Era

The change from old to new covenant formed the one major hiatus in the covenant of grace. Hence, Calvin asks:

Since the Church of God is one, how comes it that our condition is different from that of the Israelites? Since we are free by faith, how comes it that they, who had faith in common with us, were not partakers with us of the same freedom? Since we are all

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143 Inst. II: vii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 254]. "They were sons and heirs of God, but because of their youth they had to be under the charge of a tutor." (Inst. II: xi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 333]).
144 Inst. II: ix: 1 [CO 2 (30): 309].
145 Inst. II: xi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 333].
146 "What Paul says elsewhere, that 'the law was for the Jews a tutor unto Christ' (Gal. 3:24), may be applied to both functions of the law." (Inst. II: vii: 11 [CO 2 (30): 261]).
147 Another area in which Calvin says little of relevance is the corporate nature of the sonship of the children of Israel under the old covenant. While not denying the individual sonship of the Israelites, the Mosaic era emphasises more the corporate nature of the sonship of the children of Israel.
148 "It ought not to appear strange that God makes a new covenant, because the first had been useless and was of no avail... God made the first covenant when he stretched out his hand to his ancient people, and became their liberator; and yet they made void that covenant." (CTS Jer., vol. 4, 129 [CO 38 (66): 689]).
149 CTS Jer., vol. 4, 124 [CO 38 (66): 686]. Calvin says that it could only be better than the law in that it refers to the kingdom of Christ. His comparative silence in regard to the Davidic kingdom is evidence of his reductionist approach to the structure of his covenant theology. When he does mention the Davidic era he subsumes it under the law as "contained under the administration of Moses." (Inst. II: vii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 254]). For more on the Davidic era see Zachman, op. cit., 142.
150 This is true despite Calvin's description of the post-exilic era: "Adoption with regard to God, remained indeed the same, as it has been stated; but as to the judgement of men, it was abolished. He then began anew so to collect his people, that they might really know him as their Father" (CTS Jer., vol. 4, 75 [CO 38 (66): 655]).
equally the children of God, how comes it that we at this day are exempt from the yoke which they were forced to bear?\textsuperscript{151}

However, the redemptive-historical watershed created by this hiatus should not be exaggerated, for it was not absolute. It allowed for both continuity and discontinuity within the development of the covenant.

Explaining the novelty of the new covenant, Calvin says that, “it is not so called, because it is contrary to the first covenant; for God is never inconsistent with himself, nor is he unlike himself. He then who once made a covenant with his chosen people, had not changed his purpose, as though he had forgotten his faithfulness.”\textsuperscript{152} Thus, if God was to remain consistent there must be some measure of continuity between the old and the new covenant. It is this consistency which ensures the unity of the covenant:\textsuperscript{153}

If a householder instructs, rules, and guides, his children one way in infancy, another way in youth, and still another in young manhood, we shall not on this account call him fickle and say that he abandons his purpose. Why, then, do we brand God with the mark of inconstancy because he has with apt and fitting marks distinguished a diversity of times?\textsuperscript{154}

Thus, Calvin begins to allay perplexities concerning the continuity of the covenant.\textsuperscript{155}

The oneness of the covenant of grace ensures that believers of both the old (Moses/law) and new covenants (Christ/gospel) partake of adoption and have the same hope of inheritance. “The covenant made with all the patriarchs”, says Calvin, “is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same”.\textsuperscript{156} In direct opposition to Servetus, Calvin insists that believers under the Old Covenant were

\textsuperscript{151} CC Gal., 70-71 [CO 50 (78): 224].

\textsuperscript{152} CTS Mic., 407-408 [CO 43 (71): 433-434].

\textsuperscript{153} “Now we have this in common with the ancient people, that God adopts us, that he may at length bring us into the inheritance of eternal life.” Like the believers of Hosea’s day our fellowship with God is based on God’s adoption of us upon exit from the womb (CTS Hos., 115 [CO 42 (70): 251]).

\textsuperscript{154} Inst. II: xi: 13 [CO 2 (30): 339]. He continues: “What was irregular about the fact that God confined them to rudimentary teaching commensurate with their age, but has trained us through a firmer and, so to speak, more manly discipline? Thus, God’s constancy shines forth in the fact that he taught the same doctrine in all ages, and has continued to require the same worship of his name that he enjoined from the beginning. In the fact that he has changed the outward form and manner, he does not show himself subject to change. Rather, he has accommodated himself to men’s capacity, which is varied and changeable.”

\textsuperscript{155} This is also true of his discussion of covenant continuity/discontinuity in his commentary on Jeremiah (CTS Jer., vol. 4, 126f. [CO 38 (66): 688f.]), although Calvin does go on to say more of the notion of covenant discontinuity than in his comments on Galatians. As he explains: “It was necessary that the Law should be... contrasted with the new covenant, that the Jews might know that the favour in reserve for them would be far more excellent than what had been formerly manifest to the fathers.” (ibid., 128).

\textsuperscript{156} Inst. II: x: 2 [CO 2 (30): 313].
not merely the people of God in a figurative sense. They were truly one with New Covenant believers as the children of God. "The Gospel", he insists, "brings forward nothing but what the Law contains."157 "Hence, we must conclude that they held the same doctrine as ourselves, were joined with us in the true unity of the faith, placed reliance with us on the one Mediator, called on God as their Father, and were governed by the same Spirit. All this leads to the conclusion that the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies not in the substance but in accidents."158

Thus, covenant discontinuity must not be exaggerated. Although it is true that old covenant believers had the external appearance of slaves, nevertheless their spirits were free:

They so bore the yoke of the law on their shoulders that they worshipped God with a free spirit. More particularly, they had been taught about the free pardon of sins, and their consciences were delivered from the tyranny of sin and death. Hence we must conclude that they held the same doctrine as ourselves, were joined with us in the true unity of faith, placed reliance with us on the one Mediator, called on God as their Father, and were governed by the same Spirit. All this leads to the conclusion that the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies not in substance but in accidents. In all the chief points of the covenant we agree. The ceremonies and all that regime in which we differ are, so to say, appendages. Besides, we must note that that age was the infancy of the Church; but now at the advent of Christ the Church began to grow up, so that it has come to man's estate.159

The intricacies of the old dispensation were designed to set before the people the Christ through whom they could know God as their Father.160 Thus, the holy patriarchs "lived under the Old Covenant as not to remain there but ever to aspire to the New".161 "They were adopted into the hope of immortality; and assurance of this adoption was certified to them by oracles, by the law, and by the prophets."162 All these pointed forward to the Christ to whom New Covenant believers look retrospectively. When Christ eventually came he officially inaugurated the transition from the Old to the New Covenant, thus

157 CTS Jer., vol. 4, 127 [CO 38 (66): 688]. "The gospel points out with the finger what the law foreshadowed with types." (Inst. II: ix: 3 [CO 2 (30): 312]). Again: "The gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows." (Inst. II: ix: 4 [CO 2 (30): 312]).
158 CC Gal., 71 [CO 50 (78): 224].
159 CC Gal., 71 [CO 50 (78): 224-225]. Cf. 86 ([CO 50 (78): 238]): "Those holy fathers, though inwardly they were free in the sight of God, yet in outward appearance were no different from slaves".
161 Inst. II: xi: 10 [CO 2 (30): 336-337].
162 Inst. II: x: 2 [CO 2 (30): 314].
making his incarnation the lynchpin of the covenant of grace.\footnote{See Inst. II: x-xi [CO 2 (30): 313-340] for a thorough discussion of the issues involved.} Although a close examination of Christ's work must await the next chapter, there are two distinctive features of the new covenant era that require immediate enumeration.

First, it is eschatological. "The new covenant was made when Christ appeared with water and blood, and really fulfilled what God had exhibited under types, so that the faithful might have some taste of salvation."\footnote{CTSJer., vol. 4, 127 [CO 38 (66): 688].} This involved both the incarnation and the atonement. Although the coming of the Christ had been foretold for hundreds of years, it did not occur until the time appointed by the Father. The incarnation implicitly revealed the eternal pre-existence of the Christ by bringing attention to the addition of a human nature to the divine nature that had always been his.\footnote{CC Gal. 73 [CO 50 (78): 226-227]. "Christ is the true and natural Son of God, who had possessed the like essential deity with the Father from all eternity, who in the fulness of time had assumed our flesh, foreordained for our redemption." ("To Simon Grynee", dated May 1537, Letters, vol. 1, 54).} Anticipating the later concerns of federal theology while simultaneously and subtly confirming Adam's original sonship, Calvin explains that, "our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and the name of Adam in order to take Adam's place in obeying the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgement, and, in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved."\footnote{Inst. II: xii: 3 [CO 2 (30): 341-342]. For more on incarnational union with Christ see ch. 3.2.} In true humanity, he who "was by right exempt from all subjection, [could become] subject to the law. Why? In our name, that He might obtain freedom for us."\footnote{CC Gal. 74 [CO 50 (78): 227].}

Although we shall consider Christ's salvific accomplishment at Calvary in the following chapter, it is obvious that the atonement "was effected by the manifestation of Christ",\footnote{Parker defends Calvin against Barth's criticism that the Genevan passes over the birth of Christ to his death. "It is quite clear that for Calvin salvation is won by 'the whole course of Christ's obedience', with the Cross as the culmination, as the supreme test of his obedience." (Calvin, 72).} and served as "the brighter revelation of grace after the veil of the temple had been rent."\footnote{CC Gal., 67 [CO 50 (78): 221]. Writing from a New Covenant standpoint Calvin observes that, "though... many are now ignorant among the children of God, and among those who are really of the number of the faithful, yet if we consider how great was the obscurity of the Law, those who are at this
freely ought to be ascribed to the merit and righteousness of Christ. Whoever glories, then, is to glory in the Lord their Redeemer and Saviour. Adoptive sonship is, then, contingent on the vicarious nature of Christ’s death. “As the Son of God expiated our sins by the sacrifice of his death, and, by appeasing his Father’s wrath, acquired the gift of adoption for us, and now presents us with his righteousness, so it is only by faith we put him on, and become partakers of his blessings.”

Christ’s death produced a triple affect on the status and experience of the children of Israel in the New Covenant era. First, it liberated them from the law. As God’s son, Israel ceased to be a νηπιός under a παιδαγωγός, ἐπιτρόποι and οἰκονόμους. The internal freedom that the children of Israel had known under the Old Covenant became externalised once Christ had redeemed them from the curse of the law (ut infra). Commenting on Romans 8:15-18 Calvin writes:

Believers are here warned how much more liberally God has now dealt with them than He did formerly with the fathers under the Old Testament. He regards, however, the outward dispensation, and in this respect alone we excel them, for the faith of Abraham, Moses, and David, was more excellent than ours. Yet in so far as God kept them under a “schoolmaster”, they had not yet attained the liberty which has been disclosed to us.

Once the preparatory work of the law was complete, the old covenant ceremonies were no longer required. Consequently, with their coming of age the children of Israel came to enjoy an outward expansion of their liberty. “It would not be enough to say that we have passed out of our childhood, unless it were added that we are freemen, for age day the least among the disciples, are not otherwise than prophets and teachers.” (CTS Jer., vol. 4, 137 [CO 38 (66): 694-695]).

Generally, Calvin states that in order to know the Father’s purpose in sending Christ one must look at the offices of Christ (Inst. II: xv [CO 2 (30): 361-367]; cf. Jansen’s comments in The Doctrine of Christ).

If the external freedom to cry “Abba, Father” is solely a New Testament privilege that belongs to the adopted, it is implied that in the Abrahamic and Mosaic eras the children of Israel could not audibly call on God as Father. If they could at all, they did so in a way appropriate to the internal freedom they enjoyed. Hence, Calvin writes: “Believers also called God Father under the law, but not with such free confidence [libera fiducia], since the veil kept them far from the sanctuary. But, now, when an entrance has been opened to us by the blood of Christ, we may glory with familiarity and in full voice that we are the sons of God [filios Dei]. Hence arises this cry. The prophecy of Hosea is also thus fulfilled – ‘I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people, and they shall say, Thou art my God’ (Hosea 2:23). The more evident the promise is the greater our freedom in prayer.” (CC Rom., 170 [CO 49 (77): 149-150]).

CC Rom., 168 [CO 49 (77): 148].
does not change the state of slaves. The fact of their being children of God proves their freedom. How? By faith in Christ; for to all who believe in Him is given the privilege of being the sons of God. Therefore it is at the same time brought to pass that we are set free by faith when we are adopted by means of it.”

Thus, no more is said of the twofold class of sons for under the New Covenant adoption is conditional on faith in Christ. The \textit{fides adoptionis} is in turn foundational to the hope of eternal life.

Only under the old covenant do believing Jews possess the fruit of adoption. However, the linear progression of redemptive history did not terminate with the first advent. While New Covenant believers already enjoy the fruit of their adoption which “the holy fathers did not partake of before the coming of Christ” (Gal. 4: 5), nevertheless they await the adoption \textit{simpliciter} to be bestowed at the consummation (Rom. 8: 23).

In the meantime, the church must not “wickedly defraud... of what is justly due to adoption”.

Secondly, Christ’s death opened up an indispensable vitality in prayer that was characteristic of the newly won liberty of the new covenant era. For believing Jews prayer constituted a cry of liberation from the \texti{τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου} (Gal. 4:3, 6).

This was possible only because the Father not only sent his Son into the world but also sent the Spirit of Christ into their hearts enabling them to call out to God as \textit{Αββά} δ ἐπάτηρ.

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174 In Parker’s words: “Calvin saw the Jews as in a state of childhood, needing all sorts of elementary aids, like the pictorial images of sacrifices and the priestly vestments.” (Calvin, 58).

175 \textit{CC Gal.}, 68 [\textit{CO 50 (78): 221-222}].

176 \textit{CC Gal.}, 51 [\textit{CO 50 (78): 206}].

177 “The fathers under the old covenant were sure of their adoption, but did not as yet so fully enjoy their privilege.” (\textit{CC Gal.}, 74 [\textit{CO 50 (78): 227}]).

178 Calvin is endeavouring to explain what Geerhardus Vos later described as the principle of historical progression. This principle, which is alternatively labelled by Vos as the principle of periodicity, is specifically characterised by successive the Berith-making which introduce new periods of redemptive-history (Geerhardus Vos, \textit{Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments}. First published in 1948 by William B Eerdmans Publishing Co.. First British ed., 1975. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, 16).

179 This was done, Calvin believed, by maintaining popish ceremonies.

180 This phrase refers to “either literally, outward and bodily things, or metaphorically, rudiments.” Calvin prefers the latter interpretation. (\textit{CC Gal.}, 73 [\textit{CO 50 (78): 226}]).
Although faith is a prerequisite of filial prayer, true prayer is itself an evidence of adoption. The children of wrath "blurt out their prayers, but they merely mock God, because there is no sincerity or seriousness in them, or correctly ordered pattern". Where there is genuine faith, however, there can be no indifference about calling upon God. The hearts of the adopted are specifically trained to call upon God's name (Rom. 10:14-17). The spirit of adoption stirs up unspeakable groanings (Rom. 8:26) that culminate in the confident cry, ἀββα δὲ πατέρ (Rom. 8:15).

Thirdly, Christ's death effects the blessing of assurance. Under the law a spirit of bondage had prevailed which bound its subjects by a fear of death. All promises made to them were conditional upon obedience. Disobedient transgression of the law was met with death. The transition to the new covenant altered things however. "As... under the law", says Calvin, "there was the spirit of bondage which oppressed the conscience with fear, so under the Gospel there is the spirit of adoption, which gladdens our souls with the testimony of salvation." Yet, the assurance that belongs to the sons and daughters of God must not to be confused with presumption. Rather the Spirit of adoption grants a conscious awareness that personal sin has been pardoned a clear conscience experienced and the Father's love in Christ received (Eph.1:4-5). This contrasts markedly with the conditions known under the old covenant:

Believers also called God "Father" under the law, but not with such free confidence [libera fiducia], since the veil kept them far from the sanctuary. But, now, when an entrance has been opened to us by the blood of Christ, we may glory with familiarity and in full voice that we are the sons of God. Hence arises this cry. The prophecy of Hosea is also thus fulfilled - "I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people, and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:23). The more evident the promise is the greater our freedom in prayer.

181 "Faith", says Calvin, "can be proved only by calling on God"(CC Rom., 170 [CO 49 (77): 150]). Wendel notes that Calvin, like Luther before him, regarded prayer as a verification of faith (op.cit., 253).
182 CC Rom., 178 [CO 49 (77): 157].
183 Inst. III: xx: 1 [CO 2 (30): 625].
184 "For Calvin, the assurance of faith is primarily founded on the assurance of the conscience that Jesus Christ dwells in us and we in Christ, so that he might take away all of the evils of which the conscience makes us aware (ignorance, impotence, sin, guilt, death, and wrath) and freely bestow on us all the good things the conscience testifies we lack (wisdom, sanctification, justification, life, and blessing). Only in this way do the faithful have the confidence and boldness to call upon God as "Abba, Father!"" (Zachman, op.cit., 176).
185 CC Rom., 170 [CO 49 (77): 149-150].
Secondly, the new covenant is extensive. Whereas the old covenant had specific reference to the children of Israel, the new covenant relates to the church as an international community embracing Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul writes that there is now neither Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3:28), for Christ has made them one. The apostle’s object, says Calvin, “is to show that the grace of adoption and the hope of salvation do not depend on the law but are contained in Christ alone.” He is the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3: 16) in whom Jewish and Gentile believers are united. He “has broken down ‘the middle wall of partition’ between Jews a and Gentiles, and published the blessings of adoption to all nations, and thereby exhibited himself to them as a brother, [and] retains in the degree of brethren none but true believers.”

With the inclusion of the Gentiles, the new covenant emphasis shifts from Israel’s exclusive status as God’s son to the individual sonship of each believer. This does not mean to say that the individualisation of sonship has been made absolute, otherwise there could be no household of God; it does mean, however, that the corporate application of adoption differs now that the church family is international and has come of age.

Thus, believing Gentiles share the same basis of adoption as the Jews. They too are adopted through faith alone in the finished work of Christ. Consequently, Jews and Gentiles enjoy the same liberty. They, however, have not been freed from the law as tutor, governor and schoolmaster, but from the pagan deities that had ensnared them. Yet liberty is not only negative but also positive. Gentile believers are equally free to possess the inheritance. This possession confirms that they have been adopted into the fellowship of Israel. So authentic is this inclusion that the inheritance is also offered to the children of Gentile believers.

Furthermore, like their Jewish counterparts Gentile believers cry unto God not simply as ὁ πατήρ but as Ἀββα ὁ πατήρ. Drawing on Christ’s prayer at Gethsemane, Paul

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186 CC Gal., 69 [CO 50 (78): 223].
187 In the Institutio Calvin writes: “It is... clear that Abraham’s seed is to be accounted chiefly in one Head, and that the promised salvation was not realised until Christ appeared, whose task is to gather up what has been scattered. So, then, the original adoption of the chosen people depended upon the Mediator’s grace.” (Inst. II: vi: 2 [CO 2 (30): 249]).
188 CTS Psalms, vol. 1, 379 [CO 31 (59): 232].
juxtaposes the Aramaic word Ἀββά with the Greek πατήρ to amplify the fact “that the mercy of God has now been spread throughout the whole world to such an extent that, as Augustine observes, He is prayed to in all languages without distinction.” Thus, the possession of the Spirit of adoption is not the privilege of the few but of all the adopted irrespective of ethnic origin. Hence, Calvin highlights the apostle’s use of the first person plural of the verb κρáζω (κρáζομεν) in Romans 8:15: “You have... received the Spirit, through whom you and all the rest of us believers cry”.

Moreover, like Jewish believers, Gentile Christians enjoy the assurance of the Father’s love. They must learn from the history of the children of Israel, however, not to confuse assurance with complacency. Assurance includes a measure of fear and trembling that encourages dependence on the Lord. Far from destroying confidence, this form of fear establishes it. Thus, Calvin notes that Paul “exhorts the Gentiles not to lose, through pride and self-display, the grace of adoption, recently transferred to them.”

190 CC Rom., 169 [CO 49 (77): 149]. Calvin makes the same point in his comments on Gal. 4:6: “Observe that Paul ascribes this to all Christians in common [that is, the ability to call upon God as ‘Abba, Father’]... none is Christian save he who has been taught by the teaching of the Holy Spirit to call God his Father.” (CC Gal., 75 [CO 50 (78):]. And again: “The meaning of these words [Abba, Father], I have no doubt, is that calling upon God is common to all languages. For it pertains to the present subject that God has the name Father among the Hebrews and the Greeks.” (CC Gal., 76 [CO 50 (78): 228]).

191 CC Rom., 169 [CO 49 (77): 149].

Chapter Three

The Heart of Adoption

Now ... we have to gather ... that God, thinking it not enough to remedy [ne se contentant point de remedier] all our shortcomings and all our poverty, has vouchsafed to give himself to us in the person of his only Son. If it were told us that we are restored to the former state [restituez en l’estat premier] from whence our father Adam fell, that would be very much and thereby we should have an excellent witness to the goodness of our God, but he has not only given us [mais il ne nous a pas donné seulement] both heaven and earth, that is to say, all things that are fit for us both in respect of this life of decay and of everlasting salvation of our souls, but also he has given himself to us.

John Calvin (BT (Sermons), Eph., 288-289 [CO 29 (51): 489-490]).

Having painted with broad strokes a panoramic view of adoption up to the onset of the new covenant era, we are now concerned to sketch a close-up of the two immediate and prerequisite issues that bring us to the very heart of adoption: the wonderful exchange and union with Christ. Although they are distinct and significant themes in their own right, and deserve to be treated as such, their joint focus on Christ means that they overlap at vital points in their application to adoption. In fact, without the wonderful exchange and Christological union there is no possibility of either adoption into the church, which is the family of God, or of the accompanying experience of adoptive sonship.

3.1 The Wonderful Exchange

The wonderful exchange (mirifica commutatio) is the objective ground of salvation. It explains the need for, and purpose of, union with Christ. Despite that, it remains undefined until as late as the Institutes IV: xvii: 2:

This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty upon himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.

Thus, Calvin uses the wonderful exchange to explain the way that Christ serves as the Father’s fountain of every good to us. Through the wonderful exchange, all that belongs to the natural Son becomes ours as adopted sons. Inevitably, this calls for some elaboration.

(i) The Incarnation

Zachman helpfully notes that Calvin’s doctrine of the wonderful exchange contains three discernible moments. The first relates to the importance of the incarnation. Although the significance of the incarnation is often insufficiently realised, Calvin’s emphasis of it sought to resolve two problems: the natural impotence of humankind to become the children of God and the reality of sin which renders the fallen subject to God’s curse.

Essential to the resolution of the first of these problems is a proper perception of Christ’s incarnate Sonship. “It has been of the greatest importance for us”, writes Calvin, “that he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man.” If asked why it was absolutely necessary for the Mediator to be theanthropic, Calvin retorts that it was not. Rather, “our most merciful Father decreed what was best for us”. It should suffice for enquiring minds to know that he is the intermediary who alone can bring sinners back to the Father.

Nevertheless, Calvin willingly expends energy defending the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one person of Christ. To ensure that Christ’s divine

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5 Cf. the opening to Inst. II: xii: 5 [CO (30): 343-344].

6 CC I Cor., 327 [CO 49 (77): 549]. Zachman, *op.cit.*, 141. See “Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro” in Gamble, vol. 5, *op.cit.*, 167-172 and Leonard de Moor, “John Calvin’s View of Revelation” in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 6, 317. Calvin insists on this not only for the sake of orthodoxy, but also in the face of an attack by Francesco Stancaro. Stancaro had maintained that Christ was only human and therefore mediated not only with the Father but with the entire Trinity. See Joseph Tylanda’s article “Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro”, *op.cit.*, 161. Stancaro’s attack was unfortunate in that it complicated Calvin’s controversy with Osiander. See James Weiss’s article “Calvin versus Osiander on Justification” in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 5, 354.
and human natures remain united yet unmingled, Calvin seeks to emphasise the oneness of Christ's Sonship contrary to both Nestorius and Servetus.\textsuperscript{7} By doing so, he endeavours to weave his way between the two extremes of Nestorianism and Eutichianism.\textsuperscript{8}

Yet, however unique the only-begotten Sonship of Christ may be, Calvin notes in characteristic Anselmian fashion how essential it was for the incarnate Christ to take Adam's place in obeying the Father. It is this substitutionary act that addresses the second problem: the removal of God's curse. In contrast to the Manichees, the Marcionites and their contemporary equivalent, Menno Simons (1496-1561), Calvin stresses that it was as man that Christ paid for Adam's disobedience. Clothed with a body of human flesh he "present[ed] our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgement, and in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved."\textsuperscript{9} His perfect life ensured that his sacrifice was acceptable to the Father. As a result sinners can once again become the children of God.\textsuperscript{10} Thus Calvin concludes: "Our common nature with Christ is the pledge of our fellowship with the Son of God; and clothed with our flesh he vanquished death and sin together that the victory and triumph might be ours. He offered as a sacrifice the

\textsuperscript{7} "We ...therefore hold that Christ, as he is God and man, consisting of two natures united but not mingled, is our Lord and the true Son of God even according to, but not by reason of, his humanity." (\textit{Inst. II: xiv: 4} [CO 2 (30): 356]). Although Calvin criticises the errors of Nestorius in \textit{Inst. II: xiv: 4} [CO 2 (30): 355-356] (cf. \textit{CTS Evangelists}, vol. 1, 167 [CO 45 (73): 104]), understandably he takes longer presenting and refuting the errors of Servetus, his contemporary (see \textit{Inst. II: xiv: 7-8} [CO 2 (30): 358-361]). However, even there he does not stop long for he had dealt elsewhere with Servetus's errors (\textit{Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate} (1554)). Calvin's theology of the oneness of Christ's Sonship is relevant to our study particularly as the question was to re-emerge again in the Crawford/Candlish debate of the 1860s (see ch. 8).

\textsuperscript{8} Calvin regarded the title Son of God as referring to Christ's divinity and the Son of man to his humanity: "I contend that he is called Son of God by virtue of his deity and eternal essence. For it is just as appropriate to refer the fact that he is called 'Son of God' to his divine nature, as it is to refer the fact that he is called 'Son of man' to his human nature." (\textit{Inst. II: xiv: 6} [CO 2 (30): 358]; cf. \textit{II: xiii: 1} [CO 2 (30): 347-348] for more on the title Son of man). On the basis of this dialectical approach, McDonnell suggests that Calvin himself evinces a nestorian tendency from within the bounds of orthodoxy. This he attributes to the battlefield context in which he formulated his Christology (\textit{John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist}, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967, 212-220).

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Inst. II: xiii: 3} [CO 2 (30): 341-342]. Further echoing Anselm, he writes: "In short, since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with divine to stone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death; and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, he might win victory for us."

\textsuperscript{10} There is a twofold substantiation of Christ's perfection: (i) He was conceived without copulation with man; (ii) He was sanctified by the Spirit to ensure the purity of his generation (\textit{Inst. II: xiii: 4} [CO 2 (30): 352]).
flesh he received from us, that he might wipe out our guilt by his act of expiation and appease the Father's righteous wrath.\textsuperscript{11}

(ii) The Anointing of Christ to His Threefold Office

The second moment of the wonderful exchange refers to the Spirit's anointing of Christ to his threefold office of prophet, priest and King.\textsuperscript{12} The Father anointed Christ by the Holy Spirit in order to bestow on us every good thing that he has for us. Jansen observes, however, that while Calvin was largely responsible for suggesting the \textit{munus triplex} he nowhere uses it as he himself suggested.\textsuperscript{13} Consequently, Calvin considers the messianic office of redeemer especially in terms of the regal and priestly aspects. He, therefore, "constantly sees the Cross as a kingly conquest and a priestly sacrifice".\textsuperscript{14} These dual aspects are complementary and inform our understanding of the wonderful exchange. As King, Christ bestows on the adopted everything they lack, while as priest he takes from them every evil that is theirs.\textsuperscript{15}

The regal aspect of Christ's mediatorial work takes precedence.\textsuperscript{16} This refers

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} \textit{Inst. II}: xii: 3 [CO 2 (30): 342]. In \textit{Inst. II}: xii: 4 [CO 2 (30): 343] he virtually repeats the same: "In short, the only reason given in Scripture that the Son of God willed to take our flesh, and accepted this commandment from the Father, is that he would be a sacrifice to appease the Father on our behalf." We shall have more to say of this first moment of the wonderful exchange in connection with incarnational union.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Calvin expounds the threefold office in \textit{Inst. II}: xv [CO 2 (30): 361-367] and more succinctly in his "Catechism of The Church of Geneva" (1545); "Catechism of the Church at Geneva (1545)" \textit{Tracts}, vol. 2, 42-43; \textit{Cf. Jansen, The Work of Christ}, 59 and 105, 75. In particular, he added the prophetical aspect to cope with the relationship between Christ as the revealer of God and his messianic work of redemption, even though he could not substantiate this in terms of his exegesis of Scripture (\textit{ibid.}, 97; \textit{cf. Parker, Calvin}, 68. Jansen suggests that it is more faithful to the exegetical Calvin to understand the prophetical aspect as being subsumed under the kingly and priestly facets of the office of Christ (\textit{ibid.}, 99). It is no surprise then that even in \textit{Inst. II}:xv Calvin designates less space to a consideration of Christ as prophet. In contrast Zachman writes: "Without Christ as prophet offering himself to us in the gospel, the wonderful exchange in Christ would profit no one."(\textit{op. cit.}, 165). However, he does say that "the central part of Christ's threefold office, and the one most directly related to his being anointed by the Father, is Christ as king." (\textit{ibid.}, 166).
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Jansen, \textit{op. cit.}, 58. Jansen continues: "Nowhere does he relate the prophetic office to the Cross! Indeed, it seems that Calvin sees a peril in trying to do so - for an exemplary theory of atonement takes from the Cross its objective and saving character." (\textit{cf. 71f.}).
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Zachman, \textit{op. cit.}, 168.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} "I recognize that Christ was called Messiah especially with respect to, and by virtue of, his
not to God’s sovereign dominion over the whole universe but to Christ’s mediatorial reign over earth, the power of which he derived from the Father, as was visually symbolised at his baptism.\textsuperscript{17} Christ continues to rule even now that he has returned to a state of exaltation. By ascending to heaven our humanity has “in Jesus Christ... been exalted to a dignity it could never claim on its own, namely to be Lord in the place of the Father, at the right hand of the Father.”\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, Christ was anointed to an eternal and a spiritual reign whereby he rules over his body and every individual member of it in particular according to God’s immutable decree. This he does for the protection of the church and for the destruction of her enemies.\textsuperscript{19}

It is through the divine decree that, “the Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son’s hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in his care, and help us. Thus, while for the short time we wander away from God, Christ stands in our midst, to lead us little by little to a firm union with God”\textsuperscript{20} Christ rules, therefore, in power through his omnipresent Holy Spirit whom, as king, he bestows on the church. “We are furnished, as far as God knows to be expedient for us, with the gifts of the Spirit, which we lack by nature. By these first fruits we may perceive that we are truly joined to God in perfect blessedness.”\textsuperscript{21} Consequently, the church is enabled to triumph over the devil by the power of the Spirit and in so doing is lifted up to eternal life.

The nexus between Christ’s rule and the \textit{mirifica commutatio} is discerned from the nature of Christ’s reign. In ruling “he shares with us all that he has received from the Father”; that is, the benefits of his kingdom: “He arms and equips us with his power, adorns us with his beauty and magnificence, enriches us with his wealth.” In short, he clothes believers with his righteousness, so enabling them to praise him and to produce fruit for his glory.

kingship. Yet his anointings as prophet and as priest have their place and must not be overlooked by us.” (\textit{Inst. II: xv: 2} [CO 2 (30): 362]).
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Inst. II: xv: 5} [CO 2 (30): 365]. Nevertheless, Jansen says that Calvin does not fix a time of commencement for Christ’s reign: “He is the king - He does not become king.” (\textit{op.cit.}, 86).
\textsuperscript{18} Zachman, \textit{op. cit.}, 166.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Inst. II: xv: 3 and 5} [CO 2 (30): 363-364 and 365-366].
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Inst. II: xv: 5} [CO 2 (30): 365]; cf. \textit{Inst. II: xvi: 15} [CO 2 (30): 382-383]. In spite of Calvin’s emphasis on the kingship of Christ, in the same paragraph he can still attribute ultimate dominion to the Father: “Scripture usually calls Christ ‘Lord’ because the Father set Christ over us to exercise his dominion through his Son.”
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Inst. II: xv: 4} [CO 2 (30): 364].
As for Christ's priestly office, Calvin's main thought is that the adopted cannot partake of the Father's blessings without a pure and stainless Mediator who alone can reconcile to God:22 "God's righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry towards us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God's favor for us and appease his wrath. Thus Christ to perform this office had to come forward with a sacrifice." The sacrifice with which Christ came forward was, of course, his own self. He willingly became both the offerer and the sacrifice offered for the purchase of the remission of sins, righteousness and the hope of eternal life for the lost, with his own blood. Thereby he has made it possible for sinners to be received into the grace of the Father and to partake of the heavenly inheritance.23

The adopted are utterly dependant on Christ's priestly mediation: "We or our prayers have no access to God unless Christ, as our High Priest, having washed away our sins, sanctifies us and obtains for us that grace from which the uncleanness of our transgressions and vice debars us. Thus we see that we must begin from the death of Christ in order that the efficacy and benefit of his priesthood may reach us." However, Christ's priestly work pertains to more than a once-for-all redemptive act of history at the cross. It additionally involves his eternal intercession in the unseen realm by which believers obtain the Father's favour.24

By Christ, the intercessory Mediator, believers both offer themselves and what is theirs as priests to the Father.25 Christ, says Calvin, fulfils his own priestly role,

not only to render the Father favorable and propitious towards us by an eternal law of reconciliation, but also to receive us as his companions in this great office (Rev. 1:6). For we who are defiled in ourselves, yet are priests in him, offer ourselves and our all to God, and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary that the sacrifices of prayers and praise that we bring may be acceptable and sweet-smelling before God.

22 The following is an exposition of Inst. II: xv: 6 [CO 2 (30): 366-367], where Calvin deals exclusively with the priestly office of Christ. See Paul van Buren, Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957, 65ff..  
23 "To Madame the Duchess of Ferrara", dated October, 1541, Letters, vol. 1, 300-301.  
24 Jansen summarises Calvin's thought taken from a sermon on Is. 53: "If God had merely pardoned us without interceding for us and giving himself as our pledge, it could still be of little account, and we could still pay an easy lip service." (op.cit., 95).  
25 Inst. (1536), 120 [CO 1 (29): ]. "He it is", says the young Calvin, "that has made us a kingdom and priests unto the Father (Rev. 1:6)."
Thus, as part of his ongoing priestly work Christ promotes in and among the adopted trust in prayer, peaceful consciences, and dependence on God’s fatherly mercy. Given all this, it is unsurprising that Calvin views salvation as turning on Christ’s priestly office.

(iii) The Death and Resurrection of Christ

The final moment of the wonderful exchange tells us what it really meant for the Father to set forth Christ as the fountain of every good to lost sinners. At this juncture the focus shifts from the person of the Mediator, through whom we have access to the Father, to his work without which the Father’s blessings could not be received. Calvin acknowledges that immediately the Mediator’s atoning work is introduced a paradox emerges. How could God, the enemy of sinners, be prepared to provide his only begotten Son as the pledge of his love towards them? Basing his thoughts on Scripture (Rom. 5:10, Gal. 3:10, 13 and Col. 1:22-23), Calvin argues that God accommodates his speech to human capacity in order to convey how miserable and hopeless our fallen condition was:

Since our hearts cannot, in God’s mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough to accept it with the gratefulness we owe, unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God’s wrath and by the dread of eternal death, we are taught by Scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction; to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.

Looking to Augustine, Calvin states that, “in a marvelous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what he had made [et odisse quod feceramus], and to love what he had made.”

Irrespective of God’s perfect hatred of man’s sin and fallenness, his paternal

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26 This is particularly dealt with in Inst. II: xvi. Thus, with the other two nuances of the mirifica commutatio in mind, Calvin writes: “What we have said so far concerning Christ must be referred to this one objective: condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we should seek righteousness, liberation, life, and salvation in him” (Inst. II: xvi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 367]). For a general exposition of the resurrection and ascension of Christ see van Buren, op.cit., 81ff..

27 Zachman, op.cit., 168.


love - which both preceded and provided the atonement - is ineradicable. "By his love", wrote Calvin, "God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ." Not surprisingly, then, the New Testament points to the death of Christ "to define the way of salvation". That said, reconciliation should not be considered in isolation from Christ's entire life of obedience. It was "from the time when [Christ] took on the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us." Thus, because of Christ's perfect obedience, his sacrificial death availed before his Father as an acceptable offering for sin.

With the doctrine of salvation at stake, Calvin sought to be utterly precise about the forensic nature of the death of Christ:

To take away our condemnation, it was not enough for him to suffer any kind of death: to make satisfaction for our redemption a form of death had to be chosen in which he might free us both by transferring our condemnation to himself and by taking our guilt upon himself. If he had been murdered by thieves or slain in an insurrection by a mob, in such a death there would have been no evidence of satisfaction. But when he was arraigned before the judgement seat as a criminal, accused and pressed by testimony and condemned by the mouth of the judge to die - we know by these proofs that he took the role of a guilty man and evildoer.

It is the perfection of Christ's substitution that makes the imputation of Christ's righteousness possible. "This is our acquittal", says Calvin, "the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isa. 53:12)." He then adds a pastoral application: "We must... remember this substitution,

30 Inst. II: xvi: 3 [CO 2 (30): 370]. The first part of Calvin's citation of Augustine reads: "God's love is incomprehensible and unchangeable. For it was not after we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son that he began to love us. Rather, he has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be his sons along with his only-begotten Son - before we became anything at all." See Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 52-53.

31 Later Calvin writes: "We have in his death the complete fulfilment of salvation, for through it we are reconciled to God, his righteous judgement is satisfied, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid in full." (Inst. II: xvi: 13 [CO 2 (30): 380]). Calvin surmises that the Scriptures point so much to the death of Christ "because trembling consciences find repose only in sacrifice and cleansing by which sins are expiated, [therefore] we are directed thither; and for us the substance of life is set in the death of Christ." (Inst. II: xvi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 372]). The relationship between the incarnation and the atonement was to become a crucial theme in the theology of John McLeod Campbell and remains so until this day. In this regard Calvin's comment on the Apostles' Creed is significant: "The so-called 'Apostles' Creed' passes at once in the best order from the birth of Christ to his death and resurrection, wherein the whole of perfect salvation consists." However, he does point out that "the remainder of the obedience that he manifested in this life is not excluded." (Inst. II: xvi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 371]).

32 "We must hold fast to this: that no proper sacrifice to God could have been offered unless Christ, disregarding his own feelings, subjected and yielded himself wholly to his Father's will." (Inst. II: xvi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 371]).

33 Ibid..
lest we tremble and remain anxious throughout life - as if God's righteous vengeance, which the Son of God has taken upon himself, still hung over us."34 In order to pay the wages of our sin Christ descended into hell, by which Calvin means that Christ bore in his soul, "the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgement." Thus he "grapple[d] hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death."35 Thus Christ became accursed.

Despite accusations to the contrary, Calvin's view of atonement is not a legal fiction but speaks of a real solution to the sin of man.36 The remedy, however, is not included simply in Christ's crucifixion. Although he wiped out sin and extinguished death at Calvary, it was by the resurrection that Christ restored life and righteousness. "Thanks to the resurrection", writes Calvin, "his death manifested its power and efficacy in us."37

The ascension is included in the resurrection38 as the means by which Christ was exalted and his kingdom inaugurated in power and glory.39 Three benefits accrue to the children of God from the ascension. First, Christ opened up the way into the Heavenly Kingdom. Originally closed by Adam, the people of God now possess a heavenly hope in Christ their head. Secondly, having ascended to his Father, Christ's intercession and advocacy "turns the Father's eyes to his own righteousness to avert his gaze from our sins. He also reconciles the Father's heart to us that by his intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father's throne."40 Thirdly, faith finds in the ascended Christ all the strength, riches and glory to fight against hell. This, says Calvin, is the true state of the kingdom and what it means for Christ

34 Immediately following in Inst. II: xvi: 6 [CO 2 (30): 373] Calvin continues in the same vein: "When Christ is hanged upon the cross, he makes himself subject to the curse. It had to happen in this way in order that the whole curse - which on account of our sins awaited us, or rather lay upon us - might be lifted from us, while it was transferred to him."


36 This will become increasingly evident as the chapter unfolds. See van Buren and Badcock who explain why (op.cit., 61 and 100 respectively).


38 Inst. II: xvi: 14 [CO 2 (30): 381-382].

39 "Carried up into heaven... he withdrew his bodily presence from our sight (Acts 1:9), not to cease to be present with believers still on their earthly pilgrimage, but to rule heaven and earth with a more immediate power... by his ascension he fulfilled what he had promised: that he would be with us even to the end of the world. As his body was raised up above all the heavens, so his power and energy were diffused and spread beyond all the bounds of heaven and earth."

to rule over us for our protection. It involves the power conferred by the Father upon Christ until the final judgement makes visible both the king and his kingdom.

These three movements of the *mirifica commutatio* encompass the redemptive acts from the incarnation to the ascension and are foundational in regard to the ongoing development of adoption in the new covenant era. They spell out the way that “Christ took to Himself what was ours in order that He might transfer what was His to us, for He took upon Himself our curse [maledictione], and has given us His blessing [benedictione].” The wonderful exchange speaks of the Christ, the natural Son, becoming united to sinners in their humanity, so making possible the union of the Father’s adopted sons and daughters with himself. In all this, the uniqueness of Christ’s only-begotten Sonship is maintained. What he receives by nature, the adopted receive by grace and as gift. In short: Calvin alludes to the wonderful exchange in order to depict the way that the Son of God became the Son of man so that the sons of men can, by adoption, become the sons of God.

### 3.2 Union with Christ

Whereas the wonderful exchange lays the basis for the way in which the adopted share in the Father’s blessings, union with Christ highlights more directly the manner in which these blessings are appropriated. It thereby complements the notion of the wonderful exchange. In fact, the *mirifica commutatio* can be of no benefit without union with Christ:

> We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us.

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41 *CC Rom.*, 160 [CO 49 (77): 140].
42 *Inst. II: xiv: 6* [CO 2 (30): 357-358].
43 Walter, *op. cit.*, 100ff.. For an assessment of the importance of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology see Willis Watkins, *op. cit.*, 78. For a list of those who have stressed the importance of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology see William Duncan Rankin, “Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T.F. Torrance”, (University of Edinburgh: Ph.D. Thesis), 1997, 167 fn..
44 *Inst. III: i: 1* [CO 2 (30): 393]; *cf. Inst. IV: xvii: 11* [CO 2 (30): 1010]: “I do not see how anyone can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a true participation in Christ himself. For those benefits would not come to us unless Christ first made himself ours.” Van Buren rightly points out that as the work of Christ can be left as an unfulfilled possibility it can be said that Calvin held to an objective-subjective view of the
Thus, only once united to Christ can the adopted have access to the Father's goodness.\textsuperscript{45}

Initially, the concept of union with Christ was implicit rather than explicit in Calvin's thought. All he writes in his preface to Olivétan's New Testament is that:

> By the knowledge of the gospel we are made children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, fellow townsmen with the saints, citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, heirs of God with Jesus Christ...\textsuperscript{46}

Only with the passing of the years did Calvin's doctrine fully develop. The evidence of this is discerned from the rich variety of phrases used in the Institutes. Those encountered most frequently are "engrafting" (\textit{insero} or \textit{insitio}), "communion" (\textit{communio} or \textit{communico}) and "fellowship" (\textit{societas}). In addition, union with Christ is portrayed as "participation" (usually translated as "participating" \textit{participes}) and as "adoption" (\textit{adoptio}).\textsuperscript{47} As Tamburello observes, these images - particularly \textit{insero} or \textit{insitio}, \textit{communio} or \textit{communico} and \textit{societas} - are often combined in Calvin's thought. Although used less frequently, \textit{adoptio} acts as a powerful metaphorical expression of union with Christ.\textsuperscript{48} It colourfully explains how God adopts his sons and daughters by uniting them to his own Son.

Nowhere is Calvin's matured concept more manifestly and succinctly expressed than in a reply to his friend, the Italian Reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, dated 8th August, 1555.\textsuperscript{49} Exactly five months earlier (8th March, 1555) Peter Martyr

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\textsuperscript{45} Gerrish, \textit{Grace and Gratitude}, 123 and 39.

\textsuperscript{46} Calvin: \textit{Commentaries}, 66.

\textsuperscript{47} Tamburello, \textit{Union with Christ}, 90; cf. McDonnell, \textit{op. cit.}, 177

\textsuperscript{48} Tamburello, \textit{op. cit.}, 8.

had been impelled to write from “Strasburgh” “both by way of inquiry, and also to state my own judgement” concerning “the communion which we have with the Body of Christ and the substance of His nature”. In the letter he summarises three forms of communion with Christ. In “natural communion” Christ “was pleased... to communicate with us, in flesh and blood, by the benefit of His incarnation.” Thus, “the whole human race do already hold in this wise communion with Christ” and derive it “through our origin from our parents”. Secondly, he enunciates a form of union “effected by the Spirit of Christ, by which we are from our very regeneration renewed into the fashion of His glory.” At the appropriate moment faith is breathed into the elect enabling them to believe in Christ, also making them capable of immortality and conforming them each day to Christ’s image. It forms, therefore, a developmental aspect of the Christian life.

However, Peter Martyr was most concerned to discuss a proposed third but intermediate form of communion, viz., mystical communion: “As soon as we believe, we obtain Christ Himself, our true head, and are made His members.” This form of union is a once-for-all occurrence and is described by Martyr as intermediate in that it is logically rather than chronologically prior to that union which leads to spiritual

McDonnell Calvin derived his views of union with Christ substantially from Martin Bucer (op. cit., 85 and 177). As regards Peter Martyr, however, we know that Calvin esteemed him as “that most upright man” (“To Cranmer”, dated July 1552, Letters, vol. 2, 357-358), and that in Peter Martyr’s assessment the two men were “most nearly joined together.” (The Common Places of the most famous and renowned [sic] Divine Doctor Peter Martyr, divided into four principal parts: with a large addition of manie theologall and necessarie discourses, some never extant before. Translated and partlie gathered by Anthonie Marten, 1583, letter to Calvin, 25 November, 1561, Part five, 161; also cited in Anderson, op. cit., 246; cf. Donnelly, op. cit., 13, 20-21, 27-28, 57 fn., 64-65, 67, 68, 82, 89-90, 99-100, 111, 123, 125, 131, 133, 141, 154, 193-194, 197), but, generally, there is little that can be ascertained. For further scant details of the relationship between Calvin and Peter Martyr, see Anderson, op. cit., 51, 170, 187, 216-217; cf. McNair, Peter Martyr in Italy, 230-231 and 240; Di Gangi, op. cit., 1, 72, 76, 129, 182). For a helpful overview of Peter Martyr’s theology of union with Christ see Rankin, op. cit., Appendix 12, A 50-75; McLelland, op. cit., 123-138; Anderson, op. cit., 188-194. Rankin points to the work of W Kolfhaus (“Christengemeinschaft bei Johannes Calvin”. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche. Herausgegeben von W. Goeters, W. Kolfhaus, A. Lang, O. Weber. Dritter Band. Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungvereins, 1939) and, following on from him, Tamburello (op. cit.) as foremost among the few recognising the pre-eminent importance of Calvin’s letter to Martyr for his doctrine of union with Christ (op. cit., 170-171, 176).

50 Gorham, op. cit., 342.

51 In tracing the development of Peter Martyr’s doctrine of union with Christ McLelland writes: “There is no doubt that this doctrine of union with Christ is the dynamic of Peter Martyr’s theology.” Initially Peter Martyr wrote of two unions: by incarnation and by the Spirit (when we receive his gifts). Later, in his correspondence to Calvin and Beza, he adds a third, an intermediate union, which is “that constant union of Christ with his members by the Spirit, apart from which there can be no likeness of the new humanity.” (op. cit., 142ff.).
renovation. Peter Martyr writes: “When we are converted, Christ is made ours and we His, before we are rendered like Him in holiness and inherent righteousness. This is that secret communion whereby we are said to be grafted into Him. Thus we first put Him on; and so are called by the Apostle flesh of His flesh, bone of His bones. And from this communion which I have now explained that latter one is perfected so long as we live on earth.”

While Calvin acknowledged Peter Martyr’s concern to be “one of vast importance”, he offered but a brief reply. Despite this unexplained brevity, Calvin’s response provides a suitable structure for our exposition that is not supplied by the protracted discussion in the Institutes. He begins by agreeing with Peter Martyr on the natural communion between Christ and humanity: “That the Son of God put on our flesh, in order that He might become our Brother, partaker of the same nature, - is a Communion on which I do not mean to speak here”. However, his reply focuses mainly on the two other aspects of union with Christ: “1. That Communion which flows from His heavenly influence, and breathes life into us, and makes us to coalesce into one body with Himself” and “2. ...a second Communion, which, ...is the fruit and effect of the former.”

Using this threefold structure as our basis, the task at hand involves ascertaining the way that Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ informs his understanding of the adoption of the sons and daughters of God.

(i) Incarnational Union

The incarnation is as indispensable to union with Christ as it is to the wonderful exchange. As both the wonderful exchange and union with Christ are prerequisite to adoption, it follows that no one can become a son or daughter of God without the incarnation; for only an incarnate Christ, as Mediator of adoption, could

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52 Gorham, op.cit., 342-343.
54 Gerrish correctly notes that although the theme is, properly speaking, the theme of Book III of the Institutes it reaches back into Book II and forward into Book IV (ibid., 38).
55 Gorham, op.cit., 351.
regain for sinners a filial relationship to God. Adoption is, then, founded upon Christ the Head. "If we seek God's fatherly mercy and kindly heart, we should turn our eyes to Christ, on whom alone God's Spirit rests."

If adoption is contingent on the incarnation then how was it possible for the children of Israel to have been adopted previously under the Old Covenant? Is not Calvin being somewhat contradictory at this point? On the contrary; he believed that the lustre of the incarnation was diffused both retrospectively and prospectively throughout the ages of history, and shines throughout each phase of God's covenantal dealings with his people. Consequently, he regards Old Covenant believers as sharing in Jesus Christ, who is the means of the gratuita adoptio. Indeed, Calvin argues for the adoption of Old Covenant believers on the basis of their union with God: "They had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises." Nevertheless, the incarnation remains of vital significance. Christ had to be clothed with human flesh if he was to become our brother and open the way for the believer's union with him.

In alluding to incarnational union, Calvin uses three descriptions of Christ in his letter to Peter Martyr -- "flesh", "brother", "nature". Rankin observes that the term brother provides the focal point. After a wide-ranging search of Calvin's commentaries he notes that Calvin variously uses the term to refer to humanity in general, and to believers in particular. Of the former use, he comments that, "by saying that [Christ] came in the flesh, [the apostle John] means that by putting on

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56 "Since our iniquities, like a cloud cast between us and him, had completely estranged us from the Kingdom of Heaven... no man, unless he belonged to God, could serve as the intermediary to restore peace. But who might reach to him? Any one of Adam's children? No, like their father, all of them were terrified at the sight of God. One of the angels? They also had need of a head, through whose bond they might cleave firmly and undividedly to their God... What then? The situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him. Hence it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us 'Immanuel, that is, God with us'... and in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us." (Inst. II: xii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 340]; cf. Ganoczy, The Young Calvin, 190; Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, 114).
57 Inst. II: xiv: 5 [CO 2 (30): 357].
59 Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament, 28-29, 46.
60 Wolf, Die Einheit des Bundes, 142; cf. 114.
61 Inst. II: x: 2 [CO 2 (30): 314].
62 Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament, 9.
63 Rankin, op.cit., 192-193.
flesh, He became a real man, of the same nature with us, that He became our brother - except that He was free from sin and all corruption."64 Possessing human nature in common with us, "the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship."65 This generic cohesion should foster a reciprocated brotherly kindness among humanity. This was manifestly exemplified in the life of the incarnate Christ who, throughout his human development, "did all that was necessary to effect his brotherly union with men."66 This he did by "stretch[ing] out a brotherly hand to us"67 in order to confer "the right of fraternal alliance [coniunctionis]",68 which, he says, belongs at one level to the totum genus humanum.

Through unbelief, however, the ungodly have broken off and dissolved "that relationship of the flesh, by which [Christ] has allied himself to us, and thus [they have] render[ed] themselves utter strangers to him by their own fault."69 Christ's brotherly hand has been so rejected that none are retained as brethren but true believers. Naturally, "there is a common tie that binds all the children of Adam there is a still more sacred union among the children of God [filiis Dei]."70 They alone actually and ultimately enjoy the right of fraternal alliance. "According to our teaching," says Calvin, "Christ made us sons of God with him by virtue of a bond of brotherhood [fraternae coniunctionis]. For in the flesh that he received from us he is the only begotten Son of God."71 Thus, Calvin says that by accepting Christ's brotherly hand sinners can enjoy all the blessings that have eternally belonged to him:

His task was to restore us to God's grace as to make children of men, children of God; of the heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the Heavenly Kingdom. Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature

66 Ibid., vol.1, 167.
67 CC St. John 1-10, 72 [CO 47 (75): 62]. Commenting on 1 Timothy 2: 5, Calvin writes: "...if this were deeply impressed on the hearts of all, that the Son of God holds out to us the hand of a brother, and that we are united to Him by the fellowship of our nature, in order that out of our low condition, He may raise us to heaven; who would not choose to keep by this straight road, instead of wondering in uncertain and stormy paths." (Jansen, op.cit., 103).
68 CTS Psalms, vol.1, 379 [CO 31 (59): 231].
69 CTS Psalms, vol. 1, 379 [CO 31 (59): 231-232].
71 Inst. II: xiv: 7 [CO 2 (30): 359]. Of this Zachman comments: "By assuming our nature in a hypostatic union, the Son bestows upon humanity something it could never achieve on its own: to be the only-begotten Son of God." (op.cit., 163).
ours by grace? Therefore, relying on this pledge, we trust that we are sons of God, for 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 (Gen. 2:23-24, mediated through Eph. 5:29-31). Ungrudgingly 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.... In this way we are assured of the inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom; for the only Son of God, to whom it wholly belongs, has adopted us as his brothers. 'For if brothers, then also fellow heirs with him.' (Rom. 8:17p.)

While incarnational union is essential to the enjoyment of genuine brotherhood in Christ, something additional is required if this genuine fraternal relationship with Christ is to take effect. Without this extra something, all that incarnational union can grant is a common origin with Christ according to the flesh. With Menno Simons in mind, Calvin further explains that, "when we say that Christ was made man that he might make us children of God, this expression does not extend to all men. For faith intervenes, to engrat [inserit] us spiritually into the body of Christ." Indeed, sometimes Calvin so stresses the need for faith in addition to "the fellowship of nature" that he denies that the impious are in any sense Christ's brethren. "We know", says Calvin, "that the children of God are not born of flesh and blood [cf. John 1:13] but of the Spirit through faith. Hence flesh alone does not make the bond of brotherhood." It cannot be said, then, that Calvin was a Universalist, for he draws a distinction between the broader and the narrower application of the incarnation. Therefore, his universalistic statements have to be interpreted by the more particularist ones.

The presence of both these universalistic and particularistic statements endears us to Michael Thomas' explanation of the reformer's complexio oppositorum. When viewed in terms of the promise of salvation Christ died for all without exception (everybody), but when considered in terms of election Christ died

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73 Rankin comments: "Those who spurn the true brotherhood held out to them by Christ only share the honor of having come into the world in the same way as Christ - according to the flesh." (op.cit., 200).
74 Inst. II: xiii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 350].
75 Ibid. Rankin points us to an undated and un-addressed letter by Calvin in which he repeats the same thing: "We know that the sons of God are born not of flesh and blood but of the Spirit through faith. The sharing of flesh alone does not produce brotherly communion." (op.cit., 199).
76 In Rankin's words, "what is offered indiscriminately is obtained and actually experienced only particularly." (ibid., 199-200).
for all without distinction (all sorts of people). From the evidence adduced, Thomas argues that the tension between the universal promise and a particular election meet in Christ, yet is left unresolved by Calvin. Similarly, Gerrish states that attempts to prove that Calvin taught a universal atonement or a bona fide salvation for all, “cannot... be substantiated from the sources; and even if they could they would do nothing to mitigate the decretum horribile, as Calvin called it..., since no one doubts that for him only the elect will actually be saved anyway.” He then continues: “Whichever way the verdict goes on the extent of the atonement, Calvin certainly taught that God effectively wills the salvation of the elect only.” Rankin correctly warns us, then, that “it is a mistake to deduce too broadly soteriological implications from Calvin’s teaching on the incarnation”.

Rankin’s warning is as timely as it is relevant for our comparison of nineteenth-century Calvinism, as will become apparent in Part Two. There we shall encounter the revisionist Calvinist pre-occupation with what became, in effect, the blurring of Calvin’s distinction between a universalistic and particularistic application of the incarnation. With hindsight it appears that the revisionist assumption of a universal atonement may not have been so forthright had orthodox Calvinists paid greater heed to the universal relevance of incarnational union. Thus, a polarised response to the question developed, which appears indirectly traceable back to Calvin’s equally strong universalistic and particularistic statements. As is well known, such polarisation continues to the present day in both Calvin scholarship and in Reformed theology.

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77 G Michael Thomas, The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536-1675). Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs. Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997, 34. There Thomas explains the reasons derived from Calvin’s theology as to why the reformer was later believed to have taught a particularistic view of the atonement.

78 Unfortunately, he needlessly adds: “I do not share the enthusiasm of some of Calvin’s followers for this teaching. However, the (slightly) mitigating factors are that Calvin did not presume to know who were elect (Inst. 1559, 4.1.2, 8-9 [2:1013, 1022-24]), and that he therefore considered it the Christian’s duty to hope and pray for all (3.20.38 [2:901]).” (Grace and Gratitude, 171 fn.). We cannot be certain whether Gerrish implies that Calvin’s followers do claim to know who the elect are. This would be most surprising given that in his early years Gerrish sat under the reputable Calvinistic ministry of D Martyn Lloyd Jones at Westminster Chapel, London. The truth is that they do not. To say so would be a great injustice. Cf. van Buren, op.cit., 52-53, 102-103.

79 Ibid., 200. Calvin confirms this in his comments on Eph. 5:31: “We are not bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh, because, like ourselves, He is man, but because, by the power of His Spirit, He engrafts us into His Body, so that from Him we derive life.” (CC Eph., 209 [CO 51 (79): 226]).

80 For an overview of the various positions taken by different scholars see Thomas, op.cit., 12.
Prior to an analysis of secret or mystical union, a word of explanation is required as to its connection to what may be called spiritual union and also as to their respective benefits, namely justification and sanctification. For reasons that will become clear, mystical and spiritual union may be jointly regarded under the more general category of pneumatological union if for no other reason than that both aspects are in fact spiritual: secret or mystical union emphasising the Spirit's mysterious and hidden accomplishment of the union, and spiritual union the obvious fact that it is the Holy Spirit who is the living source of its dynamism.

Although the Institutes omit a clear and consistent delineation of each aspect of this union,81 the two forms nevertheless warrant as separate a discussion as the data allows for so as to draw out the full richness of its meaning. Certainly, by considering mystical and spiritual union separately, there is a better opportunity to recognise the nuances of Calvin's understanding of pneumatological union and the distinct benefits that each aspect of it conveys. In doing so, however, sensitivity to the broader strokes of Calvin's biblico-theological method is required.82 While not imposing on Calvin the scholastic method of later Calvinism (see ch. 5), there is nevertheless benefit to be derived from a gentle questioning of Calvin in regard to issues that were later to be significant, and which Calvin began to address in response to Peter Martyr.

Venema states categorically that “throughout all of his writings – in his Institutes, Commentaries, and Sermons – Calvin consistently refers to this “double grace” or twofold benefit of our reception of the grace of God in Christ, the duplex gratia Dei, as comprising “the sum of the gospel.”83 For example: “By partaking of [Christ],” says Calvin, “we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being

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81 We do not find mystical and spiritual union discussed in the Institutes with the same clarity as is found in Calvin's reply to Peter Martyr.
82 Jonathan Jong-Chun Won warns: “It is unfair to Calvin to dissect the work of the Holy Spirit in any detailed fashion because Calvin does not actually portray it in such a way. In fact, Calvin views all as the single fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit. The creating of the bond of union, justification, and the beginning of sanctification are all the unified result of the Holy Spirit’s work, none of which can be chronologically isolated.” (“Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans”, (Westminster Theological Seminary: Ph.D. dissertation), 1989, 34-35).
83 Venema, op.cit., 133.
reconciled [justified] to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life."84 Christ performs both simultaneously and inseparably, as is seen in the pneumatological union from which the duplex gratia flows. Nevertheless justification and regeneration are not to be conflated. Whereas justification corresponds to mystical union, regeneration is the benefit of spiritual union. Commenting on Galatians 2:19 he writes:

Christ lives in us in two ways. The one consists in his governing us by his Spirit and directing all our actions. The other is what He grants us by participation in His righteousness, that, since we can do nothing of ourselves, we are accepted in Him by God. The first relates to regeneration, the second to the free acceptance of righteousness, and this is how I take the passage.85

Furthermore, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are interwoven into Calvin’s teaching of mystical and spiritual union respectively. In unravelling this maze we are dealing with a most intricate network of ideas (mystical and spiritual union, justification and regeneration, baptism and the Lord’s Supper) that will occupy the rest of Part One. The following diagram is intended to prepare the reader for what follows, and indicates something of the import and locus of adoption in Calvin’s theology, although the correlation between adoption and the other soteriological doctrines is less clear in Calvin than was to be the case in later Calvinism. Given that Calvin gives few guidelines for laying out a comprehensive view of his soteriology, what follows can at best be said to be interpretative:

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84 Inst. III: xi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 533]; cf. Inst. III: xvi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 586]. See Tamburello, op.cit., 50, 84-85; Wendel, op.cit., 238, 241-242; Badcock, op.cit., 105. Zachman writes: “Since faith unites us to Christ, both graces of repentance and justification flow simultaneously and inseparably from Jesus Christ to the believer.” (op.cit., 189. See also 11, 188 and 204). As justification corresponds to mystical union so regeneration or sanctification refers to spiritual union. Unlike adoption, both the doctrines of regeneration and justification have chapters given over to them in the Institutes. On justification see Inst. III: xi-xviii; on regeneration see Inst. III: iii. For explanations of why Calvin deals with regeneration first see Wendel, Calvin, 233; Parker, Calvin, 84f., Niesel, op.cit., 130f..

85 CC Gal., 43 [CO 50 (78): 199]. Cf. his comment at the end of Inst. III: xvi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 586]: “It is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing [participationem] in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.” See Tamburello, op.cit., 86.
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<th>Type of union:</th>
<th>Benefit of union:</th>
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<td><strong>Mystical Union</strong></td>
<td><strong>Justification:</strong></td>
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<td><em>(Adoptive Act)</em></td>
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<td><strong>Spiritual Union</strong></td>
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<td><em>(Adoptive State)</em></td>
<td>Mortification and the New Life, union with Christ.</td>
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**Lord’s Supper**

Logically speaking, mystical union occurs prior to spiritual union and refers to “that Communion which flows from His heavenly influence, and breathes life into us, and makes us to coalesce into one body with Himself”. To be more precise, as soon as we receive [him] by faith, as He offers Himself to us in the Gospel, we are truly made His members, and His life flows to us from Him as from our Head. For He reconciles us to God by the sacrifice of His death, in no other way than as He is ours and we are one with Him. 86

In salvation the sinner is mystically united to Christ by an engrafting that reconciles him to God (which Calvin equates with justification). 87 This meaning is somewhat amplified on one of the two occasions in the Institutes (1559) where the term unio mystica is used:

That joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts - in short, that mystical union [Mystica... unio] - are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body - in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship

86 Gorham, *op.cit.*, 349-350. Gerrish correctly notes that “Redemption... is placed in the ‘mystical union’ of the believer with Christ” (“John Calvin and the Meaning of the Reformation”, *op.cit.*, 38). By no means, however, are all commentators overtly cognisant of the distinction between the various forms of union with Christ. The nuances recognised are usually included under the general title ‘union with Christ’. See, for instance, Parker, *Calvin*, 79; Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959, 17-27.

One of the significant things about Calvin’s description is the rich manner in which he refers to the mystical union. He variously describes it as an “indwelling”, a “sharing” as well as an “engrafting”. Whichever term is used, however, the central idea remains unaltered: the sinner’s justification cannot be considered in isolation from his mystical union with Christ. This is clear from the above citations. They convey to us a number of the notable features of mystical union. First, it is a once-for-all event resulting from the reception of Christ through faith. Secondly, in mystical union sinners are brought into membership of Christ so that he becomes theirs and they become his. Thirdly, membership of Christ is constituted by his indwelling the believer, and by their sharing with him in all that he has been endowed with by the Father. Fourthly, mystical union is thoroughly grounded upon the imputed righteousness of Christ made effective at Calvary. The union which believers have with Christ is, then, far more than a mere mental apprehension of Christ borne of a spiritual connection. It involves a genuine membership of the Saviour.

A full picture of mystical union cannot be obtained without a consideration of the Institutes, Book Three. Opening up “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ”, Calvin begins by asking: “How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son - not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men?” To this question he provides two answers.

Initially he says that we receive the Father’s benefits through an indispensable union with his Son. In this union there are two essential elements: the

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89 Willis-Watkins, op. cit., 78.
90 There is some overlap at this point between mystical and spiritual union. As we shall see Christ’s sharing of his gifts with us strictly speaking belongs to our spiritual union with Christ. However, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that Calvin was pre-eminently a biblical theologian rather than a systematic theologian. Therefore, although we are attempting to provide a systematic treatment of Calvin’s doctrine of adoption and, in this chapter of union with Christ in particular, we must remind the reader of the interface between mystical and spiritual union arising from the fact that they combine to form pneumatological union and, with incarnational union, come under the simple rubric of union with Christ.
91 Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 151.

These elements clearly demonstrate that mystical union is possible only because of the grace of God. This grace comes to sinners through the harmonious working of the Trinity. The Father anoints Christ with the Spirit in order to effect union with himself. This he accomplishes through the secret and monergistic ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose principal work is to inspire faith in those trusting in Christ. The union then is not of our doing. It is "the Holy Spirit [who] is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself", and although faith may be legitimately regarded as the immediate cause or conditio sine qua non of our union, the Holy Spirit is considered the efficient cause. Consequently, in mystical union we... are said to be "engrafted into him" (Rom. 11:17), and to "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27); for... all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.

Thus, having spoken in Institutes III: i of the role of the Spirit in the uniting of believers to Christ he goes on in Institutes III: ii to define the place of faith within the process. "Faith", the young Calvin had already written, "believes God to be our Father" by looking to Christ alone. It sees in Christ the image of the Father's glory. However, for faith in Christ there must be a basis of knowledge that dispels ignorance. Faith, says Calvin, believes when it knows "that God is our merciful Father, because of reconciliation effected through Christ (II Cor. 5:18-19), and that

92 Tamburello, op. cit., 86.
93 According to Wendel, Calvin “insists so strongly on this action of the Holy Spirit that one may justifiably wonder whether the Holy Spirit does not in his view occupy a position, in our relations with the Christ, analogous to that of the Christ himself in his relations with the Father. In a good many passages, indeed, the Holy Spirit plays the part of an obligatory mediator between Christ and man, just as the Christ is mediator between God and man.” (op. cit., 239-240). See also van Buren, op. cit., 97ff..
94 “Faith”, as Calvin puts it, “is the principal work of the Holy Spirit” (Inst. III: i: 4 [CO 2 (30): 396]). It is vital because, “in order to be an adopted child of God, and to have a proper certainty of it we must believe in Jesus Christ in as much as it is in him alone that we must seek the whole grounds of our salvation.” (“Confession of Faith, in Name of the Reformed Churches of France”, Tracts, vol. 2, 143).
96 Inst. (1536), 65 [CO 1 (29): 80]. Commenting on Jn. 6:29 Calvin writes: “Faith is called the only work of God [unicum Del opus], because by it we possess Christ and become the sons of God, so that He governs us by His Spirit.” (CC St. John 1-10, 155 [CO 47 (75): 141]). Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 51, 63 and 67. For some brief overviews of Calvin’s doctrine of faith see Parker, Calvin, 81-84; Dewey J Hoitenga, Jr., “Faith and Reason in Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God”, op. cit., particularly 310-312.
Christ has been given to us as righteousness, sanctification, and life.\textsuperscript{97} To possess such knowledge faith must rest upon God’s word - the gospel: “This, then, is the true knowledge of Christ, if we receive him as he is offered by the Father: namely, clothed with his gospel. For just as he has been appointed as the goal of our faith, so we cannot take the right road to him unless the gospel goes before us.”\textsuperscript{98} While the gospel focuses upon the living Word it is mediated through the written Word. Yet, the written Word is a dead letter without the accompanying application of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{99} He it is who supplies God’s people with the power that illuminates their minds and strengthens their hearts. Although this first occurs at their engrafting into Christ’s body the Spirit continues to strengthen the faith of believers thereafter.

Faith is often likened to obedience: the obedience of the gospel. Had Calvin left his definition of faith in the realm of obedience, however, would have reduced it to a mere knowledge of the existence of God and his will towards us. Thus, he sought to fine-tune his definition. As faith impels the believer to take hold of the promise of grace that testifies to the Father’s clemency (and which, in turn, emboldens the believer to approach God as Father), its definition ought to be located in the realm of mercy.\textsuperscript{100} Faith regards heavenly mercy as indicative of the divine love displayed pre-eminently in Christ.\textsuperscript{101}

Thus, Calvin arrives at a satisfactory if lengthy definition of faith:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Inst. III: ii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 399]. Relevant at this point is Gerald Postema’s observation that the relational knowledge of God given in faith is more important to Calvin than the propositional sort which the Reformer views as having little value (”Calvin’s Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology”, Gamble, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 7, 142-143). This is confirmed by Parker, who says of Calvin’s use of \textit{fides} that, it “comprises both belief and trust; belief that there is a God, that He has revealed Himself to us in His word and works, that He is our Creator and Preserver, our loving heavenly Father, that there is no good thing that does not come from Him, and that nothing can take place upon the earth but what He wills. And trust that is assured that it may in all circumstances rely upon His help, that He will supply all our needs, and that under the shadow of His wing there is safety.” (“Calvin’s Concept of Revelation I. The Revelation of God the Creator”, Gamble, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 6, 346); cf. Zachman, \textit{op. cit.}, 176.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Inst. III: ii: 7 [CO 2 (30): 402-403].}
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Inst. III: ii: 32 [CO 2 (30): 424-425]. Interestingly, Tamburello says that “Calvin does not characteristically speak explicitly of ’love’ in passages dealing with union with Christ” (op.cit., 91).
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Inst. III: ii: 7 [CO 2 (30): 403]. See George Gordh, “Calvin’s Conception of Faith”, Gamble,
In short, “faith embraces Christ, as offered to us by the Father”. 103 This means two things: “first, that faith does not stand firm until a man attains to the freely given promise; second, that it does not reconcile us to God at all unless it joins us to Christ.”104 In this way Calvin sought to define genuine faith as well as to safeguard it from various counterfeit versions: “We seek a faith that distinguishes the children of God from the wicked, and believers from unbelievers.” A genuine faith must be Christ-centred: “In order to be adopted children of God [advouez enfans de Dieu], and to have a proper certainty of it, we must believe in Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it is in him alone that we must seek the whole grounds of our salvation.”105 Thus, he asks, “how can there be saving faith except in so far as it engrafs [inserit] us in the body of Christ?”106

We cannot go further in outlining the role of faith in mystical union without considering its salvific benefit, justification.107 As in so much of Calvin’s thought we are immediately introduced to a paradox. While sinners receive the saviour’s justifying righteousness only by participating in Christ,108 they cannot be received into union unless Christ’s merit is interposed. In this way they are brought to the forgiveness of sins:109 “Him whom [Christ] receives into union [coniunctionem] with himself the Lord is said to justify, because he cannot receive him into grace nor join him to himself unless he turns him from a sinner into a righteous man.”110

For Calvin justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns”.111 His

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103 Inst. III: ii: 8 [CO 2 (30): 404].
104 Inst. III: ii: 30 [CO 2 (30): 422].
106 Inst. III: ii: 30 [CO 2 (30): 522]. “Christ, when he illuminates us into faith by the power of his Spirit, at the same time so engrafs [inserere] us into his body that we become partakers of every good.” (Inst. III: ii: 35 [CO 2 (30): 427].
107 Niesel, op.cit., 130 and 131; van Buren, op.cit., 107, 122.
109 “By divine liberality, with Christ’s merit interposed, forgiveness of sins and grace come to us who have been adopted [asciti] and engrafted into the body of the Church.” (Inst. (1536), 63 [CO 1 (29): 78]). On the place of justification in the Institutes (1536) see Wendel, op.cit., 257-258; cf. Parker, Calvin, 84f.
111 “Ut meminerimus praecipuum esse sustinendae religionis cardinem” (Inst. III: xi: 1 [CO 2 (30): 533]; van Buren, op.cit., 118-124; Parker, Calvin, 95f.). Calvin says that this is because “unless you
assessment is significant for our inquiry into adoption. As soon as the subject of justification is raised the question of the relationship with adoption immediately surfaces. Here, we are straightaway reminded of Calvin's broad application of adoption ("salvation entire") by the way that he initially refers to justification as founded on adoption. For instance, in his Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent, Calvin cites Paul's statement that "we are adopted to the predestination of sons of God, that we might be accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1: 5-6)\textsuperscript{112}

In the main, however, the reverse is true. Justification is foundational to adoption as is implied by the nature of justification itself. It involves two essential aspects: the reckoning of sinners as righteous in God's judgement and their acceptance into his favour on the grounds of their righteousness.\textsuperscript{113} Calvin sets these two essential elements in juxtaposition: "We explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."\textsuperscript{114} Through faith the sinner grasps the righteousness of Christ. Once clothed in it, he can stand before God as righteous. Thus, Calvin sometimes offers a shorthand definition of justification: "'To justify' means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if innocence were confirmed."\textsuperscript{115} However, irrespective of the definition, justification is impossible without the provisions of the wonderful exchange, which includes the intercession of Christ, who absolves believers by the imputation of his righteousness.

Wielding the trowel in one hand it is not long before Calvin begins to lash out first of all grasp what your relation to God is, and the nature of his judgement concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God." In his sermon on Lk. 1:5-10, Calvin says of justification that it is "the principle of the whole doctrine of salvation and of the foundation of all religion" (cited Wendel, op.cit., 256).

\textsuperscript{112} Tracts, vol. 3, 117 (italics inserted).
\textsuperscript{113} Inst. III: xi: 2 [CO 2 (30): 533-534]. In the same paragraph he writes: "Now he is justified who is reckoned in the condition not of a sinner, but of a righteous man; and for that reason, he stands firm before God's judgement seat while all sinners fall."
\textsuperscript{114} In his "Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent" Calvin insisted that there was one cause of justification, namely, the gratuitous acceptance of God (Tracts, vol. 3, 116; cf. 115). Zachman links Calvin's definition of justification as the remission of sins and the imputation of righteousness with the priestly office of Christ, in that these are possible through Christ's sacrificial death (op.cit., 206). This lengthier definition appears at face value to rule out the inclusion of adoption in justification. However, the prima facie evidence cannot be thoroughly considered until we know what Calvin meant by the term acceptance.
\textsuperscript{115} Inst. III: xi: 3 [CO 2 (30): 535].
with the sword in the other. He does so most notably against the Lutheran, Andreas Osiander. Believing him to have distorted the doctrine of justification by his "strange monster of 'essential righteousness'", Calvin's ferocious response was dictated by his fear that a view of union transfusing deity with humanity would bypass the necessity of Christ's obedience unto death. This obedience was essential for the dual imputation that lay at the heart of the atonement. Were Osiander's view tolerated, it would minimise the need of a mediator.

According to Calvin, sinners are justified not simply by the righteousness of God but by the righteousness of Christ rendered in the flesh. On the one hand, Christ was made righteous when he took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). On the other hand, he procured the justification of sinners by his perfect obedience to the Father (Phil. 2:8). Thus, even though the righteousness with which sinners are justified is sometimes called the righteousness of God (justitia Dei), nothing more is meant than that by the sacrifice of Christ's death sinners can stand before God's judgement seat. Furthermore, even though it is the God-man who justifies sinners, the atoning sacrifice of Christ comports with his human nature. He offered himself up to death in the flesh. Nevertheless, because Christ fulfilled all righteousness as the Son of God, the righteousness imputed to the sinner's account is the "eternal righteousness

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116 For details and analysis of the Osiandrian controversy, see Weiss' "Calvin versus Osiander on Justification" in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 5, 353-369.
117 Inst. III: xi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 536]. See Wendel, op.cit., 235ff.; Walter, op.cit., 136ff.. This was a view that impacted on both his doctrine of union with Christ and justification. He held that Christ had imparted something of his very essence to sinners when they entered into union with him: "That gentleman had conceived something bordering on Manichaeism, in his desire to transfuse the essence of God into men." (Inst. III: xi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 536]; cf. Tamburello, op.cit., 50). Calvin continues: "He says that we are one with Christ. We agree. But we deny that Christ's essence is mixed with our own. Then we say that this principle is wrongly applied to these deceptions of his: that Christ is our righteousness because he is God eternal, the source of righteousness, and the very righteousness of God."
118 Calvin writes: "We... confess that he, who, reconciling us to the Father in his flesh, gave us righteousness, is the eternal Word [sermonem] of God, and that the duties of the Mediator could not otherwise have been discharged by him, or righteousness acquired for us, had he not been eternal God. But Osiander’s position is that, since Christ is God and man, he is made righteousness for us with respect to his divine nature, not his human nature. Yet if this properly applies to divinity, it will not be peculiar to Christ but common with the Father and the Spirit, inasmuch as the righteousness of one differs not from the righteousness of the other. Then, because he was by nature from eternity, it would not be consistent to say that he was 'made for us.' But even though we should grant that God was made righteousness for us, how will this harmonize with what Paul interposes: that Christ was made righteousness by God (1 Cor. 1:30)?" (Inst. III: xi: 8 [CO 2 (30): 538-539]; cf. the end of Inst. III: xi: 5).
of the eternal God". In this way, believers are justified by the imputation of a righteousness, which, while divine, is appropriate to their human and sinful condition, and was procured by the Son of God whilst in the flesh and in the sinner's stead.  

Hence, Calvin's view of justification underlines his belief in the absolute necessity of a mediator. A mediator procures the righteousness sinners need. Received through faith it results in reconciliation with God. Without Christ's mediatorial work, sinners, being the enemies of God, continue alienated from him. "Thus", writes Calvin, "him whom [God] receives into union with himself the Lord is said to justify, because he cannot receive him into grace nor join him to himself unless he turns him from a sinner into a righteous man." This is accomplished through the forgiveness or remission of sins. Accepting the righteousness of his Son purchased through the shedding of blood, God views the sinner as in Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:19 and 21), and so refuses to impute sin to his account. Thus, the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins combine to secure acceptance into God's favour. Only then can he look upon the sinner, and bestow his paternal favour upon him.

It becomes more obvious, then, why justification is foundational to Calvin's seemingly more localised references to adoption. These seem to function within Calvin's more all-encompassing understanding of adoption as "salvation entire". Given Calvin's looser use of terminology than was to be the case in later Calvinism, the difficulty here is the absence of any unambiguous statements that could guide us through the succeeding discussion. All we have been able to gather are two clues the strategic nature of which make them nevertheless worth pursuing. The first focuses

120 "We do not deny that what has been plainly revealed to us in Christ derives from God's secret grace and power, nor do we contend over the fact that the righteousness Christ bestows upon us is the righteousness of God, which proceeds from him." (Inst. III: xi: 12 [CO 2 (30): 544]). In short: "it does not follow that Christ, who in the flesh sanctified himself for our sake [John 17:19], is righteousness for us according to his divine nature." (Ibid).

121 Rom. 4: 6-7 (CC Rom. 118 [CO49 (77): 61]).


123 "As iniquity is abominable to God, so no sinner can find favor in his eyes in so far as he is a sinner and so long as he is reckoned as such." (Inst. III: xi: 2 [CO 2 (30): 533]).

124 With the advent of Protestant Scholasticism and its accompanying division of theology into various loci, Reformed theologians became occupied with the question as to whether adoption should be subsumed under, or regarded as distinct from, justification.
on Calvin’s definition of justification as divine acceptance. At first sight this implies that Calvin understood adoption as a corollary of justification and not intrinsic to it. In his commentary on Ephesians 1:5-6 he speaks of adoption and reconciliation somewhat distinctly. However, this can be accounted for by the nature of the text that has both what we may call conveniently the adoptive act (acceptance) and the adoptive state (sonship) in view. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Calvin separately includes in the efficient cause of salvation both the believer’s predestination to adoption and his acceptance according to the good pleasure of God’s will. This explains his deduction that “whomever... God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption”.

However, the weight of evidence suggests that in some way adoption is subsumed under justification. This much is derived Calvin’s definition of justification in the Institutes:

Paul surely refers to justification by the word ‘acceptance’ when in Eph. 1:5-6 he says: “We are destined for adoption through Christ according to God’s good pleasure, to the praise of his glorious grace by which he has accounted us acceptable and beloved”... That means the very thing that he commonly says elsewhere, that “God justifies us freely” (Rom. 3:24).

Furthermore, “in the first chapter to the Ephesians, where [Paul] says that we are adopted to the predestination of sons of God, that we might be accepted in the Beloved, he comprehends the whole of our righteousness.” Calvin’s ambiguity, then, makes it feasible to suggest that he may not have been too clear or concerned about the relationship between justification and adoption. This was after all to become a later concern of Westminster Calvinism once the two doctrines had been juxtaposed in the Westminster Standards. While we must step rather cautiously here, the answer may lie in an unspoken distinction between the adoptive act and the adoptive state or experience. Although we shall return later to the connection between the adoptive experience and regeneration, it seems probable that when

125 “In adopting us, therefore, the Lord does not look at what we are, and is not reconciled to us by any personal worth.” (CC Eph., 127 [CO 51 (79): 149]).
126 CC Eph. 126 [CO 51 (79): 148]. In his comments on Romans 3:24 he explicitly describes the mercy displayed in justification as the efficient cause of our salvation as he had done in regard to adoption in his comments on Ephesians 1:4-5 (CC Rom. 75 [CO 49 (77): 61]).
dealing with justification as a benefit of mystical union Calvin has in view the adoptive act. From a fair reading of his statements, he appears to include it as the climactic element of acceptance in justification. 130

The second factor confirms this understanding. When listing the salvific benefits of union with Christ, Calvin deliberately mentions just the two, justification and regeneration. 131 This, of course, immediately evokes the question as to where and how adoption figures. To our knowledge no answer is forthcoming, despite the evident connection between adoption and union with Christ. 132 This suggests that either Calvin preferred to regard adoption as co-terminous with union with Christ consistent his broader conception of the motif, or that he subsumed it under justification and regeneration respectively. We cannot be entirely sure.

The subsuming of the adoptive act under justification forms at least one way of explaining why Calvin so easily intermingles forensic and familial terminology: "Because no union is possible for us with Him except by reconciliation we need Christ to restore us to the Father's favour by His blood." 133 Similarly, he writes: "As soon as you become engrafted into Christ through faith, you are made a son of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker in righteousness, a possessor of life". 134 Again this is hinted at in the way that Calvin says "we... hide under the precious purity of our first-

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130 Although Venema does not address the issue, his statements nevertheless imply a similar position (op.cit., 253).
131 In his "Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent" Calvin writes that "Justification and Sanctification, are constantly conjoined and cohere; but from this it is erroneously inferred that they are one and the same." (Tracts, vol. 3, 116). Nevertheless, there is an indissoluble connection between them which is brought out in Calvin's comments on Ezek. 16: 63. There he writes that God "is appeased by us only when he makes us new creatures in Christ, and regenerates us by his Spirit" (CTS Ezek., vol. 2, 180).
132 Interestingly, according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary (OLD) in addition to referring to the legal adoption of a son, father, sister, etc. adopto can also mean the process of grafting (OLD. S.v. "adopto". Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).
133 CC I Cor. 30 [CO 49 (77): 318]. (In this and the following quotes, the italics have been inserted). See Calvin's very similar statement in his "Brief Confession of Faith" (Tracts, vol. 2, 132).
134 Inst. III: xv: 6 [CO 48 (76): 418]. And again: "Faith flows from the secret election of God, because he enlightens, by his Spirit, those whom it seemed good to him to elect before they were born, and by the grace of adoption grafts them into his family." ("To Melanchthon. 27th August, 1554", Letters, vol. 3, 62).
born *brother*, Christ, so that we may be attested righteous in God's sight."\textsuperscript{135} Furthermore, responding to the Schoolmen's concept of accepting grace, Calvin says that it is "nothing else than [by] his free goodness, ... [that] the *Father* embraces us in Christ". This he does "when he clothes us with the innocence of Christ and accepts it as ours that by the benefit of it he may hold us as holy, pure, and innocent."\textsuperscript{136}

It is unsurprising then that although justification is a legal concept,\textsuperscript{137} once the believer is mystically united to Christ he has God as both a Judge and a Father.\textsuperscript{138} This is why the adoptive act forms the climactic element of acceptance in Calvin's thought. It demonstrates why he considers the Fatherhood of God to be pre-eminent in salvation. As Gerrish puts it: "The familial imagery runs alongside the forensic imagery and finally supplants it. In the end, Christ saves us, reconciles us, justifies us as God's Son who takes us for his brothers and sisters."\textsuperscript{139} Sinners must realise that God wills to be their Father even if he cannot accept them as his children until their unrighteousness has been dealt with.\textsuperscript{140} This does nothing to underestimate the reality of divine justice. Rather, the awareness of it supplements the effect of his paternity by awakening sinners to flee to Christ in faith for the receipt of forgiveness. Thus, although Calvin seems to simply associate justification with mystical union, 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. And so the justified sinner embarks on a filial relationship to God.

Calvin states this explicitly when, in his *Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent*, he says "we reach the haven of security only when God lays aside the character of Judge, and exhibits himself to us as a Father."\textsuperscript{141} "It is a plain matter," says Calvin, "that we cannot come boldly before the tribunal of God, unless

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\item \textsuperscript{135} *Inst.* III: xi: 23 [CO 2 (30): 552].
\item \textsuperscript{136} *Inst.* III: xiv: 12 [CO 2 (30): 572].
\item \textsuperscript{137} Calvin chides Osiander among many other things for ridiculing the legal nature of justification (*Inst.* III: xi: 11 [CO 2 (30): 541-543]).
\item \textsuperscript{139} Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 60-61.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 169.
\item \textsuperscript{141} "Antidote to the Acts of the Council of Trent", *Tracts*, vol. 3, 147 ("Hic enim unicus securitatis nostrae portus est, quod iudicis personam Deus exuit, ut se nobis patrem exhibeat." [CO 7 (35): 473]); Zachman captures Calvin's alternative perspective when he says that we cannot know God as Father until we have come to know him as judge. Cf. Zachman (*op.cit.*, 124, 126, 127). Zachman notes that while thoughts of divine judgement make us realise our unworthiness to be considered God's children,
we are certainly persuaded that he is our Father: and this cannot be without our being regarded as righteous in his sight. Thus we are precluded from all access to him, until trusting in his paternal good will, we can without hesitation invoke him as our Father.”

Whether this intermingling of juridical and familial terminology is due to the pervasive manner in which adoption expresses union with Christ, or more specifically because of its respective connections to justification and regeneration respectively, we must note its close affinity with Calvin’s understanding of acceptance. Certainly, the frequent translation of Calvin’s use adopto, coopto, ascisco and assumo as adoption testifies to the interrelatedness of the ideas of adoption and acceptance. Significantly, each of these has a wider meaning than adoption and includes acceptance. Thus, in writing of adoption Calvin must have had justification in view, because adoption immediately implies acceptance. Unsurprisingly then, one of Calvin’s many references to Ephesians 1:4-5 runs justification and adoption through each other. “By [Christ’s] death we are redeemed from the condemnation of death and freed from ruin (cf. Col. 1:14, 20); that we have been adopted unto him as sons and heirs by our Heavenly Father [cf. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:5-7]; that we have been reconciled through his blood [Rom. 5:9-10].”

The fact that the justification and adoption share certain characteristics confirms at least the plausibility of claiming that Calvin subsumed what we have called the adoptive act under justification. Not the least of these shared characteristics is that they emanate from the free grace of God. In justification, the believer forsakes his or her own works, accepting fully and freely the imputed

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143 Adopto: (i) The legal adoption usually of a son (OLD); to adopt (to take one in the place of a child or grandchild) (A Latin Dictionary (LD). S.v. “adopto” (revised, enlarged and in great part rewritten). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917); (ii) grafting (OLD); (iii) to take to oneself by wish or choice (LD); (iv) sponsorship (adoptio) (Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus. Compositum J F Niermeyer. Leiden: E J Brill, 1976). Cooptato: (i) co-option into office or body (OLD); (ii) adoption (OLD); (iii) election, choice (LD). Ascisco: (i) to take a person to oneself as ally, associate or the like (OLD, LD); (ii) to take or receive (LD); (iii) adopt (OLD, LD); (iv) to employ, engage (OLD). Assumo: (i) To take to, or with one’s self; (ii) to adopt; (iii) to take-up; (iv) to receive; (v) to accept; (vi) to take (OLD and LD).
144 Inst. III: xv: 5 [CO 2 (30); 583].
145 Ibid., 126. Cf. his comments on Rom. 3:24 (CC Rom. 74-75 [CO 49 (77): 61]).
righteousness of Christ.  

"Every work from us", says Calvin, "has only one way of obtaining acceptance, viz., when all that was vicious in it is pardoned by paternal indulgence." Thus, in his comments on Galatians 4:6 Calvin writes of Gentile believers that, "since... [they] are reckoned among the sons of God, it is evident that adoption comes, not by the merit of the law, but from the grace of faith."  

Having studied the content and consequence of mystical union, we must now examine the way that mystical union is portrayed in the sacrament of baptism. Consistent with his familial theology, Calvin thought that precisely because believers are children that God has given the sacraments to tutor them. Being a Protestant Reformer he was content to accept but two, viz., baptism and the Lord’s Supper. By themselves they are sufficient aids to faith. They act as "mirrors in which we may contemplate the riches of God’s grace, which he lavishes upon us." Thus, the Spirit enables the "Word and sacrament [to] confirm our faith when they set before our eyes the good will of our Heavenly Father toward us, by the knowledge of whom the whole firmness of our faith stands fast and increases in strength." Indeed, faith is not only confirmed but also pro-actively nourished by the promises contained in the sacraments. They point to Christ, outside of whom the Father promises

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147 “Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent”, Tracts, vol. 3, 146 (italics inserted); Badcock, op. cit., 97.
148 CC Gal., 76 [CO 50 (78): 229].
149 Although our treatment of the Lord’s Supper must await the following chapter, nevertheless we can be certain that “Calvin looks on both sacraments as having the same end - to testify, and to assist in effecting our union with the body of Christ.” (Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 150; Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 108).
150 Inst. (1536), 88 [CO 1 (29): 103]. For Calvin’s exposition of baptism in the Institutes (1536) see Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 109f.; cf. Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 143-144.
151 “Brief Form of a Confession of Faith”, Tracts, vol. 2, 134; Inst. IV: xviii: 19 [CO 2 (30): 1064]; CC Eph., 210. Although Calvin deals with the sacraments in the Institutes from Bk. IV: xiv-xix, it is not until Inst. IV: xix [CO 2 (30): 1066f.] that he explains his reasons for the dismissal of the additional five Roman sacraments (extreme unction, confirmation, penance, orders and marriage) as invalid: “Our previous discussion of the sacraments would have been enough to persuade teachable and sober folk not to carry their curiosity any farther, or to accept any sacraments apart from God’s Word, except those two which they knew to be ordained by the Lord”.
152 Inst. IV: xiv: 6 [CO 2 (30): 945]. While the sacraments are always based on preceding promises (Inst. IV: xiv: 3 [CO 2 (30): 942-943]) their efficacy is dependant on the application of the their meaning by the Holy Spirit (Inst. IV: xiv: 9-10 [CO 2 (30): 947-949]).
153 Inst. IV: xiv: 10 [CO 2 (30): 948].
nothing. However, baptism and the Lord’s Supper refer to different nuances of pneumatological union. This is implicit in Calvin’s remark that baptism was ordained “to give us an entrance into the Church of God - [the Lord’s Supper] to keep us in it.” It is, therefore, mostly appropriate to mystical union.

The sacrament has a threefold meaning, each aspect of which confirms the significance of baptism in Calvin’s thought. They are cleansing, mortification and the new life, and union with Christ. Although our immediate interest is drawn to the latter meaning due to its causal relationship to adoption, the impossibility of adoptive sonship without the remission of sins means that something must be said initially of baptism as indicative of cleansing. As the forgiveness of sins is inherent in justification and logically precedes adoption, so this first meaning of baptism must be considered prior to an investigation of the way it signifies union with Christ and adoption.

156 “Brief Form of a Confession of Faith”, op.cit., 134. Again, in Inst. IV: xviii: 19 [CO 2 (30): 1064] Calvin writes: “Baptism should be, as it were, an entry into the church, and an initiation into faith; but the Supper should be a sort of continual food on which Christ spiritually feeds the household of his believers.” (Cf. “Catechism of the Church of Geneva”, op.cit., 86, 92-93). The thought is also implicit in Wallace’s statement that, “baptism... mainly bears witness to our initiation into this union [mystical union], while the Lord’s supper is a sign of our continuation in this union [spiritual union].” (Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 150).
157 Calvin understood baptism as having both a vertical and a horizontal application; that is, it involves things which God signifies to us through its administration (vertical) as well as those things which the recipient of the rite are to confess before men (horizontal) (Inst. IV: xv: 13ff. [CO 2 (30): 969ff.]). In what follows we are primarily concerned with the vertical aspect.
158 In Esil Grisil’s opinion: “John Calvin succeeds in stating his position on baptism in such a way that it becomes not only an integral part of his entire system of theological thought, but also an occasion for a very lucid exposition of the central themes characteristic of his theology.” (E Grisil, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Baptism”, Gamble, op.cit., vol. 8, 222). That said, Gerrish makes the pertinent comment that Calvin’s discussion of baptism in the final edition of the Institutes is complicated by his attempt to fit a variety of baptismal motifs into his conception of the sacrament (Grace and Gratitude, 109-110).
159 Walker, op.cit., 242-244. Wallace is right to say that “No single phrase could sum up the meaning which Calvin finds in the sacrament of Baptism” (Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 175; Wendel, op.cit., 318-322). In the 1536 edition of the Institutes Calvin says that baptism signifies cleansing, rebirth and union with Christ (op.cit., 94-98 [CO 1 (29): 110-114]; cf. Inst. (1559) IV: xv: 1-6 [CO 2 (30): 962-965]). This contrasts with Calvin’s Catechism of 1545 in which baptism is said to have a twofold meaning: the forgiveness of sins and spiritual regeneration (op.cit., 86).
160 Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 110-111. On a different point, see Wolf (op.cit., 88f.) for a short discussion of baptism as the new covenant equivalent of old covenant sign, circumcision.
161 For more on baptism see ch. 4 where the three meanings of the sacrament are explained in relation to regeneration or sanctification. In the meantime, it is worth noting the inversion that Calvin introduces into the whole order of things. Whereas the mystical union of the believer paves the way for the remission of sins (justification), in his description of baptism Calvin denotes cleansing first, but does not mention union with Christ until last.
When referring to baptism as a token of the sinner’s cleansing Calvin has justification in view. It is, he says, “like a sealed document to confirm to us that all our sins are so abolished, remitted, and effaced that they can never come to his sight, be recalled, or charged against us.” Consistent with what has already been discerned, if baptism refers in this context to justification it must also pertain to the adoptive act. Hence, Calvin says that “we are cleansed by Christ’s blood because our merciful Father, wishing to receive us into grace in accordance with his comparable kindness, has set this Mediator among us to gain favor for us in his sight.” For this reason, baptism serves to remind the fallen believer that “we may always be sure and confident of the forgiveness of sins.” Calvin explains:

Though our baptism, administered only once, seemed to have passed, it was still not destroyed by subsequent sins. For Christ’s purity has been offered to us in it; his purity ever flourishes; it is defiled by no spots, but buries and cleanses away all our defilements.

This, Calvin adds, is not intended to pander to the indiscipline of an indifferent believer, but is for those who would despair of the unceasing forgiveness found in Christ and needed until the point of death. Thus, baptism is administered by the church and is accompanied by the preaching of the Word, which is intended to point the sinner to the cleansing of Christ’s blood. Baptism functions then as a sign and testimony of washing.

Baptism refers, secondly, to mortification and the new life. In doing so, it serves as a symbol of regeneration, as we shall discuss later. In the meantime, the sacrament introduces us thirdly to a closely intertwined trio of concepts: baptism, union with Christ and adoption. This comes out in Calvin’s definition of baptism:

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162 *Inst. IV: xiv* [CO 2 (30): 962]. We shall see later that regeneration is also signified by baptism as a token of cleansing.
164 *Inst. IV: xiv* [CO 2 (30): 963].
165 *Inst. IV: xiv* [CO 2 (30): 964].
166 *Inst. IV: xiv* [CO 2 (30): 964].
167 In what follows we have sought to distinguish the sacrament’s various strands of meaning as far as it is legitimate to do so. Sometimes, however, Calvin transposes the regeneration and adoption emphases so that he can refer to baptism on the one hand in terms of regeneration by pointing to union with Christ, and on the other hand in terms of adoption by pointing to the new life. See, for example, “The True Method of Giving Peace, and of Reforming the Church”, *Tracts*, vol. 3, 288; Calvin’s letter to the King of France (October, 1557), *Letters*, vol. 3, 375). For the complexity of the relationship between regeneration and adoption see ch. 4.
168 As Gerrish puts it: “Baptism means union with Christ: it testifies that we are not only engrafted...
“Baptism is the sign of the initiation by which we are received [cooptamur] into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God’s children.” Elsewhere he writes that “in dealing with baptism our first consideration is the fact that God the Father, having placed us by His unmerited goodness in His Church, receives us by adoption into the fellowship of His sons. Thus, in this context baptism is the symbol or testimony of adoption, just as circumcision had been under the old covenant. It tells us that if the adoptive act was indeed subsumed under Calvin’s notion of acceptance, then it is equally legitimate to say that acceptance must involve adoption. The sacrament could not act as the symbol of adoption unless justification was already assumed.

Overall though, baptism’s indication of union with Christ demonstrates on this understanding the climactic nature of the adoptive act vis à vis justification. At first Calvin’s comments are rather general: “Our faith receives from baptism the advantage of its sure testimony to us that we are not only engrafted into the death and life of Christ, but so united to Christ himself that we become sharers in all his blessings.” Thus, the believer appropriates the blessings of the wonderful exchange. Chief among these is that we should be the children of God. Yet the
denotation “children of God” does not of necessity imply adoption. Calvin’s passing reference to Romans 8:1 does, however. “There [Paul] teaches that those whom the Lord has once received into his grace, engraves into the communion of his Christ, and adopts into the society of the church through baptism - so long as they persevere in faith in Christ...- are absolved of guilt and condemnation.”

As far as Calvin was concerned his doctrine of baptism was not compromised by the participation of infants; far from it. As the sign of the covenant had been applied to infants under the old covenant, it was inconceivable that it could be denied to those under the new without curtailing the grace of the Father. Of Christ’s welcoming of the children (Matt. 19:14), Calvin writes:

If it is right for infants to be brought to Christ, why not also to be received into baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them, why is the sign denied which, so to speak, opens to them a door into the church, that, adopted into it, they may be enrolled among the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven?

The decretal and covenantal aspects of his theology determined Calvin’s belief that “God... adopts our babies as his own before they were born, when he promises that he will be our God and the God of our descendants after us

with Christ and adoption even though he brings out many truths about adoption from the surrounding verses. The doctrine is, however, strongly implied in Calvin’s comments on v. 27: “The greater and sublimer it is that we are the children of God [filios Dei], the farther it is from our senses and the more difficult to believe it. He therefore explains briefly the nature of our conjunction, or rather uniting, with the Son of God, so that we may not doubt that what belongs to Him is communicated to us.” (CC Gal., 68 [CO 50 (78): 222]) In the light of the surrounding context, it becomes clearer that this union with Christ is explained in terms of baptism and is compatible with Calvin’s description of the sacrament as the symbol of adoption.

176 “Who will conclude from this that baptism ought to be denied to infants whom, begotten of flesh, God consecrates to himself by free adoption?” (Inst. IV: xvi: 7 [CO 2 (30): 980-981]). It is important to note that Calvin’s view of paedo-baptism remained substantially unaltered throughout the many revisions of the Institutes. There was a change, however, in the relationship of faith to infant-baptism since the earliest edition of the Institutes.
177 “Since the promise of adoption reaches even to the posterity of believers, I acknowledge that the infants of believers ought to be received into the Church by baptism; and in this matter I detest the ravings of the Anabaptists.” (“Brief Confession of Faith”, Tracts, vol. 2, 134).
178 Inst. IV: xvi: 6 [CO 2 (30): 979-980]. In response he returns to the attitude of Christ towards children demonstrated in Matt. 19: “The Lord Jesus, wishing to give an example by which the world would understand that he came to enlarge rather than to limit the Father’s mercy, tenderly embraces the infants offered to him, chiding his disciples for trying to deny them access to him, because they were leading away from him those to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belonged” (Inst. IV: xvi: 7 [CO 2 (30): 980]; cf. “Form of Administering the Sacraments”, Tracts, vol. 2, 115).
Hence he argued that, “as in Abraham, the father of the faithful, the righteousness of faith preceded circumcision, so in the children of the faithful, in the present day, the gift of adoption is prior to baptism.” Therefore, in reality it matters little if a covenant child dies unbaptised. The covenant and the promise are sufficient for the right of adoption. Nevertheless, if the infant lives then it is absolutely necessary that the sacramental rite be applied: “Infants have need of it, not as a necessary help to salvation, but as a seal divinely appointed to seal upon them the gift of adoption.” Having the gift of adoption, they are perceived as the children of God from birth. In other words, “the children of believers are baptized not in order that they who were previously strangers to the church may then for the first time become the children of God, but rather that, because by the blessing of the promise they already belonged to the body of Christ, they are received into the church with this solemn sign.” Elsewhere Calvin says likewise: “By baptism...
[infants] are admitted into Christ's flock, and the symbol of adoption suffices them until as adults they are able to bear solid food.”\textsuperscript{188}

However, if covenant children are baptised on the ground that they already possess the gift of adoption and are thereby the children of God, why does Calvin state on other occasions that in their baptism covenant children are only recognised as heirs of adoption rather than the possessors of it?

Baptism would not be at all suitable to them if their salvation were not already included in this promise, - ‘I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.’ [(Gen. 17, 7)] For they do not become the sons of God through baptism; but because, in virtue of the promise, they are heirs of adoption, therefore the Church admits them to baptism.\textsuperscript{189}

Again, in his \textit{Brief Form of a Confession of Faith} he writes, “since the promise of adoption reaches even to the posterity of believers, I acknowledge that the infants of believers ought to be received into the Church by baptism”\textsuperscript{190}

The answer lies in Calvin’s triple perspective. When thought of in terms of predestination, covenant children already have the gift of adoption.\textsuperscript{191} When thought of alternatively in regard to their standing with the visible church, the sign of baptism signifies the reality of adoption. Moreover, given that they lack the actual experience of salvation they are but the heirs of adoption.\textsuperscript{192} How the implications of baptism works out in the adoptive experience of the covenant child are, Calvin says, largely dependent on the way they are brought up. This, curiously enough, appears to transfer the actualisation of adoption from the sovereignty of God to the parenting skills of his people.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{188} Inst. IV: xvi: 31 [CO 2 (30): 999].
\textsuperscript{189} “Antidote to Art. I of the Articles agreed upon by the Theological Faculty of Paris”, \textit{Tracts}, vol. 1, 74 [CO 7 (35): 7-8].
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Tracts}, vol. 2, 134; cf. Calvin’s “Appendix to the Tract on the True Method of Reforming the Church”, \textit{Tracts}, vol. 3, 354.
\textsuperscript{191} This would seem to be confirmed by Calvin’s letter to John Claubiuger (June, 1556), \textit{Letters}, vol. 3, 282.
\textsuperscript{192} Cf. Gerrish, \textit{Grace and Gratitude}, 115.
\textsuperscript{193} “Provided there is no contumacy or negligence on the part of the parents, the simple promise by which the children of believers are from the womb adopted into the fellowship of the Church suffices for their salvation.” (\textit{Ibid.}; on child rearing see Calvin’s letter “to a Seigneur of Piedmont”, dated February 1554, \textit{Letters}, vol. 3, 24). This, however, opens the door to presumptive regeneration. This possibility is not hindered by Calvin’s attempt to distinguish between the sign and the promise. Although he stresses the efficacy of baptism, he does say that salvation is not so tied to the sign as to make the promise of salvation superfluous. (“Appendix to the Tract on the True Method of Reforming the Church”, \textit{op.cit.}, vol. 3, 347). The solution to the question of presumptive regeneration depends on the nature of the promise.
Given he had so much to say on the essential importance of Holy Spirit-inspired faith for mystical union, it is perplexing that Calvin says little of the role of faith in regard to the application of its symbol to covenant children.\footnote{Gerrish, \textit{Grace and Gratitude}, 114.} Whoever the subject of baptism, the meaning remains unaltered: “The children receive some benefit from their baptism: being engrafted [\textit{insiti}] into the body of the church, they are somewhat more commended to the other members. Then, when they have grown up, they are greatly spurred to an earnest zeal for worshipping God, by whom they were received as children through a solemn symbol of adoption before they were old enough to recognise him as Father.”\footnote{\textit{Inst. IV: xvi: 9 [CO 2 (30): 982]. Later he makes the same point in the negative: “From [Paul’s] statement elsewhere that we have been engrafted into the body of Christ through baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), we in the same way conclude that infants, whom he counts as his members, must be baptized, that they may not be sundered from his body.” (\textit{Inst. IV: xvi: 22 [CO 2 (30): 992]; cf. Calvin’s “Appendix to the Tract on the True Method of Reforming the Church”, \textit{op.cit.}, 346).}}

In summary, it can be said that whereas incarnational union provides the redemptive-historical background of adoption, mystical union supplies the more immediate soteriological input. Although the incarnate Christ offered a brotherly hand to humanity, only those Jews and Gentiles taking hold of it in faith become his adopted brethren. Integral to this whole process is the engrafting of believers into Christ, which constitutes a unity of identity but not of essence,\footnote{As Niesel puts it: “The nature of our relation to Christ [is] a real communion of persons but not a fusion of being.” (\textit{op.cit.}, 248; cf. Wallace, \textit{Calvin’s Doctrine of Word and Sacrament}, 153; Tamburello, \textit{op.cit.}, 89).} and results in the justification of believers in the sight of their divine Judge, who, as their heavenly Father accepts them once and for all. Thus, by virtue of mystical union the adoptive act occurs. Mystical union forms, then, the very heart of adoption.\footnote{Not surprisingly, Gerrish says of Calvin’s view of redemption that it is placed in the mystical union of the believer with Christ (“John Calvin and the Meaning of the Reformation”, \textit{op.cit.}, 38).}

\textit{(iii) Spiritual Union}

Spiritual union is “the fruit and effect” of mystical union: “For after that Christ, by the interior influence of His Spirit, has bound us to Himself and united us to His Body, He \textit{exerts a second influence of His Spirit, enriching us by His gifts.”}\footnote{\textit{Inst. IV: xvi: 9 [CO 2 (30): 982]. Later he makes the same point in the negative: “From [Paul’s] statement elsewhere that we have been engrafted into the body of Christ through baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), we in the same way conclude that infants, whom he counts as his members, must be baptized, that they may not be sundered from his body.” (\textit{Inst. IV: xvi: 22 [CO 2 (30): 992]; cf. Calvin’s “Appendix to the Tract on the True Method of Reforming the Church”, \textit{op.cit.}, 346).}} Whereas mystical union has a special but not exclusive emphasis on our initial
engrafting into one body with Christ, spiritual union has a particular but not exclusive emphasis on the ongoing nature of our union with Christ. It is, says Rankin, dynamic and progressive in nature.\(^{199}\) It begins "on the very first day of their calling", but continues "inasmuch as the life of Christ increases in them, He daily offers Himself to be enjoyed by them.\(^{200}\) Thus, the faith required for mystical union makes the experience of spiritual union possible.\(^{201}\) Put alternatively, sinners are not eligible for spiritual union unless they have first trusted God for his mercy, having sought salvation in Christ alone and are seeking to live unto God and in brotherly love towards their neighbours.

Spiritual communion has, then, more to do with the Christian life than with salvation \textit{per se}. Whereas mystical union undergirds justification and includes the act of adoption, spiritual communion lays the basis for the inclusion of the adoptive experience within sanctification:\(^{202}\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{JUSTIFICATION} & \textbf{SANCTIFICATION} \\
\textbf{ADOPTIVE} & \textbf{ADOPTIVE} \\
\textbf{ACT} & \textbf{STATE} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Fig. 3}
\end{figure}

As expected, then, Calvin speaks of both in words appropriate to adoption. The fact that he does so confirms the oneness of the pneumatological union from which the salvific benefits are derived. These are obtained "when we know that God is our merciful Father, because of \textit{reconciliation} effected through Christ [II Cor. 5:18-19],

\begin{enumerate}
\item Gorham, \textit{op.cit.}, 351.
\item Rankin, \textit{op.cit.}, 182.
\item Gorham, \textit{op.cit.}, 351-352.
\item Cf. Gordh's statement on faith ("Calvin's Conception of Faith", \textit{op.cit.}, 214).
\item Tamburello, \textit{op.cit.}, 86-87; Badcock also grapples with this issue (\textit{op.cit.}, 97 and 105). Strictly speaking he is right to say that union with Christ transcends the clear-cut distinction between justification and sanctification. However, given that Calvin delineates them as distinct benefits of union with Christ, we prefer to say that pneumatological union undergirds justification and sanctification. This ensures that the distinctiveness of the doctrines is more clearly maintained while
\end{enumerate}
and that Christ has been given to us as righteousness, sanctification, and life.”\textsuperscript{203}

The distinctiveness of these blessings are, however, as important as their inseparability. Hence, Calvin opposed Osiander’s view of essential righteousness, for if sinners can obtain a righteousness acceptable to God through the transfusing of the divine essence with human nature then the need of the gift of regeneration would be greatly diminished. Therefore, Calvin regarded Osiander’s error as but a Lutheran variation of the Romish conflation of justification with regeneration, which inevitably results in the redefining of justification as “making righteous”.\textsuperscript{204}

Thus, while Wendel correctly says that justification and sanctification are on a par with each other while remaining logically distinct, there is nevertheless a logical prioritisation. Just as spiritual communion cannot be enjoyed without the mystical engrafting, so a life of sanctification cannot be embarked upon without justification.\textsuperscript{205} This, however, does not undermine either the instantaneous nature of mystical and spiritual union or the experience of the benefits that they produce in the life of the believer. We merely acknowledge that whereas mystical union grants Christ, spiritual union grants his gifts.\textsuperscript{206} Mystical and spiritual union enjoy then an appropriate parity as vital aspects of pneumatological union. It must be stressed that Calvin thought spiritual union to be as important for the adopted as mystical union precisely because Christ was given by the Father so that his younger brethren should enjoy their Father’s gifts:

That we are strong in hope and patience, - that we soberly and temperately keep ourselves from worldly snares, - that we strenuously bestir ourselves to the subjugation of carnal affections, - that the love of righteousness and piety flourishes in us, - that we are earnest in prayer, - that meditation on the life to come draws us upwards, - this, I maintain, flows from the second Communion, by which Christ, dwelling in us not ineffectually, brings forth the influence of His Spirit in His manifest gifts.\textsuperscript{207}

also safeguarding their inseparability by virtue of their joint derivation from union with Christ.

\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Inst.} III: ii: 2 [\textit{CO} 2 (30): 399] (italics inserted).
\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Inst.} III: xi: 6 [\textit{CO} 2 (30): 537-538].
\textsuperscript{205} Wendel, \textit{op. cit.}, 233-234 and 256-257; van Buren, \textit{op. cit.}, 109.
\textsuperscript{206} “It must be noted”, writes Niesei, “that we do not in the strict sense receive gifts, but the one gift, Jesus Christ Himself. If we do not appreciate and receive this gift in its full significance for ourselves, not only must our doctrine of sanctification or justification be perverse, but we destroy the value and meaning of that gift itself. When we attempt to separate sanctification from justification we are in fact seeking to break up the unity of the one Christ.” (\textit{op.cit.}, 138).
\textsuperscript{207} Letter to Martyr (Gorham, \textit{op.cit.}, 351). The attributing of the distribution of these gifts to spiritual union with Christ is a more precise picture than Calvin had earlier conveyed. Initially, in his first edition of the \textit{Institutes} Calvin had spoken of the gifts more generally as an outworking of the incarnation, but in doing so related it more to adoption than is found above: “Descending to earth, he
However, caution is required when distinguishing between mystical and spiritual union, especially as the two forms are by no means so clearly demarcated in the *Institutes* as in Calvin’s reply to Peter Martyr. As we have noted already, Calvin often conflates the two nuances under the single rubric of union with Christ. Nevertheless, Calvin’s letter to Martyr justifies the differentiation between the two aspects.

When mystically united to Christ the adopted partake through spiritual union of the Spirit’s liberality. To them he directs all the good things that the Father has in store for them, and which were intended for them in the wonderful exchange. To quote Garret Wilterdink: “As Christ is he in whom God becomes Father to us; so the Spirit is he through whom our adoption in Christ is realized.” Thus the Holy Spirit is not only described as “Spirit of the Father” and the “Spirit of the Son” but also as the “Spirit of Adoption”. Significantly, Calvin sets out to consider the last of these descriptions in the *Institutes* III: i: 3 as a way of opening up “the beginning and the whole renewal of our salvation” (italics inserted). In the next chapter we shall consider the way in which Calvin sets the adoptive experience within the context of renewal.

### 3.3 The Church

Before doing so, a word about Calvin’s ecclesiology is *à propos*, because it is into the church that the Father receives his adopted sons and daughters. Christ’s work in the wonderful exchange and the Spirit’s work in pneumatological union forms the dual basis of their acceptance. Once in the church they enjoy the adoptive...
Thus, an analysis of Calvin's concept of the church prepares the way for a lengthier consideration of the adoptive experience.

Calvin's doctrine of the church is most rich as is evident from the layout of the *Institutes*. As Léopold Schümmer Herstal writes: "Le plan de l’Institution est, à ce titre, instructif. Les quatre livres sont consacrés à Dieu (I), à Jésus-Christ (II), au Saint -Esprit (III) et à l’Eglise (IV)." His view of the church well illustrates the interconnectedness in Calvin's thought of mystical and spiritual union/ justification (the adoptive act) and sanctification (the adoptive experience).

Calvin refers to the church in two ways. On one level, he alludes to it as seen in God's sight, yet invisible to the eyes of humankind. In this sense it genuinely consists only of the freely adopted children of God:

> Sometimes by the term “church” it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God [filii Dei] by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world.

It is for God alone to perfectly discern those who truly believe, for personal belief is grounded on his divine and secret election and cannot be determined merely by external performances. This secret election and inner call to believers informs God's omniscient knowledge of his church. It is for him alone to distinguish the

and is the power by which we are engrafted into Christ." *(op.cit., 177).*

211 In passing, it is interesting to note Battles' comment that the English-speaking world first became conversant with Calvin in terms of his view of the Christian life. This was derived from the translation of Calvin's treatise originally included in his *Institutes*, entitled *The Life and Conversation of a Christen Man* (1549). See *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer*. Translated and edited by Ford Lewis Battles. Music edited by Stanley Tagg. Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Book House, 1978, 9. Whole volumes have been written on Calvin's understanding of the Christian life. For instance, John Leith in his book *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1989, 100) has said that "we may summarise the condition of the Christian life as sonship." It is interesting that in spite of this statement by Leith he does not seem to trace Calvin's view of the Christian life in terms of sonship. The same can be said of R S Wallace's book, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life.*


214 “It may happen”, Calvin says, “that we ought to treat like brothers and count as believers those whom we think unworthy of the fellowship of the godly, because of the common agreement of the church by which they are borne and tolerated in the body of Christ. We do not by our vote approve such persons as members of the church, but we leave to them such place as they occupy among the people of God until it is lawfully taken from them.” *(Inst. IV*: i: 9 [CO 2 (30): 754]).

reprobate and the elect. For anyone else to do so is divisive. The believer's duty is "to establish with certainty... that all those who, by the kindness of God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, have entered into fellowship with Christ, are set apart as God's property and personal possession; and that when we are of their number we share that great grace." 216

The church is also regarded in Scripture in its earthly and less than perfect form. "Often... the name 'church' designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ." 217 Although many of the impenitent profess to be Christian, the visible church is nevertheless a glorious institution to be revered and supported not least by participation in the sacraments. Hence it is loftily portrayed in Scripture. Calvin notes this by picking up on the various New Testament descriptions of the church such as mother, family and kingdom. 218 Although all these metaphors figure in Paul's ecclesiology, neither Calvin nor the apostle considers them all as necessarily appropriate to adoption. They do serve to illustrate, however, the extent to which the birth and adoption motifs are interwoven in Calvin's soteriology. Generally speaking, Calvin uses the maternal motif to refer to sanctification, and the family motif to denote adoption and the kingdom as referring to both. Thus, he illustrates the close affiliation of sanctification and sonship, which is the adoptive state.

Of all the various portrayals of the church, the reformer regards the motherhood metaphor as pre-eminent. It is "wonderful and the highest honour". Hence, Calvin opens his discussion of the church in the Institutes Book Four by entitling her the "mother of all the Godly". She it was who served in a maternal capacity under the law and continues to do so throughout the new covenant era. 219 Into her bosom, says Calvin, "God is pleased to gather his sons [filios], not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants [infantes] and children [pueri], but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they

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216 Inst. IV: i: 3 [CO 2 (30): 748].
217 Inst. IV: i: 7 [CO 2 (30): 753].
218 In addition Calvin also calls the church "the city of God" and "the tabernacle which the Most High has sanctified as his dwelling place" (Inst. (1536), 63 [CO 1 (29): 78]).
219 For more on the church as mother under the law see Calvin's comments on Is. 54:1 (CTS Is., vol.4, 133-135 [CO 36 (54): 268-269]; cf. CC Gal., 88 [CO 50 (78): 240]).
mature [adolescent] and at last reach the goal of faith."220 Thus, "away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation." Therefore, following Cyprian's famous dictum, Calvin warns that only "those to whom [God] is Father the church may also be Mother."221 By contrast the Roman church is an adulteress who produces children of the devil who slay the children of God.222

Commenting on Paul's description of the church as "the Jerusalem that is above... which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26) Calvin looks on the church as bringing to birth the sons of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.223 The metaphor relates, therefore, to regeneration and not to adoption and embraces the development of the believer from conception to maturity:

There is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels [Matt. 22:30]. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah [Isa. 37:32] and Joel [Joel 2:32] testify.224

The church, says Calvin, "has the incorruptible seed of life deposited in her by which she forms us, cherishes us in her womb and brings us to light. She has the milk and the food by which she continually nourishes her offspring."225 Thus, the mother conceives, delivers, nourishes, nurtures and educates her children through to maturity, which is a lifelong process only terminated at death.226 It is accomplished through the Word and the sacraments, thus making her instrumental in the sanctification of her children.

Another favourite metaphor of the church is the family. Certainly, Paul labels the church as the household of God (Eph. 2:19 and Gal. 6:10). Although Calvin's comment on the former use of this phrase is rather tautological,227 he makes clear in the latter case that the metaphor "is used to stir us up to that kind of communication

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220 Inst. IV: i: 1 [CO 2 (30): 746].
221 Inst. IV: i: 1 ("quibus ipse est pater, ecclesia etiam mater sit" [CO 2 (30): 746]).
222 CC Gal., 88 [CO 50 (78): 240].
223 CC Gal., 87-88 [CO 50 (78): 239].
224 Inst. IV: i: 4 [CO 2 (30): 748-749].
225 CC Gal., 88 [CO 50 (78): 239].
226 Inst. IV: i: 5 [CO 2 (30): 749-751].
227 "God admitted [cooptavit] them [the Ephesians] into His own family. For the Church is God's House." (CC Eph., 154 [CO 51 (79): 174]).
which is necessary among the members of one family. Our common humanity makes us debtors to all; but we are bound to believers by a closer spiritual kinship, which God allows among us.”

Entrance into the family particularly implies the adoption of believers. Hence, when regarded as a family the church’s function changes from a maternal role, and becomes, in Wallace’s words, “the sphere of the Fatherhood of God”:

God designates as his children [filios] those whom he has chosen, and appoints himself their Father. Further, by calling, he receives [asciscit] them into his family and unites them to him so that they may together be one.

There are good reasons why God should call the church his house, for not only has he received his sons into the church by the grace of adoption, but he also dwells in the church among his children. “Because God has chosen the church to be his dwelling place, there is no doubt that he shows by singular proofs his fatherly care in ruling it.” Thus, when the church is regarded as a family or household, the Father takes responsibility for the nourishment of the adopted. On the Pauline description of the church as “the pillar and ground of truth” and “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15), Calvin writes that

by its ministry and labor God willed to have the preaching of his word kept pure and to show himself the Father of a family, while he feeds us with spiritual food and provides everything that makes for our salvation.

Whereas the church’s maternal role in the nourishment of believers is primarily educational, Calvin sees God’s paternal role in the family in terms of providential preservation. The Father’s household becomes a place of refuge. “If we are cast out of our own house, then we will be the more intimately received into God’s family.” Elsewhere he writes: “Not only does the Lord through forgiveness of sins receive and adopt [cooptat] us once for all into the church, but through the same means he preserves and protects us there.” Thus, the Father daily promises those sons and daughters of his household grace to cope with every infirmity of

228 CC Gal., 114-115 [CO 50 (78): 263].
229 Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 180; cf. Niesel, op. cit., 73 and 74.
234 Inst. IV: i: 21 [CO 2 (30): 762].
This grace is, of course, mediated to the adopted through Christ’s merits who, as firstborn son, excels in honour within the family. He it is who pre-eminently bears the name of the family and in whom all believers are included as a common mark of brotherhood [communi fraternitatis nota]. It is his Spirit who ensures that the family is not only a place of refuge but of sanctification by catering for the renewal and restoration of the household members. Each family member is upheld by the prayers of the brethren: “There is nothing in which we can benefit our brethren more than in commending them to the providential care of the best of fathers; for if he is kind and favorable, nothing at all else can be desired. Indeed, we owe even this very thing to our Father.”

Lastly, the church is also God’s kingdom and is entered through new birth and adoption. Naturally, the key passage for the new birth is located in John 3. As men and women are naturally carnal, they need to be born again before they can enter God’s kingdom as his children. In the new birth the Holy Spirit renews the whole nature so making faith possible. Only then can believers become fellow heirs of Christ. Thus, the kingdom of God is “the spiritual life, which is begun by faith in this world and daily increases according to the continual progress of faith.” It marks the beginning of the Christian life and becomes to the newly born a sphere of sanctification. Although the kingdom is already come, nevertheless along with the created order the children of God yearn for its future manifestation because only then will the renewal process be completed in them.

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235 Inst. IV: i: 21-22 [CO 2 (30): 762-763]. For more on providence see ch. 4.4.
236 CC Rom., 181 [CO 49 (77): 160].
239 Inst. IV: i: 20 [CO 2 (30): 761-762]. Similarly in Inst. IV: ii: 4 [CO 2 (30): 771] Calvin unequivocally says “the church is Christ’s kingdom”. See also the end of Inst. III: viii: 7 and III: xx: 38 in which Calvin sets the church as “family” (Dei familia) “household” (domus) and “kingdom” (regnum) in juxtaposition [CO 2 (30): 519-520 and 664]).
240 CC St. John 1-10, 65-66 [CO 47 (75): 56]. “It is plain that we must be formed for the Kingdom of God by a second birth. And the meaning of Christ’s words is that, since a man is born from his mother’s womb only carnal, he must be fashioned anew by the Spirit that he may begin to be spiritual. And the word Spirit is used here in two senses - for grace, and for the effect of grace. In the first place Christ is teaching us that the Spirit of God is the only author of a pure and upright nature and afterwards He says that we are spiritual because we are renewed by His power.” (CC St. John 1-10, 67 [CO 47 (75): 57-58]).
241 CC Rom., 172-173 [CO 49 (77): 152].
Believers, however, are also adopted into the kingdom. Sometimes this is implied by Calvin's reference to entrance into the kingdom by means of the believer's mystical union to Christ: "Unquestionably, as soon as we are by faith engrafted into the body of Christ, we have already entered the kingdom of God". On other occasions he explicitly says that the adopted enter into possession of the heavenly kingdom:

Now we ought to examine what this faith ought to be like, through which those adopted by God as his children come to possess the Heavenly Kingdom, since it is certain that no mere opinion or even persuasion is capable of bringing so great a thing to pass. The kingdom motif reinforces, then, the overlapping relationship between sanctification and the adoptive state or experience. To this we shall now turn.

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242 CC Phil., 277 [CO 52 (80): 51].
244 Inst. IV: i: 16 [CO 2 (30): 758-759].
Chapter Four

The Outworking of Adoption

It is true that we are redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and he is given to us for our redemption, as is said in other passages, [1 Cor. 1: 30; 1 Tim. 2: 6] but we do not have the effect and full fruition of it as yet. There is, then, a double redemption [double redemption] — one which was accomplished in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and another which we wait for and which shall be shown to us at his coming again.

John Calvin (Sermons, Eph., 78 [CO 29 (51): 308])

Towards the end of the previous chapter an outline was drawn of the way that the believer's spiritual union with Christ gives rise to the benefit of sanctification in Christian living. Irrespective of which way Calvin is read it is clear that he sets adoptive sonship in the broader context of sanctification. A son or daughter of God is one who has been regenerated from a state of death.1 “As soon as you become ingrafted into Christ through faith,” writes Calvin, “you are made a son of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker in righteous, a possessor of life”.2 As Gerrish explains: “the whole of Christian existence - the life of the new self - is... perceived as nothing but the life of God’s adopted sons and daughters”.3 In short, then, the adoptive experience involves a new filial life in the enjoyment of his gifts.4

If one opts for one of the more particular readings of Calvin, he may be understood to regard the adoptive act as intrinsic to justification and the adoptive state as essential to the everyday outworking of salvation. On this rendering, however, it ought to be borne in mind that as the adoptive act does not exhaust Calvin’s doctrine of justification so neither does the adoptive state embrace his entire doctrine of sanctification. It refers to but part of God’s sanctifying work in the life of the believer. “We know”, says Calvin, “that under the word sanctification includes the whole renewal [renovationem] of man.”5 “We are restored [instauramur] by this regeneration through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God; from which we had fallen through Adam. In this way it pleases the Lord fully to restore

1 Leith, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 87.
3 Grace and Gratitude, 100; Zachman writes: “The grace of sanctification is the purpose and goal of our adoption, for God adopts us so that we might actually become God’s grateful and obedient children.” (The Assurance of Faith, 11).
4 Leith, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 87.
5 CTS 1 Thess. 379 [CO 52 (80): 178].
whomsoever he adopts [cooptat] into the inheritance of life.\textsuperscript{6} Before developing more fully the nexus between sanctification and adoption, more must be said of Calvin's understanding of regeneration or sanctification in the context of repentance.\textsuperscript{7}

Repentance is a process of conversion that involves "the true turning [\textit{conversionem}] of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit."\textsuperscript{8} It entails three noteworthy elements: (i) An inner renewal in which the old nature is put off and godly works are undertaken;\textsuperscript{9} (ii) an earnest fear of God derived from a consciousness of divine judgement for sins committed and worship not rendered;\textsuperscript{10} and (iii) the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the spirit that coincides with the believer's union with Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

Calvin was prepared in principle to accept that repentance has a narrower meaning. Melanchthon, for instance, held that repentance consisted merely of mortification or contrition, and vivification (the consolation that arises from faith). While Calvin was prepared to concede this narrower understanding he could do so only on condition that its meaning was more substantive than a mere happiness of mind. It must pertain to "the desire to live in a holy and devoted manner, a desire arising from rebirth; as if it were said that man dies to himself that he may begin to live to God."\textsuperscript{12} Others spoke similarly of two forms of repentance; a repentance of the law and of the gospel, the former referring to the wounding of sin and the fear of wrath, the latter to Christ's medicine. Even though Calvin seems to have regarded his

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 9 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 440]. Nevertheless, just as justification does not overshadow the adoptive act, so sanctification ought not to be seen as eclipsing the adoptive state. Leith writes: "Calvin summarized the activity of God which calls forth the Christian life by the word 'adoption.' God chooses to reclaim prodigal people by his fatherly love. He elects to restore us to fellowship with himself by gently drawing us to him." (\textit{Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life}, 213-214).

\textsuperscript{7} Given that regeneration has, over the centuries, come to be more narrowly defined as effectual calling (and so prior to justification, adoption and sanctification), it is tempting to assume that regeneration precedes justification in Calvin's theology, especially given that the \textit{Institutes} deal with regeneration prior to justification (\textit{Inst. III}: iii ("Our Regeneration by Faith: Repentance")). The citations provided, however, reveal why we have dealt with justification prior to regeneration.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 5 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 437]. In commenting on Col. 3:9 Calvin provides his definitive definition of regeneration: "It contains two parts: the putting off of the old man, and the putting on of the new" (\textit{CC Col.}, 349). For a graphic picture which Calvin portrays of the utter necessity of renewal see his comments on Ezek. 16:13 (\textit{CTS Ezek.}, vol. 2, 108-109 [\textit{CO 40} (68): 345-346]).

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 6 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 438].

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 7 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 438-439].

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 8-9 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 439-440].

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Inst. III}: iii: 3 [\textit{CO 2} (30): 436].
friend Bucer as holding this view, he nevertheless opposed it on the ground that it tended to fuse faith and repentance.

Thus, dissatisfied with contemporary Protestant statements on repentance, Calvin proffers a threefold definition that includes regeneration. He emphasises not so much the first two aspects of repentance (the inner transformation of the soul and the acknowledgement of a coming judgement), but the third, mortification and vivification. United to Christ in his death and resurrection believers are raised to newness of life. “I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore [reformetur] in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam’s transgression.” Repentance is not, then, a once and for all event. It culminates in regeneration, which is the lifelong pursuit of likeness to God: “In order that believers may reach this goal, God assigns to them a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives.” Calvin therefore equates regeneration with sanctification.

The divine telos of regeneration or sanctification is that God’s glory should shine through his children in a disordered universe. Essential to sanctification is the restoration of the imago Dei, which is described by the use of a range of verbs: reparatio, regeneratio, instauratio, reformatio, renovatio, restitutio. For example, Calvin writes that

Adam was at first created in the image of God, so that he might reflect, as in a mirror, the righteousness of God. But that image, having been wiped out by sin, must now be restored [instaurari] in Christ. The regeneration [regeneratio] of the godly is indeed, as is said in 2 Cor. 3:18, nothing else than the reformation [reformatio] of the image of God in them. But there is a far more rich and powerful grace of God in this second creation than in the first. Yet Scripture only considers that our highest perfection consists in our conformity [conformitas] and resemblance [similitudo] to God. Adam lost the image of God which he had originally received, therefore it is necessary that it shall be restored [restitui] to us by Christ. Therefore he teaches that the design in regeneration [regenerationem] is to lead us back from error to that end for which we were created.

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13 Inst. III: iii: 9 [CO 2 (30): 440]. It is in this context that Gerrish says that repentance and regeneration are synonymous terms. The broader picture demonstrates that strictly speaking they are not (Grace and Gratitude, 94).

14 Lucien Richard writes that, “the honor of God is more important than our individual salvation. For Calvin the ultimate end of history was not the salvation of man, but the glory of God.” (The Spirituality of John Calvin. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1974, 114).


16 Leith, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 71.

17 CC Eph., 191 [CO 51 (79): 208-209].
Commenting on Colossians 3:10 Calvin states that the restoration constitutes a renewal of knowledge not of the sort which is merely intellectual, but of that spiritual insight produced by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, who is the Spirit of life, enlightens darkened minds with the truth that transforms the whole person so renewing him in God's image.\(^\text{18}\) This involves a restoration of reason and will, whereby "we may be made like God and that His glory may shine forth in us".\(^\text{19}\) The process is progressive and develops in each believer until the perfect day of the Lord when, "resembling their Heavenly Father in righteousness and holiness, they prove themselves sons true to their nature."\(^\text{20}\) The results of sanctification are, then, only to be fully seen once the cosmos is regenerated.

Regeneration or sanctification implies the fundamental gift of newness of life granted by Christ as is conveyed by the sacrament of baptism. Whereas justification (the adoptive act) relates to the first and third meanings of baptism (cleansing and union with Christ)\(^\text{21}\), Calvin reads regeneration into all three meanings of the sacrament, so indicating the presence of a considerable interface between spiritual union and regeneration on the one hand, and regeneration and adoption on the other.

When comprehended as a token of cleansing, baptism is indicative of the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5).\(^\text{22}\) Yet, Calvin reminds us that "Paul did not mean to signify that our cleansing and salvation are accomplished by water, or that water contains in itself the power to cleanse, regenerate and renew; nor that here is the cause of salvation, but only that in this sacrament are received the knowledge and certainty of such gifts."\(^\text{23}\) Regeneration or sanctification issue directly from Christ, the Word of life, in whom the regenerate are cleansed and washed (Eph. 5:26).

\(^{18}\) CC Col., 349 [CO 52 (80): 121].
\(^{19}\) CC Col., 349-350 [CO 52 (80): 121].
\(^{21}\) See ch. 3.
\(^{22}\) Baptism is "a spiritual washing and sign of our regeneration, [it] serves as an evidence that God introduces us into His Church to make us, as it were, His children and heirs; and thus ought we to apply it during the whole period of our life, in order to confirm us in the promises which has been given us, as well as of the forgiveness of our sins as of the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit." ("Confession of Faith in Name of the Reformed Churches of France" (Tracts, vol. 2, 153-154 [CO 9 (37): 765]). For the typological significance of baptism as an Old Testament token of cleansing see Inst. IV: xv: 9 [CO 2 (30): 966-967].
\(^{23}\) Inst. IV: xv: 2 [CO 2 (30): 962-963].
Secondly, baptism signifies believers’ mortification and newness of life by portraying their burial and resurrection with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, 11; Col. 2:11-12). It denotes the outworking of the wonderful exchange in the personal lives of those who trust him.

We obtain regeneration by Christ’s death and resurrection only if we are sanctified by the Spirit and imbued with a new and spiritual nature. For this reason we obtain and, so to speak, clearly discern in the Father, the cause, in the Son the matter, and in the Spirit the effect, of our purgation and our regeneration.

The “central focus of baptism” is fellowship in Christ’s death. The believer’s sharing in Christ’s death in baptism is also his or her engrafting into his death. Thus, Calvin anticipates his connecting of the sacrament with union with Christ. This engrafting supplies the root of mortification out of which blossoms the effect of Christ’s death in the believer’s life. However, in Colossians 2:12 Paul describes the believer as not only having died but also having been buried with Christ. Noting the difference in wording, Calvin remarks that it means more than that we are crucified with Him. For burial expresses a continued process of mortification. When he says that this is done through baptism (as also in Rom. 6:4), he speaks in his usual manner, ascribing efficacy to the sacrament, that it may not fruitlessly signify what does not exist. By baptism, therefore, we are buried with Christ, because the mortification which Christ there figures, He at the same time effectively executes, that the reality may be conjoined with the sign.

Thus, whereas death with Christ refers to a mortification that is once and for all, burial with Christ has refers to the ongoing work of sanctification. Although death and burial are included in mortification, Calvin understood Paul to be thinking of burial when writing of the washing of regeneration.

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27 CC Rom., 122 [CO 49 (77): 105].

28 CC Col., 332-333 [CO 52 (80): 106]. Of this continued process of mortification Calvin writes: “We are baptized into the mortification of our flesh, which begins with our baptism and which we pursue day by day and which will, moreover, be accomplished when we pass from this life to the Lord.” (Inst. IV: xv: 11 [CO 2 (30): 968]).

29 These nuances were later to be defined in Reformed orthodoxy as definitive and progressive sanctification (see for instance, Murray, Collected Writings. Vol. 2, op. cit., 277-317).
The believer, however, also shares in Christ’s resurrection without which there can be no vivification by the Spirit. Calvin’s comments on Romans 6: 8 shed added light on this:

If [Christians] ought to represent in themselves the image of Christ, both by mortifying the flesh and by the life of the Spirit, the mortifying of the flesh must be done once and for ever, while the life of the Spirit must never cease. This is not, as we have already stated, because our flesh is mortified in us in a single moment, but because we must not shrink from putting it to death. If we return to our own filthiness, we deny Christ, for we can have communion [consortes] with Him only by newness of life, even as He Himself lives an incorruptible lie.

Thirdly, baptism signifies union with Christ. Although this meaning provides the reason for Calvin’s description of baptism as symbolum adoptionis, he nevertheless regards the nexus between the sacrament and Christological union as pertinent to regeneration. This immediately evokes the question as to the nature of the interface between regeneration and adoption.

While both doctrines follow logically on from union with Christ, they do so in different ways. Whereas adoption is contingent upon an engrafting into Christ (the putting on of Christ, Gal. 3:26-27), regeneration is impossible without fellowship in Christ’s death and resurrection (mortification and vivification). Thus, although adoption refers in an immediate sense to mystical union (the adoptive act), the instantaneous spiritual union of the believer with Christ automatically results in his or her regeneration or sanctification (the adoptive state). Hence, the two forms of union combine without conflation under the single rubric of pneumatological union.

Regeneration or sanctification and adoption are set, then, in juxtaposition. Whereas adoption has a particular reference to entrance into the church, regeneration points to the new life enjoyed by the believer once a member of it. This juxtaposition,

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30 Göhler tells us that Calvin’s exposition of vivification is far briefer in his writings than his explanation of mortification: “In der Instituio stehen den vier ausführlichen Kapiteln über die Abtötung (3, VII-X) nur drei Sätze über die Lebendigmachung (3, III, 8) gegenüber.” (Calvins Lehre von der Heiligung, 44). According to Göhler, this can be explained by the presently intangible realisation of the new life, a reality that the new creature knows more as a goal or destiny (Ziel (ibid.)).

31 CC Rom., 126 [CO 49 (77): 109].

32 CC Rom., 123 [CO 49 (77): 106]. “There [Rom. 8:1] [Paul] teaches that those whom the Lord has once received into grace, engrafts into the communion of his Christ, and adopts into the society of the church through baptism - so long as they persevere in faith in Christ (even though they are besieged by sin and still carry sin about in themselves) - are absolved of guilt and condemnation.” Believers are absolved of guilt and condemnation because they possess Christ’s righteousness. It is at this point that Calvin introduces regeneration: “All those who don Christ’s righteousness are at the same time regenerated by the Spirit... we have a pledge of this regeneration in baptism [Rom. 6:3ff].” (Inst. IV: xv: 12 [CO 2 (30): 968]).
however, raises once again the problem of relating the two apparently incompatible models: new birth and adoption (see ch. 2.3), as comes out in Battles’ anthology of Calvin’s spirituality:

\[
\text{Descending to earth,} \\
\text{He [Christ] brought with Him} \\
\text{All the rich heavenly blessings:} \\
\text{With a lavish hand} \\
\text{Showered them upon us.} \\
\text{These are the Holy Spirit’s gifts.} \\
\text{Through Him we are reborn,} \\
\text{Wrested from the power} \\
\text{And chains of the devil,} \\
\text{Freely adopted as God’s children,} \\
\text{Sanctified for every good work.}^{34}
\]

Whichever way Calvin employed the terms, his juxtaposing of them enabled him to demonstrate how those regenerated to spiritual life participate in the adoptive state or experience. It is because the adopted son or daughter has been born anew that the adoptive state can be enjoyed. Calvin therefore subsumes the adoptive state under regeneration so making it possible to speak of the life of sonship.\(^{35}\)

Our interest in sanctification takes us, then, as far as the adoptive experience leads us. While the following discussion does not exhaust his insight into sanctification, it does demonstrate just how filial was his notion of pietas.\(^{36}\) This is characterised by some of the gifts of spiritual union that Calvin enumerates:

When all the gifts God has bestowed upon us are called to mind, they are like rays of the divine countenance by which we are illumined to contemplate that supreme light of goodness; much more is this true of the grace of good works, which shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us (cf. Rom. 8:15).\(^{37}\)

In seeking to apply theology to the Christian life, Calvin keys into a notable teaching of the Devotio Moderna; namely the conjunction of eruditio and pietas: a sancta eruditio as taught particularly by Erasmus. In this he built on the mystical “inwardness, individualism and personalism”\(^{38}\) of the Devotio Moderna without

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\(^{34}\) The Piety of John Calvin, 47 (italics inserted).

\(^{35}\) “The Christian way, [Calvin] maintained, is the life of sonship with a heavenly Father.” (Leith, op.cit., 108). As Leith notes, however, sonship is not the only way that Calvin understands the Christian life. In regarding it as submission to the exclusive and sovereign claim of God he variously describes the relationship as that between a slave and a lord, a soldier and a commander and also a child and a father (ibid., 44).

\(^{36}\) Richard, op.cit., 119.


\(^{38}\) Richard, op.cit., 164. “The Devotio Moderna reacted against scholasticism and Nominalism by advocating an anti-intellectual spirituality. As a renewal of spirituality it made no attempt to integrate
falling victim to its subjectivism. Thus, Calvin sought to balance a subjective and
objective view of the Christian life, as is seen in the six closely inter-related gifts of
sanctification that pertain to the adoptive experience. The first three — liberty,
assurance and prayer — were earlier introduced in connection with the redemptive-
historical development of the new covenant era (ch. 2.3). They are further applied
here to the new covenant believer.39

4.1 Liberty

The historic liberation of the people of God accomplished in the fullness of
the time is mirrored in essence every time a sinner comes to faith in Christ.40 Thus,
the topic is one that has much importance attached to it.41 The only difference is that
through adoption believers enter directly into possession of a mature sonship. They
are not liberated from the constraints of a τελειασμός, or even necessarily from the
bondage of pagan deities. Nevertheless, all who are in Christ have been redeemed
from τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου of one form or another; certainly from bondage to Satan
and slavery to sin. Hence Calvin can express the salvific importance of liberty,
consistent with what we have surmised of the adoptive act, by describing it as
“especially an appendage of justification and is of no little avail in understanding its
power.”42

Given Calvin’s hostility to Antinomianism, it is a tribute to the balanced
nature of his theology that he made so much of Christian liberty.43 In fact, he
regarded true Christian freedom as its greatest antidote: “Some, on the pretext of this

39 “Calvin’s doctrine of the Christian life”, says Leith, “represents a magnificent effort to give
expression to what it means to have to do with the living God every moment of one’s life.” (Calvin’s
Doctrine of the Christian Life, 224).
40 “As those who walk in Christ are made just before God we are called to walk in the freedom of the
sons of God.” (Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, 141).
41 In the light of the omission of a chapter on adoption in the Institutes, it is interesting that Calvin
writes of liberty that, “he who proposes to summarize gospel teaching ought by no means to omit an
explanation of this topic. For it is a thing of prime necessity, and apart from a knowledge of it
consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubting; they hesitate and recoil from many
things; they constantly waver and are afraid.”
42 Inst. III: xix: 1 [CO 2 (30): 613]; cf the first aspect of liberty (II: xx: 2 [CO 2 (30): 625-626]). As
an expert exegete of Paul’s theology, Calvin could not have failed to notice the connection that Paul
makes between adoption and liberty. His description of liberty as an appendage to justification would
seem then to confirm our argument in the preceding chapter that the adoptive act is subsumed under
justification. This is not altered by the fact that Calvin also links freedom with adoption in III: xix: 5.
freedom, shake off all obedience toward God and break out into unbridled license. Others disdain it, thinking that it takes away all moderation, order and choice of all things."44 What then is the Christian liberty enjoyed by the adopted?45

Firstly, it consists in the freedom of not having to justify oneself by the keeping of the whole law. Genuine liberty exists, says Calvin, "when the consciences of believers, in seeking assurance of their justification before God, ... rise above and advance beyond the law, forgetting all law righteousness."46 In justification, the sinner is free to look to Christ from whom alone mercy is received. Justified through faith alone, believers must stand foursquare on the righteousness of Christ for the rest of their Christian lives: "Standfast in the freedom wherewith Christ has set you free and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." (Gal. 5:1). To do otherwise is to commit the Judaizers' error of obscuring the clarity of the gospel with works of the law. The adopted must, then, forever appreciate their freedom from the law's condemnation, for it was bought for them by Christ through his own perfect fulfilment of its requirements.

Secondly, liberty involves observing the law "not as if constrained by the necessity of the law, but that freed from [its] yoke they willingly obey God's will."47 It is not, therefore, to be equated with licentiousness. On the contrary, it is essential to obedience. Indeed, warns Calvin, "those who infer that we ought to sin because we are not under the law understand that this freedom has nothing to do with them. For its purpose is to encourage us to do good."48 In redemption, the adopted are delivered from the bondage of keeping the law as a way of salvation, but must use their freedom to obey God's law as a way of life.49 Although the law has no place in the believer's conscience before the judgement seat of Christ, nevertheless it does not cease to exhort believers.50 "The law", says Calvin, "continues to perform its office

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43 Gustav E Mueller describes it as "the center of Calvin's ethics" ("Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion" as an Illustration of Christian Thinking" (Gamble, op.cit., vol. 4, 226).
45 For Calvin's treatment of Christian freedom see Inst. III: xix; Parker, Calvin, 105-106; Niesel, op.cit., 99-101; Leith, op.cit., 49.
49 Writing of the "imposters" who opposed Paul, Calvin says that they "imbued the common people with they very wicked notion that this obedience obviously availed to deserve God's grace". (Inst. III: xix: 3 [CO 2 (30): 615]).
This freedom to obey is the product of the changed heart granted in regeneration. It is manifest in a new love for God and his will which clearly distinguishes filial obedience from servitude. In regeneration the positive response to the “fatherly tenderness” of God takes into account the imperfection of his children:

Those bound by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned certain tasks for each day by their masters. These servants think they have accomplished nothing, and dare not appear before their masters unless they have fulfilled the exact measure of their tasks. But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their fathers, do not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful father, however small, rude and imperfect these may be.

Thirdly, liberty pertains to those things that are indifferent (adiaphoroi adiaphora). Here Calvin keenly addresses those with over-sensitive consciences so as to protect them from the threat of superstition. They must think of the gifts that God designed for them. These they should fully enjoy without scruple of conscience or trouble of mind. The adiaphora are legitimate matters of which believers “are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently.” To enjoy the full scope of this liberty, however, believers must avoid addiction to even legitimate things.

The adopted, however, do not function in isolation from their brethren. Following Paul, Calvin was greatly concerned for the weaker brethren. For their sake the redeemed must refrain from the reckless use of liberty. Many err, says Calvin, because “they use their freedom indiscriminately and unwisely, as though it were not sound and safe if men did not witness it. By this heedless use, they very often offend weak brothers.” His point is that the abuse of freedom denies its original purpose, the safeguarding of the consciences of those brethren quietly observing. However,

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51 CC Gal., 106 [CO 50 (78): 256].
54 Inst. III: xix: 7 [CO 2 (30): 616]; cf. 9 [CO 2 (30): 618]. In III: xix: 12 [CO 2 (30): 621] Calvin says: “We have due control over our freedom if it makes no difference to us to restrict it when it is fruitful to do so.”
55 Inst. III: xix: 10 [CO 2 (30): 619]. In III: xix: 12 [CO 2 (30): 621] Calvin asserts that “nothing is plainer than this rule: that we should use our freedom if it results in the edification of our neighbor,
Calvin distinguishes between not giving offence (*scandalum infirmorum*) and not receiving offence (*scandalum pharisaeorum*). He protests against those who through wickedness take hold of the innocent activities of others in order to wrench them into occasions for offence. This attitude Calvin dismisses as belonging “to persons of bitter disposition and pharisaical pride”.56

### 4.2 Prayer

In the new covenant era liberty is clearly evident in prayer and is a notable privilege of believing Jew and Gentile alike. However, Calvin’s interest in prayer extends beyond the initial cry of liberation. It exemplifies the Trinitarian structure of his theology. Wilterdink notes that, “as Christ is he *in* whom God becomes Father to us: so the Spirit is he *through* whom our adoption in Christ is realized.”57 The Trinitarianism of Calvin’s doctrine of prayer is very manifest in the *Institutes* (III: xx). There it is obvious that he regards God the Father as object of prayer. Elsewhere he writes: “Now seeing God is our Saviour Christ’s Father, it followeth necessarily, that he is also our Father.”58 It should not surprise us that the Father is the one to whom prayer is directed, for it is from his hand that every blessing comes. However, it would be impossible to approach the Father without the merits of Christ the mediator and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Hence, Calvin initially describes the Holy Spirit as the “*spiritus adoptionis*”59 (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). This is “because he is the witness [*testis*] to us of 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; and he encourages us to have trust in prayer. In fact, he supplies the very words [*imo verba dictat*] so that we may fearlessly cry, ‘Abba, Father!’”.60

All this requires some elaboration. It speaks volumes of the ongoing relationship that the adopted have with their heavenly Father through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. One thing is certain: prayer is made not for God’s sake but his children’s. *Pietas* is, therefore, essentially filial61 because, by virtue of it, the

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57 Wilterdink, “The Fatherhood of God in Calvin’s Thought”, 179.
58 The *Catechisme*, or *Manner to Teach Children The Christian Religion*, 2.
60 Inst. III: i: 3 [CO 2 (30): 395].
61 Richard, *op.cit.*, 119.
adopted look to their heavenly Father to bountifully provide for them (vide infra). Indeed, it is the knowledge of God’s paternal affection that encourages them to pray:62

Persuaded of God’s fatherly love, they gladly commit themselves to his safekeeping and do not hesitate to implore the assistance that he freely promises, still they are not elated by heedless confidence, as if they had cast away shame, but they so climb upward by the steps of the promises that they still remain suppliants in their self-abasement.63

Prayer is, then, the principal exercise of faith whereby the adopted speak to their Father.64 He “tolerates even [their] stammering and pardons [their] ignorance whenever something inadvertently escapes [them]; as indeed without this mercy there would be no freedom to pray.”65

Calvin’s doctrine of prayer is important, not least because it prevents the theology of God’s Fatherhood from degenerating into mere sentimentality Although divine paternity is to the fore, Calvin avoids the nineteenth-century temptation to obscure the dreadful majesty of God. For this reason, Christ’s mediatorial work is ever necessary:

In calling God our Father, we certainly plead the name of Christ. For with what confidence could any man call God his Father? Who would have the presumption to arrogate to himself the honour of a Son of God were we not gratuitously adopted as his sons in Christ.66

Thus, Christ - the believer’s intermediary - turns the Father’s throne of dreadful glory (solium formidabilis gloriae) into a throne of grace (solium gratiae).67 Consequently, personal unworthiness is no barrier to prayer:

Since no man is worthy to present himself to God and come into his sight, the Heavenly Father himself, to free us at once from shame and fear, which might well have thrown our hearts into despair, has given us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our advocate (1 John 2:1) and mediator with him (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. Heb. 8:6 and 9:15), by whose guidance we may confidently come to him, and with such an intercessor, trusting nothing we ask in his name, will be denied us, as nothing can be denied to him by the Father.

Access to the Father is then utterly reliant on Christ’s priestly work:68 the offering of an acceptable sacrifice for sin and his ongoing intercession for his people.

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62 Father, the “sweetest of names”, is granted to the adopted in order to stimulate them to prayer (Inst. III: xx: 14 [CO 2 (30): 639]). “Our most gracious Father will not cast out those whom, he not only urges, but stirs up with every possible means, to come to him.”
64 Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 271ff..
66 Inst. III: xx: 36 [CO 2 (30): 642].
Calvin’s insistence on the uniqueness of Christ’s mediatorship constitutes a typical Protestant rejection of the Romish doctrine of the intercession of the saints and of the Sophists’s teaching that believers are eternal and undying mediators of intercession. Christ alone has entered the heavenly sanctuary once and for all, there to petition his Father for those remaining in the outer court and thereby unable to present their needs to the Father. To reject the mediatorship of Christ is then to spurn the Father who set him forth. Indeed, one of the proofs of adoption is the wholehearted accepted of Christ, the elder brother, as the unique mediator whom God has ordained. In principle this should be no problem, for the adopted are dependent on Christ’s brotherly affection for the presentation of their needs to the Father.

Interestingly, in commenting on the components of prayer Calvin places petition prior to thanksgiving. If God’s children are to obtain anything from their Father, they must offer prayer in the name of Christ. Only then is it agreeable to the Father.

Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ? He, while He is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother that what he has of his own by nature may become ours by benefit of adoption if we embrace this great blessing with sure faith.

Most of all, the sons and daughters of God require daily forgiveness. While the adoptive state does not allow the sons of God to treat sin lightly, they should not despair, for although filial transgression displeases the Father, he hears their cries and

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68 “Since [Christ] is the only way, and the one access, by which it is granted us to come to God (cf. John 14:6), to those who turn aside from this way and forsake this access, no way and no access to God remain; nothing is left in his throne but wrath, judgement and terror. Moreover, since the Father has sealed him (cf. John 6:27) as our Head (Matt. 2:6) and Leader (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18), those who in any way turn aside or incline away from him are trying their level best to destroy and disfigure the mark imprinted by God. Thus Christ is constituted the only Mediator, by whose intercession the Father is for us rendered gracious and easily entreated.” (Inst. III: xx: 19 [CO 2 (30): 645]).
69 Inst. III: xx: 20 [CO 2 (300: 645-646); The Piety of John Calvin, 95f.; Parker, Calvin, 109 and 110. However, Calvin did teach a priesthood of all believers that is sponsored by Christ’s priestly work itself (CTS Zech., 88 [CO 44 (72): 171-172]; Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, cf. 14 and 29, 33).
70 Inst. III: xx: 21 [CO 2 (30): 646-647]. Here Calvin cites Ambrose: Christ “is our mouth, through which we speak to the Father; he is our eye, through which we see the Father; he is our right hand, through which we offer ourselves to the Father. Unless he intercedes, there is no intercourse with God either for us or for all the saints.”
71 The Piety of John Calvin, 97, 100. On Calvin’s personal prayers see 117ff. where his familial approach to theology is clearly reflected.
groans. "He is not only a father but by far the best and kindest of all fathers, provided we still cast ourselves upon his mercy, although we are ungrateful, rebellious, and froward children."73

Prayer could not be made at all without the Spirit's power and stimulus. He it is who testifies to us that we are the children of God, who at the same time pours confidence into our hearts, so that we dare to invoke God as Father.74 In evoking prayer the Spirit moves believers' hearts to trust their heavenly Father:75

[He] is not some mysterious power which calls forth in us a certain religious awareness; but... is the Spirit which draws us to the Son, the Spirit through whose action God accepts us as His children for the sake of Christ.76

Any “prayer” offered without Spirit-inspired faith is just a natural impulse that forgets that God is a Judge as well as heavenly Father.77 The stimulus of the Holy Spirit is needed, then, “because the narrowness of our hearts cannot comprehend God’s boundless favor”. Thus, the Father has given his adopted not only Christ as pledge and guarantee of their adoption, but also the Spirit as witness of the same. Through him the adopted cry with free and full voice, “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15),78 in exactly the same way as Christ, for the sons of God have been endowed with the same Spirit as the Son.79

The Spirit teaches the adopted how to pray. He supplies them with the words of Christ as well as the composure that denotes the authentic filial attitude.80 As the Spirit of adoption “he has not been given to harass us with fear or torment us with anxiety, but rather to allay our disquiet, to bring our minds to a state of tranquility, and to stir us up to call on God with confidence [securam] and freedom.”81 This is what Calvin calls “the special effect produced by the Spirit” who enables the Father's

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73 Inst. III: xx: 37 [CO 2 (30): 663].
74 For more on this see E David Willis “The Context of Contemporary Theology” in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 4, especially 94.
75 The adopted “dare to call God... Father only by the instigation and incitement of the Spirit of Christ.” (CC Gal., 75 [CO 50 (78): 228]). For the importance of the Spirit’s leading in prayer see Inst. III: ii: 39.
76 Niesel, op.cit., 155.
77 Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 286.
78 Inst. III: xx: 37 [CO 2 (30): 663].
79 CC Gal., 75 [CO 50 (78): 228].
80 Inst. III: xx: 34 [CO 2 (30): 661].
81 CC Rom., 167-168 [CO 49 (77): 148].
children to overcome all their difficulties in prayer and in life.\footnote{82} This he does by helping to carry their burden:

Paul admonishes us that, though we are weak in every part and various infirmities threaten our fall, there is sufficient protection in the Spirit of God to prevent us from ever being destroyed or being overwhelmed by any accumulation of evils. But these resources of the Spirit instruct us with greater certainty that it is by God’s appointment that we strive with groanings and sighings for our redemption.

Prayer, then, is not merely a devotional exercise. The Father lays all manner of burden upon his children in order to draw them to prayer.\footnote{83} However, the Spirit helps them to carry their burdens by instructing them how and what to pray (Rom. 8:26-27). This is just as well, for the adopted are often too overcome with cares to say the appropriate things in prayer or make suitable decisions in life. Therefore, the Spirit guides them through their darkness towards the light. Indeed, “the presence of heavenly grace shines forth in the very zeal of prayer”,\footnote{84} which is produced by an impulse of the Spirit that exceeds intellectual capacity.

Prayer, then, is the product of the Spirit’s grace. He not only inspires prayer, but also ensures that it both penetrates heaven and avails with the Father. “We are bidden to knock. But no one of his own accord could premeditate a single syllable, unless God were to knock to gain admission to our souls by the secret impulse of His Spirit, and thus open our hearts to Himself.”:

\begin{quote}
God must work therein: For we are of ourselves dull, and without all lust to prayer: but the Spirit of God doth stir up in our hearts such sighs, as no tongue is able to express, and indueth our minds with such a zeal and fervent affection, as God requireth in prayer.\footnote{85}
\end{quote}

Thus, Calvin jointly regards faith and the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the key to the subjective side of prayer:

The Spirit which makes itself manifest in our prayer is not some mysterious power which calls forth in us a certain religious awareness; but it is the Spirit which draws us to the Son, the Spirit through whose action God accepts us as His children for the sake of Christ.\footnote{86}

Such then is the Trinitarian nature of prayer.

\footnote{82} CC Rom., 177 [CO 49 (77): 157].
\footnote{83} Richard, \textit{op. cit.}, 121; \textit{The Piety of John Calvin}, 93; Gerrish, \textit{Grace and Gratitude}, 100.
\footnote{84} CC Rom., 178 [CO 49 (77): 157]. The fervency of prayer arises out of the realisation of personal wretchedness. This awareness must be sufficiently acute to produce “a fervent desire to obtain grace at God’s hand, which desire must kindle our hearts, and ingender in us a fervent prayer.” (\textit{Catechism}, \textit{op. cit.}, 19).
\footnote{85} \textit{Ibid.}
\footnote{86} Niesel, \textit{op. cit.}, 155.
4.3 Assurance

Implicit in Calvin’s whole notion of prayer is the assurance with which the adopted approach their heavenly Father.87 This assurance is rooted in the believer’s mystical union with Christ:

Since it is into [Christ’s] body the Father has destined those to be engrafted [inserere] whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life [cf. Rev. 21: 27] if we are in ‘communion’ with Christ [Christo communicamus].88

However, the moment that the doctrine of assurance is introduced we are faced with a thorny issue that has dogged studies of Calvin and Calvinism ever since the nineteenth century; namely, its relationship to faith. Whereas Calvin understood assurance as of the essence of faith, the WCF later presented assurance as distinct from it.89 Consequently, the various disputants have sought to discern whether Westminster theology markedly departed from Calvin on this question. Something needs, therefore, to be said about the reformer’s position.

Since Christ’s advent, those possessing the Spirit of adoption have been able to pray to their Father with what Calvin calls an “assured faith”. This is implied in all that has been said of faith: first, that it believes God to be our Father and, secondly, that it confidently feeds off the promises of God that are found in his trustworthy Word and outworked in redemption and providence in the believer’s experience. Thus, assurance is implicit to faith: “Under the name ‘Father’ is set before us that God who appeared to us in his own image that we should call upon him with assured

87 The doctrine of assurance in Calvin’s theology is a substantial. Beeke notes that the subject pervades not only the Institutes, but also the commentaries and his sermons. The vital and practical nature of the doctrine lay in the fact that Calvin “addressed individuals newly delivered from the bondage of Rome, wherein was taught that assurance was heretical. (Beeke, The Assurance of Faith, 63).


89 See WCF XIV and XVIII. Randall C Gleason has outlined three different schools of thought on this issue: (i) The old school of William Cunningham and R L Dabney who favour the distinction found in the Westminster Standards, believing Calvin to have held an untenable position; (ii) the more recent school of R T Kendall, Charles Bell and Anthony Lane who regard the Westminster position as a qualitative departure from Calvin’s preferred position; (iii) the most recent school of Joel R Beeke who holds that Westminster went quantitatively but not qualitatively beyond Calvin’s thought (see John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality. Studies in Church History. Vol. 3. New York et al.: Peter Lang, 1995, 20-26). See also E David Willis, “The Context of Contemporary Theology”, esp. 94.
faith. "90 "The knowledge of faith", says Calvin, "consists in assurance rather than in comprehension."91

Although Calvin's view of faith is therefore intellectual, it is not reducible to an assent. "As with Luther and Zwingli," says Beeke, "faith is never merely assent (assensus) for Calvin, but always involves both knowledge (cognitio) and confidence or trust (fiducia)."92 He notes that whereas the element of knowledge rests on the Word of God and is foundational to faith, confidence or trust rests on the promises found in God's Word which serve as the ground of assurance. Thus, when cognitio is coupled with fiducia there is saving faith of which assurance is the very essence.93

One of the places in which Calvin is most explicit is in his commentary on Ephesians 3:12 ("through whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in him."). There he says that, "Paul expresses elegantly the power and nature of faith, and the confidence necessary for the true invocation of God."94 It must not be confused with a bare and confused knowledge about God. Rather, faith is directed to Christ through whom God is sought. In seeking, faith begets confidence and, consequently, boldness. Thus, there are three steps climbed in the search for God:

"First, we believe the promises of God; next, by resting in them, we conceive confidence, so that we may have a good and quiet mind. From this follows boldness, which enables us to banish fear, and to entrust ourselves courageously and steadfastly to God."

It is certain, then, that Calvin opposed the distinction of assurance and faith.

With Roman theology in mind, he protests:

Those who separate faith from confidence act like men trying to take heat or light from the sun. I acknowledge, indeed, that, in proportion to the measure of faith, confidence is small in some and greater in others; but faith will never be found without these effects or fruits. A trembling, hesitating, doubting conscience will

90 Inst. III: xx: 40 [CO 2 (30): 665]. "Faith", says Calvin, "is a knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us and a sure persuasion of its truth" (Inst. III: ii: 12 [CO 2 (30): 407]). Even in the first edition of the Institutes, Calvin portrays assurance as integral to faith when he asks: "If we had not been adopted in Christ as children of grace, with what assurance would anyone have called God 'Father'?" (cited Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 89).
92 Beeke, Assurance of Faith, 47. Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 68. Kendall implicitly acknowledges this: "The position which Calvin wants to pre-eminently to establish (and fundamentally assumes) is that faith is knowledge. Calvin notes some biblical synonyms for faith, all simple nouns, such as 'recognition' (agnitio) and 'knowledge' (scientia). He describes faith as illumination (illuminatio), knowledge as opposed to the submission of our feeling (cognitio, non sensus nostri submissio), certainty (certitudino), a firm conviction (solido persuasio), assurance (securitas), firm assurance (solida securitas), and full assurance (plena securitas)." (op.cit., 19).
93 Ibid., 48.
94 CC Eph., 164 [CO 51 (79): 183].
Significantly, this confidence and boldness is typical of the believer’s demeanour upon entrance into the adoptive state:

He is the “Spirit of Adoption” because he is the witness to us of the free benevolence of God with which God the Father has embraced us in the beloved only-begotten Son to become a Father to us; and he encourages us to have trust in prayer. In fact he supplies the very words so that we may fearlessly cry, “Abba, Father!” (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6).96

This comes to the fore in Galatians 4:4-6 and Romans 8. On the former passage Calvin says of the Pauline use of κρατειν: 

I consider that this participle is used to express greater boldness [fiduciae]. Uncertainty does not let us speak calmly, but keeps our mouth half-shut, so that the half-broken words can hardly escape from a stammering tongue. ‘Crying’ [clamor], on the contrary, is a sign of certainty [securitatis] and unwavering confidence [fiduciae]. “For we have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear”, as he says in Rom.8:15, but of freedom to full confidence [plenam fiduciam].97

Similarly, on Romans 8:15 Calvin comments on Paul’s analysis of the “fatherly indulgence of God by which He forgives His people the infirmity of the flesh and the sins under which they still labour. Our confidence [fidem] in this forbearance of God, Paul teaches us, is made certain by the Spirit of adoption, who would not bid us be bold in prayer without sealing to us the free pardon.”98

While assurance pervades the Christian life far beyond the realm of prayer, nevertheless the initial acquaintance that the adopted have with their Father is in communication with him.99 This is particularly evident from Calvin’s rules on

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95 CC Eph., 164 [CO 51 (79): 183-184]; cf. Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 64.
97 CC Gal., 75-76 [CO 50 (78): 228]. Calvin gives a fine illustration of assurance in his record of the dying words of Madame Laurent de Normandie in his letter to Madame de Cany (29th April 1549): “The hour draws near, I must needs depart from the world; this flesh asks only to go away into corruption; but I feel certain that my God is withdrawing my soul into his kingdom. I know what a poor sinful woman I am, but my confidence is in his goodness, and in the death and passion of his Son. Therefore, I do not doubt of my salvation, since he has assured me of it. I go to him as to a Father.” (“To Madame de Cany”, dated 29th April 1549, Letters, 2, 221). What is noticeable here once again is the interchangeability of the terms used for assurance.
98 CC Rom., 168 [CO 49 (77): 148]. “For Calvin, the assurance of faith is primarily founded on the assurance of the conscience that Jesus Christ dwells in us and we in Christ, so that he might take away all of the evils of which the conscience makes us aware (ignorance, impotence, sin, guilt, death, and wrath) and freely bestow on us all the good things the conscience testifies we lack (wisdom, sanctification, justification, life, and blessing). Only in this way do the faithful have the confidence and boldness to call upon God as ‘Abba, Father!”’ (Zachman, The Assurance of Faith, 176).
99 “The children of God [filii Dei] differ from the ungodly in that, whereas these men rest supinely in forgetfulness of God, and are never at ease but when they remove to the greatest possible distance from God, His children have peace with God, and approach Him cheerfully and freely. We infer,
genuine prayer.¹⁰⁰ The first refers to reverence in prayer that involves the refusal either to be distracted through the inadequate engagement of one’s faculties, or to ask of God more than he allows. In remembering this, the believer has confidence that in petitioning God for things in accordance with his will, he will be heard (1 John 5: 14).¹⁰¹ Reverence in prayer, however, requires the aid of the Holy Spirit because the children of God do not know how to pray appropriately. Therefore, the Spirit comes to their help by interceding for them with unspeakable groans (Rom. 8:26). Calvin explains that it is not the Spirit himself who prays or groans but rather that he arouses within the adopted “assurance, desires, sighs, to conceive which our natural powers would scarcely suffice”.

In addition, Calvin’s fourth and last rule of prayer speaks of a confident hope which believers have in the favour of God. Just as under the law the children of Israel derived confidence in prayer solely from God’s mercy,¹⁰² so new covenant believers, despairing of self, look upward to God. This is explained most clearly in a letter to the King of France (1557):

We believe that by this one sacrifice, which Jesus Christ offered on the cross, we are reconciled to God so as to be held and reputed just, and that by this means we have liberty to invoke God with full confidence that he is our Father, inasmuch as by adoption we obtain what Jesus Christ has by nature.¹⁰³

Thus, the adopted “depend on no assurance whatever but this alone: that, reckoning themselves to be of God, they do not despair that he will take care of them.”¹⁰⁴

It may be wondered how the believer can be assured of the favour of God while simultaneously conscious of his righteous vengeance against sin. Certainly, Christians feel the tension of relating to one who interacts both paternally and juridically. Indeed, despite the predominance of divine paternity in Calvin’s thought,
he is never in danger of downplaying the justice of God. He recognises therefore that assurance is not a panacea for all pain. Rather, God’s children call upon their Father out of their pain and in the confidence they will be heard:

But “assurance” [Fiduciam] I do not understand to mean that which soothes our mind with sweet and perfect repose, releasing it from every anxiety. For to repose so peacefully is the part of those who, when all affairs are flowing to their liking, are touched by no care, burn with no desire, toss with no fear. But for the saints the occasion that best stimulates them to call upon God is when, distressed by their own need, they are by the greatest unrest, and are almost driven out of their senses, until faith opportunely comes to their relief. For among such tribulations God’s goodness so shines upon them that even when they groan with weariness under the present ills, and also are troubled and tormented by the fear of greater ones, yet, relying upon his goodness, they are relieved of the difficulty of bearing them, and are solaced and hope for escape and deliverance. It is fitting therefore that the godly man’s prayer arise from these two emotions, that it also contain and represent both. That is, that he groan under present ills and anxiously fear those to come, yet at the same time take refuge in God, not at all doubting he is ready to extend his helping hand. It is amazing how much our lack of trust provokes God if we request of him a boon that we do not expect.

Unsurprisingly, the Spirit does not evoke prayers of doubt, but helps the adopted to appropriate the commands and promises of Scripture. He thereby acts as their guide and teacher both in prayer and throughout life, ensuring that the injunctions of Scripture are met with unhesitating obedience and the promises with unwavering assurance.

Thus, Calvin strenuously sought to show that assurance is part and parcel of faith. Indeed, he accuses those who mingle doubt with faith of being ignorant of its whole nature. Appealing to Scripture, Calvin argues that, “Paul and John recognise none as the children of God but those who know it.” His polemic, however, must be understood in the context of the Roman objection to assurance as the believer’s privilege. By emphasising how essential assurance is to faith, Calvin seeks to instruct those newly liberated from the bondage of Rome that personal assurance, far from being heretical, should be the norm in Christian living. In opposing the Roman doctrine, he insists that if salvation is based on works-righteousness, then assurance would naturally be impossible. This was Paul’s point against the Judaizers. “He argues”, says Calvin, “that there will be no certainty of faith if it depends on

107 Leith, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 94.
108 Beeke, op.cit., 63. Given both the ecclesiastical context and the nature of Paul’s theology, it should not be surprising that the concepts of assurance and liberty are so interwoven in Calvin’s theology (Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 308ff.).
human works - a dependence which he hesitates not to pronounce most absurd." 109

Thus, Calvin claims that the certainty of justification by faith must involve assurance. Hence, Calvin faced a significantly different situation than the one that later confronted the commissioners of the Westminster Assembly in formulating the Westminster Standards.

While all are agreed that Calvin understood assurance to be of the essence of faith, Beeke exposes the way in which the secondary sources have often played down what Calvin writes of "infancy of faith", "beginnings of faith", and "weak faith". 110 In reality, assurance is not so much the essence of faith that doubt is never experienced. Frequently, assured faith is assailed by doubt, acute temptations and struggles against Satan and the world the flesh and the devil. 111 In fact, Calvin believed assurance to shadow the fluctuations of faith. Paradoxically, then, although he defines faith as full assurance, it is still possible to lack assurance.

In response to this paradox, Beeke outlines four principles operative in Calvin's thought. 112 First, he distinguishes between the "ought" of faith and the "is" of daily experience. Whereas faith is assured, it is never so assured as to be free of all doubt. 113 Thus, when Calvin regards faith in terms of a full assurance, he is setting out an ideal to be sought after. It is the Word, then, which informs Calvin's definition of faith rather than life's experience.

Secondly, Beeke distinguishes between the "ought" of the spirit and the "is" of the flesh. 114 The believer knows a "sure consolation" and the imperfection of the flesh sided by side within. Whereas consolation arises from the assurance of God's promises, fear is aroused from thoughts of his wrath against sin. However, it is the

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110 For instance, in Inst. III: ii: 11-12 [CO 2 (30): 406-408], having noted that the reprobate can have transitory faith, Calvin says of true believers that "however deficient or weak faith may be in the elect, still, because the Spirit of God is for them the sure guarantee [arrha] and seal [sigillum] of their adoption [Eph. 1: 14; cf. II Cor. 1: 22], the mark he has engraved can never be erased from their hearts" (cf Inst. III: ii: 36 [CO 2 (30): 428]).
111 Assurance of Faith, 51ff.. "Calvin argues... that though faith ought to be assuring, no perfect assurance exists in this life."
112 The limitations of space prevent us from providing the evidence of Beeke's case. See the Assurance of Faith, 54-72.
114 The flesh Calvin defines as all the endowments of human nature. The spirit, he says, refers to that part of the soul that the Spirit of God purifies from evil and refashions so that the image of God shines through. Therefore, both terms refer to the soul: the flesh to the part retaining its natural affections, the Spirit to the regenerate part (CC Rom., 151 [CO 49 (77): 132]).
fear of divine anger that keeps the believer's assurance from degenerating into presumption.

Thirdly, the smallest degree of faith contains assurance even though it cannot be appropriated due to the weakness of faith. This is because the smallest degree of faith is the Spirit's seed. Even when "shadowed on every side with great darkness, we are nevertheless illumined as much as need be for firm assurance when, to show forth its mercy, the light of God sheds even a little of its radiance." Thus, while the sense or feeling of faith fluctuates, the seed of faith remains. Weak assurance results, then, from weak faith.

Fourthly, Calvin places the faith-assurance relationship in a Trinitarian framework. The central thought is that assurance is based on the electing purposes of God and ensures the preservation of his people. The Father elects his people in the Son and through the Spirit, so that assurance of salvation becomes assurance of election. As knowledge of one's election is bound up with the realisation of it in union with Christ, Calvin distances his doctrine of predestination from an objective, decretal and hidden act, preferring to regard it as a subjective assurance. Thus, once in Christ through faith, the believer sees his election and is assured. Beeke therefore concludes that it is Calvin's doctrine of election that answers the question of assurance.

Nevertheless, the possibility of self-deceit persists and so there must be rigorous self-examination conducted with the Spirit's help. The object of the examination is not to consider the existence of personal faith but the work of Christ which the Holy Spirit applies to the believer's life: "If we have been chosen in [Christ], we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then, is the mirror

116 From these first three principles Beeke draws out several conclusions in regard to the relationship of assurance and faith: (i) Calvin includes assurance in the essence of faith and full assurance in the quintessence of faith without demanding that the believer consciously feel assured at all times. That is, assurance is essential for faith and its exercise. (ii) On this basis the views of Calvin and the Calvinists merge: Assurance may be possessed without being known. Contrary to the Westminster commissioners, Calvin defines faith in its assuring character rather than assurance as a self-conscious experimental phenomenon. (iii) Calvin does not adopt a two-tier approach to faith that is evident in the Puritans ("faith in exercise" versus "full assurance of faith") and the Second Reformation divines in Holland ("refuge-taking faith" versus "assured faith"). Nevertheless, Calvin was sympathetic to this approach as evidenced by talk of "measure of faith". (iv) Cunningham may be right to argue that Calvin had not worked out all the details of the relationship between faith and assurance, hence the tension in his position. See Assurance of Faith, 61-64.
wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."\textsuperscript{117} Thus, summarises Beeke, "personal assurance is never to be divorced from the election of the Father, the redemption of the Son, the application of the Spirit, and the instrumental means of saving faith."\textsuperscript{118}

This introduces us to the question of the *syllogismus practicus*,\textsuperscript{119} which Willis defines as "an argument from one’s outward conduct, and especially from one’s evident peace and prosperity, to the conclusion that one is of the elect company."\textsuperscript{120} Although it belongs to a later date, it is suggested that later Calvinism departed from Calvin in looking for signs of assurance apart from Christ. According to Beeke this is only partially correct. Although it is anachronistic to speak in a formal sense of Calvin as having employed the *syllogismus practicus*, nevertheless he used its principles to practical effect. This is not to say that Calvin was as dependent on syllogistic reasoning as his successors, but he did acknowledge that features of Christian living play a secondary role in strengthening faith.\textsuperscript{121}

So, for instance, he writes of the Pauline “test” (Rom. 8:16): “Only when those who have embraced the promise of grace exercise themselves in prayers, … is [it] seen how serious is the faith of every believer.” On another occasion, he states that “we... do not deny that newness of life as the effect of divine adoption, serves to confirm confidence [*fiduciam]*.”\textsuperscript{122} Of works, he calculates that:

\begin{quote}
When all the gifts God has bestowed upon us are called to mind, they are like rays of the divine countenance by which we are illuminated to contemplate that supreme
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{117} Inst. III: xxiv: 5 [CO 2 (30): 716].
\textsuperscript{118} Op.cit., 68.
\textsuperscript{119} Beeke, op.cit., 72-78. In this section, Beeke takes umbrage with Niesel’s argument that Calvin rejected the *syllogismus practicus* (Niesel, op.cit., 169-181). “Niesel”, he says, “has unduly exaggerated the Calvin-Calvinist distinction on both sides.” Niesel’s position is that Calvin’s teaching was wholly centred on Christ. Thus, an advocacy of the *syllogismus practicus* would have detracted from assurance by deflecting attention from Christ to the Christian. However, in his chapter “Syllogismus practicus bei Calvin”, Kwang-Woong Yu also takes Niesel to task. Of the contribution of works to assurance, Yu writes: “Die Werke des Glaubens sind Gnadengaben Gottes, sie sind also nur Hilfsmittel, die über sich hinausweisen. Hilfsmittel stärken nur den Glauben, sie begründen ihn nicht. Die Barmherzigkeit Gottes begründet nur den Glauben, nicht die Nachstenliebe.” (Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor, op.cit., 262). He concludes that “Niesel sollte darum den Syllogismus practicus in Calvins Theologie nicht leugnen. Der Rüchschluss [sic] von der Werken auf den Glauben - nicht auf Erwählung - hat bei ihm seinen festen Platz. Er stärkt den Glauben, aber er gibt - darin hat Niesel recht - keine Glaubensgewissheit.”
\textsuperscript{120} David Willis, “The Influence of Laelius Socinians on Calvin’s Doctrines of the Merits of Christ and the Assurance of Faith.” (Gamble, op.cit., vol. 5, 239).
\textsuperscript{121} Rightly or wrongly, Willis comments that, “a well developed *syllogismus practicus* would be more consonant with ‘confidence of the flesh’ than with ‘assurance of faith’. The latter does not exclude the faithful being subject to doubts, uncertainties and fear.” (Ibid., 65-66??).
light of goodness; much more is this true of the grace of good works, which shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us [cf. Rom. 8:15].

Consequently, "when God's image appears in us, it is, as it were, the seal of His adoption." Thus, although works do not play a foundational role in securing assurance, nevertheless they are essential, for as justification is the ground of assurance so sanctification supports it.

Calvin says nothing then to deny the legitimate use of the *syllogismus practicus*. By example, however, he warns against its misuse. Works can only assure of salvation when viewed in the light of the Father's election, the Son's redemption and the Spirit's sanctification and the exercise of saving faith. Thus, Calvin's theology of assurance carries in Wendel's words, "the germs of Puritanism". We shall enlarge on the futuristic aspects of this assurance in relation to the inheritance (4.6).

### 4.4 Providence

Although God placed human beings in the world so that he might be a Father to them, the Fall robbed humanity of the ability to infer from merely gazing at the universe that the sovereign Lord of the cosmos cares for them (ch. 2.2). However, when the adopted are brought into the church, they enter a privileged realm of providence. There they are taught of their Father from Scripture and witness him at work in their own experience. "Not only does the Lord through forgiveness of sins receive and adopt [recipit et cooptat] us once for all into the church," says Calvin, "but through the same means he preserves and protects us there."

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125 Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 158, 107. Wendel observes that in Calvin's treatise *Against the Libertines* (1545) he distinguishes three forms of providence not so clearly demarcated in the *Institutes*. They are: (i) "The order of nature" in which God acts according to the laws of nature which he himself has imposed on creation; (ii) "special providence" in which God works through his creatures making them servants of goodness, justice and judgement according to his will both in the punishment of the wicked and the chastisement of believers; (iii) God's governance of believers by living and reigning in them by the Holy Spirit (*op. cit.*, 179-180).
127 "God has received us, once for all, into his family, to hold us not only as servants but as sons. Thereafter, to fulfill the duties of a most excellent Father concerned for his offspring, he undertakes also to nourish us throughout the course of our life." (*Inst. IV*: xvii: 1 [CO 2 (30); 1002]. Niesel, *op. cit.*, 71).
In the church, then, “God the Father [gives] the Holy Spirit for his Son’s sake, and yet... bestow[s] the whole fullness of the Spirit upon the Son to be minister and steward of his liberality.” This evidence of God’s continual goodness serves to assure the adopted of their Father’s love towards them. Through providence they come to recognise that he is the fountain of every good, or, to use a favourite Calvinian phrase, “the Father of mercies”. Any study of Calvin’s view of providence that is not set in the light of divine paternity is, therefore, a distortion of his theology. This is particularly demonstrated by a cursory reading of Calvin’s letters, where references to God’s Fatherhood abound.

These are found most often at the end of Calvin’s letters, and are repeated with such consistency that they serve as his hallmark. Time and time again Calvin signs off his letters by particular references to the Father’s providential care of his people. Although formulaic, these parting thoughts are no empty clichés but were designed to encourage his correspondents in an age of grave difficulties. What follows are some of the lengthier endings:

Whereupon, my well beloved brethren, after having commended myself to your fervent prayers, I entreat our heavenly Father to hold you in his holy protection, to guide you by his Spirit in all prudence and uprightness, to confirm you in full virtue and constancy, and to make use of you more amply, not permitting his enemies to gain any advantage over you, whatever they may devise. - Your brother, John Calvin.

Whereupon, beloved brethren, having commended myself to your fervent prayers, I supplicate our heavenly Father to be to you as a fortress and rampart against all your enemies, to support you in the midst of their fury, in the mean time to govern you by

130 “Seeing the care which thou takest of us, we may the better recognise thee as our Father, and expect all blessings at thy hand, no longer placing hope and confidence in any creature, but entirely in thy goodness.” (“Forms of Prayer for the Church” (Tracts, vol. 2, 104). See Parker, Calvin, 43-49; Niesel, op. cit., 70-79.
131 Evidence of the link is peppered throughout Parker’s summary of the treatment of providence in the Institutes (Calvin, 43-49). This does not detract from Heim’s description of providence as the practical sovereignty of God (“The Powers of God: Calvin and Late Medieval Thought” in Gamble, op. cit., vol. 4, 3).
132 Such is the proliferation of these citations that there are far too many to cite in full. What follows is a lengthy compilation of many of them: Letters, vol. 3, 131, 151, 181, 223, 227, 230, 259, 274, 293, 305, 307, 322, 392, 396, 398, 405, 446, 450, 469; vol. 4, 43, 46, 60-61, 65, 66, 80, 162, 164, 166, 173, 175, 200, 202, 204, 208, 225, 228, 247, 261, 273, 274, 302, 304, 305, 307, 309, 313, 320, 328, 330, 332, 333, 344, 351, 361, 442. So consistent are these citations that it is obvious that in a letter jointly attributed to Calvin and Beza, the ending must have been written by Calvin: “We will supplicate our merciful Father to have you in his keeping, to strengthen you with invincible courage, to bestow on you prudence and address in the management of all affairs, and increase you more and more in his grace.” (Letters, vol. 4, 252).
his Holy Spirit in upright wisdom and charity, so that, in despite of Satan and his agents, his name may be glorified in you to the end.134

Whereupon I pray our heavenly Father to give you counsel and prudence, to mortify all disorderly passions; and in general to have you in his keeping, to fortify you with his invincible power, and to prevent what he has built up in you from falling into ruin. My brethren greet you, and I especially desire to be commended to your fervent prayers.135

For my own part, I could wish that God had given me the means of being nearer at hand to assist you, but since that is not possible I will pray our merciful Father that since he has confided you to the keeping of our Lord Jesus Christ, he would cause you to feel how safe you are under so good a protector, to the end that you may cast all your cares upon him; and that he would be pleased to have compassion on you and all those who are in affliction, delivering you from the hands of the ungodly. And as he has once made you partakers of the knowledge of the truth, that he would, from day to day, increase you therein, making it bring forth fruits to his glory.136

To the Father then, Calvin attributes many gracious acts of providence such as protecting, guiding, confirming, using, supporting, governing, mortifying, keeping, delivering, and increasing his children.137

Nowhere is God's paternal providence more graphically portrayed than in the Eucharist,138 the sacrament of spiritual union.139 In his letter to Peter Martyr, Calvin categorically states in a brief addendum to his comments on spiritual union that “this is the Communion which they receive in the Sacred Supper.”140 However, as pneumatological union consists of both mystical and spiritual union it should not surprise us that the Lord’s Supper is also relevant to the mystical union of believers with Christ. Only on the basis of their engrafting into Christ can the adopted sit at the Lord’s Table. “If we have this testimony in our hearts before God let us have no doubt at all that he adopts us for his children, and that the Lord Jesus addresses his

137 Indeed, “if there fall not to the ground without his will a single bird, he will never be wanting to his own children.” (“To the Church of Paris”, dated 16th September, 1557 (Letters, vol. 3, 360)).
139 Gerrish writes that, “the Eucharist certainly attests a finished, vicarious work of Christ on the cross. But it also fosters a daily communion with the living Christ, and it draws the church into participation in his continuing priestly office.” (Grace and Gratitude, 56).
140 Gorham, op.cit., 352. Gerrish picks up on this: “The first communication [mystical union] is associated chiefly with the gospel, the second [spiritual union] chiefly with the Sacrament.... this, of
word to us to invite us to his table, and present us with this holy sacrament which he communicated to his disciples.”¹⁴¹ Once there, the engrafted enjoy communion with Christ.

The priority of spiritual union over mystical union in relation to the Lord’s Supper is confirmed in the Institutes where Calvin explains, “it is not... the chief function of the Sacrament simply and without higher consideration to extend to us the body of Christ [mystical union].¹⁴² Rather, it is to seal and confirm that promise by which he testifies that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink (John 6:56), which feed us unto eternal life (John 6:55) [spiritual union].”¹⁴³ In the next section he goes further. “The Sacrament does not cause Christ to begin to be the bread of life; but when it reminds us that he was made the bread of life, which we continually eat, and which gives us a relish and savor of that bread, it causes us to feel the power of that bread.”¹⁴⁴

However, Calvin is by no means always so clear. On enquiring why it is that Christ is shown to us in the elements of bread and wine, his two replies correspond to both mystical and spiritual union. “First, that we may grow into one body with him; secondly, having been made partakers [participes] of his substance, that we may also feel his power in partaking [communicatione] of all his benefits.”¹⁴⁵ However, earlier Calvin links the Lord’s Supper to mystical union. Commenting on Ephesians 5:30 seven years prior to his letter to Peter Martyr (1548), Calvin adamantly states that, “if we are to be true members of Christ, we grow into one Body by the communication of His substance. In short, Paul describes our union to Christ, a symbol and pledge of course, is suggested by the eucharistic symbolism itself, which has to do with the growth and nurture of a life that is already there.” (Grace and Gratitude, 129).

¹⁴³ Inst. IV: xvi: 4 [CO 2 (30): 1004]; cf. CC St. John 1-10, 154 [CO 47 (75): 139-140]. “The body and blood of the Lord “are represented under bread and wine so that we may learn not only that they are ours but that they have been destined as food for our spiritual life.” (Inst. IV: xvii: 3 [CO 2 (30): 1004]).
¹⁴⁴ Inst. IV: xvi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 1005]. No doubt Calvin has the teaching of John 6 in mind, where Christ continually speaks of himself as the bread that feeds his people (CC St. John 1-10, 169-170 [CO 47 (75): 154-155]). For more on this ibid., 156ff. [CO 47 (75): 142ff.]. In attributing the Lord’s Supper to spiritual union Calvin is diverging from Martyr who attribute both Sacraments to his understanding of the intermediate union. It is probably for this reason that in his reply Calvin links the Lord’s Supper explicitly with spiritual union (McLelland, op.cit., 145).
¹⁴⁵ Inst. IV: xvii: 11 [CO 2 (30): 1010].
which is given to us in the Holy Supper.”  

And again, in his *Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal* published two years subsequent to his reply to Peter Martyr, Calvin links the Lord’s Supper to mystical union. He states that, “the Supper was instituted with no other intention than that by means of it we might be united to the body of Christ.”

Although we would expect Calvin to hold experiential and mystical union in tandem, the implications of his doctrine of the Supper for pneumatological union are most ambiguous. They illustrate the importance of not over-systematising his thought. The clarity exhibited in his reply to Martyr was exceptional and stimulated by the clear structure of Peter Martyr’s initial enquiry. Whatever the distinctiveness of spiritual union it cannot be divorced from mystical union in which it is grounded. The believer’s union with Christ is, by its very nature, mysterious and will always evade the demanding constraints of language.

Nevertheless, it remains generally true of Calvin that when conveying union with Christ, baptism signifies its mystical union. The sacrament thereby serves as the basis and symbol of adoption. The Lord’s Supper, on the other hand, is more indicative of spiritual union and symbolises the way that the Father providentially nourishes his offspring. “We confess”, writes Calvin to the King of France, “that

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146 *CC Eph.*, 208-209 [CO 51 (79): 225]. What is perplexing is that having described mystical union and applied it to the supper, in his comments on the next verse he labels it as spiritual union (*spirituali Christi unione*) [CO 51 (79): 226].


148 It is understandable then that Gerrish should say that the ‘mystical union’ of believers with Christ is a pivotal theme of the Lord’s Supper (*Grace and Gratitude*, 72). Whatever, the question has no bearing on why infants should be granted the sacrament of baptism, but denied the Eucharist (*CC St. John 1-10*, 169 [CO 47 (75): 154]).

149 Thus, Tamburello is right to note that Calvin mixes his terminology and often in the course of a single reference to the Lord’s Supper (*op. cit.*, 100).


151 *Inst. IV*: xvii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 1002]. Again Calvin writes: “The end... to which [the Lord’s Supper] ought to be referred is to continue in us the grace which we received in baptism. For as by baptism God regenerates us to be his children, and by such spiritual birth introduces us into his Church, to make us, as it were, of his household; so in the Supper he declares to us that he wishes not to leave us unprovided, but rather to maintain us in the heavenly life till such time as we shall have attained to the perfection of it. Now, inasmuch as there is no other food for our souls than Jesus Christ, it is in him alone that we must seek life. But because of our weakness and ignorance, the Supper is to us a visible and external sign to testify to us, that in partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ we live spiritually in him.” (“Confession of Faith (1562)”, *Tracts*, vol. 2, 157 [CO 9 (37): 767]; cf. Calvin’s “Brief Confession of Faith” (*Tracts*, vol. 2, 134). It is this issue which McDonnell appears to grapple with (*op. cit.*, 71).
the holy supper of our Lord is a testimony of the union which we have with Jesus Christ, inasmuch as not only he died and rose from the dead for us, but also truly feeds and nourishes us with his flesh, till we be one with him and his life be common to us. All the adopted are, then, invited to the Supper. It is necessary that they be there for it is a vital pledge of the Father’s continuing liberality towards them as is manifest in all the delights of the gospel that he sets before his children.

It is therefore “a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality (John 6:51).” For the unlearned Calvin expands the meaning:

The signs are bread and wine, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ. For as in baptism, God, regenerating us, engrains us into the society of his church and makes us his own by adoption, so we have said, that he discharges the function of a provident householder in continually supplying to us the food to sustain and preserve us in that life into which he has begotten us by his Word.

Calvin continues: “Now Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our Heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that, refreshing by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality.” In the Lord’s Supper Christ is presented to the Father’s children as the bread of life by which believers are nourished into eternal life. Thus “the sacred bread of the Lord’s Supper is spiritual food, as sweet and delicate as it is healthful for pious worshipers of God, who, in tasting it, feel that Christ is their life, whom it moves to thanksgiving, for whom it is an exhortation to mutual love among themselves.”

“The analogy of the sign applies [however] only if souls find their nourishment in Christ - which cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us, and refreshes us by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood.”

Contrary to Zwingli, Calvin believed there to be more to the partaking of Christ in the Supper than just a trusting in Christ:

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152 “To the King of France”, dated October 1557, Letters, vol. 3, 376. Calvin says exactly the same thing in his “Form of Administering the Sacraments” (Tracts, vol. 2, 134); McDonnell, op. cit., 74.
153 “Form of Administering the Sacrament” (Tracts, vol. 2, 120).
154 “God has received us, once for all, into his family, to hold us not only as servants but as sons. Thereafter, to fulfill the duties of a most excellent Father concerned for his offspring he undertakes also to nourish us throughout the course of our life.” (Inst. IV: xvii: 1 [CO 2 (30: 1002)).
155 Inst. (1536), 111 [CO 1 (29): 127-128].
It seems to me that Christ meant to teach something more definite, and more elevated, in that noble discourse in which he commends to us the eating of his flesh (John 6:26ff.). It is that we are quickened by the true partaking of him; and he has therefore designated this partaking of him; and he has therefore designated this partaking by the words 'eating' and 'drinking,' in order that no one should think that the life that we receive from him is received by mere knowledge. As it is not the seeing but the eating of bread that suffices to feed the body, so the soul must truly and deeply become partaker of Christ that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power.\(^{160}\)

Nevertheless, he concedes that there is no other eating than that by faith. Unlike Zwingli, however, Calvin reckoned that in the Supper "we eat Christ's flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that this eating is the result and effect of faith." In short, whereas Zwingli regarded eating as faith, Calvin understood it as the consequence of faith.\(^{161}\)

Calvin denies that he is splitting hairs. When Christ describes himself as the "Bread of Life" he means not merely that salvation rests on faith but that "by partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours - just as bread when taken as food imparts vigor to the body."\(^{162}\) Thus, there is a correlation between the body of Christ and the bodies of the participants. This makes the union more profound than any Zwinglian interpretation could allow for. In some mysterious way our bodies as well as our souls are involved in this union.\(^{163}\) In doing so they are united with the whole Christ, his human as well as his divine nature.\(^{164}\) Calvin is most adamant about this: "It would be extreme madness to recognize no communion of believers with the flesh and blood of the Lord, which the apostle declares to be so great that he prefers to marvel at it rather than to explain it."\(^{165}\)

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159 *Inst.* IV: xvii: 10 [CO 2 (30): 1009].

160 *Inst.* IV: xvii: 5 [CO 2 (30): 1005-1006]. In short, the Lord's Supper was perceived by Calvin as a means of nurturing communion with Christ and not just of remembering him. (*Grace and Gratitude*, 56).

161 See also McDonnell, *op.cit.*, 43.

162 *Inst.* IV: xvii: 5-7 [CO 2 (30): 1006]. In trying to explain this Calvin quickly and admittedly reaches the end of his vocabulary, but in the following paragraphs battles on in his attempt to express things more perfectly.

163 Says Calvin, "the spiritual union [*unitatem spiritualem*] which we have with Christ is not a matter of the soul alone, but of the body also, so that we are flesh of His flesh etc. (Eph. 5:30). The hope of the resurrection would be faint, if our union [*coniunctio*] with Him were not complete and total like that." (*CC I Cor.* 130 [CO 49 (77): 398]). Calvin also hints of this in *Inst.* IV: xvii: 5; cf. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 151 and 157).

164 "In the Supper He offers His body to be enjoyed by us, to nourish us unto eternal life" (*CC Eph.*, 209 [CO 51 (79): 226]).

Calvin anticipates objections based on the fact that Christ has taken his humanity to the pinnacle of the universe. As Christ's body must be locally present there, surely it cannot also be present in the bread and the wine. Calvin acknowledges this, but insists that in order for the believer to enjoy participation in Christ's flesh and blood it does not matter that Christ's body is absent:

Though he has taken his flesh away from us, and in the body has ascended into heaven, yet he sits at the right hand of the Father - that is, he reigns in the Father's power and majesty and glory. This kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits. Thus Christ is not prevented from exerting his power wherever he pleases, in heaven and on earth. He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body. In short, he feeds his people with his own body, the communion of which he bestows upon them by the power of his Spirit. In this manner, the body and blood of Christ are shown to us in the Sacrament.

Thus, the providential nourishing of the adopted is also perichoretically attributed to Christ himself. In the Supper he is really present by his Spirit as the author of union. “By virtue of the Holy Spirit”, writes Calvin, “our souls are spiritually fed by the substance of the flesh of Christ, ... who bid[s] us rise to heaven in order to be admitted to this communion.”

By the Spirit, then, Christ pours his life into his people as they partake of his flesh and blood. This is testified to us and sealed in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit ensures that the elements of bread and wine are not empty signs, but fulfil what was promised in them. Thus, Calvin protests that his objection to the local presence


167 Inst. IV: xvii: 30 [CO 2 (300: 1031-1032]. Hence, Calvin opposes the Schoolmen such as Peter Lombard for teaching that Christ lies hidden under the bread (Inst. IV: xvii: 13) and, of course, also the doctrine of transubstantiation (Inst. IV: xvii: 14-18; xviii). Calvin rejected transubstantiation not only because of its stress on the carnal presence (see McDonnell, op.cit., 120f) but because it undermined the uniqueness of Christ’s atoning death (Inst. IV: xviii: 13 [CO 2 (30): 1060-1061]).

168 Inst. IV: xvii: 18 [CO 2 (30): 1017]. Cf. Inst. IV: xvii: 19 [CO 2 (30): 1017]. Thus, Calvin saw no problem in holding that believers can be united to Christ in spite of the great distance between earth and heaven. In Inst. IV: xvii: 24 [CO 2 (30): 1023] he writes: “There is nothing more incredible than that things severed and removed from one another by the whole space between heaven and earth should not only be connected across such a great distance but be also united, so that souls may receive nourishment from Christ's flesh. Therefore let perverse men cease to engender hatred toward us by the foul misstatement that the wicked intent we would somewhat restrict God’s boundless power. For here either they are stupidly mistaken or they are basely lying.”

169 Inst. III: ii: 35 [CO 2 (30): 427]. Cf. van Buren, op.cit., 99. Calvin cites Augustine who held that Christ was present among us in three ways: in majesty, providence and in ineffable grace. Calvin writes: “Under grace I include that marvelous communion of his body and blood - provided we understand that it takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by that feigned inclusion of the body itself under the element.” (Inst. IV: xvii: 26 [CO 2 (30): 1026]).

170 “Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal” (Tracts, vol. 2, 484).

171 The Lord’s Supper thus consists of two elements: physical signs and spiritual truth (Inst. IV: xvii: 11 [CO 2 (30): 1010]; cf. “Confession of Faith in Name of the Reformed Churches of France”, Tracts,
was not a rejection of the real presence of Christ in the Supper. Christ is really present by his Spirit who raises the adopted to heaven so that they can enjoy the Saviour’s presence. Consequently, it is superfluous for Christ to descend to earth.\textsuperscript{172} The Spirit inspires faith so that those already engrafted into Christ through mystical union “may grow more and more together with him, until [Christ] perfectly joins us with him in the heavenly life.”

Although the sacrament may be participated in without faith, it is not possible to eat Christ’s flesh and blood under such circumstances. When unworthy recipients partake of the Sacrament they reject the goodness of God on offer. Nevertheless, the sacrament still testifies to the possibility of drawing from the life of God and, as such, may yet serve to engraft the unbelieving participant into Christ’s body. At that point the Sacrament becomes a converting ordinance. Failing that, the unworthy are divinely rejected not because they ate, but because in doing so they “profaned the mystery by trampling underfoot the pledge of sacred union with God, which they ought reverently to have received.” Consequently, just as bodily food may harm as well as benefit, so can the spiritual food offered in the Lord’s Supper. It can cast wicked eaters down into deeper trouble “not by the food itself, but because to polluted and unbelieving men nothing is clean (Titus 1:15), however much it otherwise be sanctified by the Lord’s blessing.”\textsuperscript{173}

Thus, drawing from Augustine, Calvin clearly distinguishes between a mere sacramental eating (eating in unbelief), and the reality (eating in dependence on the promises of God).\textsuperscript{174} “It is not at all by the material of water, and bread and wine that we obtain possession of Christ and his spiritual gifts, but that we are conducted to him by the promise, so that he makes himself ours, dwelling in us by faith, fulfils whatever is promised and offered by the signs.”\textsuperscript{175} Because the promises are found in the Word, the preaching of it must accompany the administration of the

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Inst. IV: xvii: 31 [CO 2 (30): 1032]; Inst. IV: xvii: 36 [CO 2 (30): 1039].}

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Inst. IV: xvii: 40 [CO 2 (30): 1042]. He points to the words of the institution in support of his argument (1 Cor. 11: 27 and 29).}

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Inst. IV: xvii: 34 [CO 2 (30): 1035-1038].}

\textsuperscript{175} “Mutual Consent of the Churches of Zurich and Geneva as to the Sacraments”, \textit{Tracts}, vol. 2, 228.
Sacrament. By laying hold of the promises given in the Supper, believers are nourished. However, believers need frequent nourishing. As a caring Father, God knows this and has therefore ordained that the Lord’s Supper be frequently administered. By the regular remembrance of Christ, believers “sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness; finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ’s body.”

Accordingly, there is in the Lord’s Supper a twofold self-offering. On the one side, Christ gives himself to his brethren through the Spirit whereby he grants his people participation in his body through which they are made one with Christ in body, spirit and soul. On the other side, in receiving all the good that the Father has stored up for them in Christ, believers present their bodies as living sacrifices to God as a form of spiritual worship. As the sacraments only dimly mirror what the Father has bestowed on the adopted, the praise of his children reflects the fact that there is a hidden fullness yet to be revealed at the *τελευταίων.* Nevertheless, in the here and now they may begin to fulfil the original eucharistic purpose of their creation.

In every age of the church, the adopted have need of the strengthening of the Father’s bountiful provision. However, Calvin looked out from Geneva upon a situation that merited much emphasis on the comfort of divine providence. First, there was a general harshness to sixteenth-century life that made it difficult and cheap. Secondly, Protestants were being persecuted particularly in France, the country of Calvin’s birth. Ever since Francis I had signed the Concordat with the Pope in 1516 the lives of Protestants, first Lutheran and later Reformed, had been imperilled. Hence, Calvin dedicated his *Institutes* to Francis I in the hope that by

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176 “Whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word: whether we are to be confirmed in faith, or exercised in confession, or aroused to duty, there is need of preaching.” (*Inst. IV: xviii: 39 [CO 2 (30): 1041]).

177 *Inst. IV: xvii: 44 [CO 2 (30): 1046]. He points to statements from Augustine and Chrysostom supporting the earlier frequent use of the Lord’s Supper (*Inst. IV: xvii: 45*).

178 Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 126-127 and 156.

179 *Inst. IV: xvii: 12 [CO 2 (30): 1011]. “The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us.”

180 Gerrish observes that whereas Calvin understood God to have created ‘eucharistic man’ who was called by his heavenly Father to thankfulness for the good things spread before him in creation, so, now, in the Eucharist we are to be grateful for Christ, whose flesh and blood is spread before us. (*Grace and Gratitude*, 86).
explaining the Protestant faith he could avert further persecution. His effort was to no avail. The persecutions continued apace.

Not surprisingly, then, Calvin’s theology is markedly pastoral. He evidently and movingly sought to comfort beleaguered Protestants with thoughts of the Father’s kindness. That the godly survived at all was clear proof of heavenly providence. Writing in 1557 to the church of Paris, he declares:

I cannot sufficiently magnify the infinite goodness of God, which is so powerfully manifested in you, and especially because in the midst of the fears and assaults to which you are daily exposed, that indulgent Father fortifies and renders you invincible by his Spirit. It is much that he keeps in check, nay, even in fetters, so many enemies who seek but to devour you, and have the means of doing so were they not otherwise restrained. But I prize still more the grace by which you are sustained, and through which, relying on his promises you persevere; for it is by this grace that he shews the efficacy of his Spirit and wishes it to be known in his church.

Naturally, Calvin did not believe that the Father’s care of his people included the evasion of, or deliverance from, every trouble. The Father does, however, promise strength for every eventuality. Thus, in addition to raising compassionate aid among the churches of Lausanne, Moudon, and Payerne, Calvin promises the persecuted brethren of Paris that he would supplicate “the Father of mercies”, that in every thing and every where he would strengthen them and demonstrate the care that he takes of his people.

Calvin’s confidence was bolstered by the thought that all things, whether good or bad, work together for the good of those who love God. “Although the elect and the reprobate are exposed without distinction to similar evils, yet there is a great difference between them, for God instructs believers by afflictions, and procures their salvation.” Therefore, whatever their troubles the godly have a better idea of what joy is:

In truth unbelievers have no idea what true joy is, since they do not possess a peaceable conscience towards God, nor can [they] truly enjoy the goods which he has showered down upon them, however abundantly. For this very reason we have better motives for supporting with patience the vexations which may annoy us, inasmuch as they cannot prevent us from continually savouring the goodness of our

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181 On the Father’s keeping power over the persecuted and afflicted see Calvin’s letters “To the Church of Paris”, dated 5th January 1558 (Letters, vol. 3, 391) and “To the Admiral de Coligny”, dated 4th September 1558 (Letters, vol. 3, 466).
184 CC Rom., 179 [CO 49 (77): 158].
God and Father and the love He bears towards us, till we be fully satisfied with them in the place of our everlasting rest. 185

On account of the love that lies behind all God's paternal dealings with the godly, they ought to remain confident in the perfection of God's will. It was in this vein that Calvin wrote to a monsieur de Richebourg on the death of his son in 1541:

What the Lord has done, we must, at the same time, consider has not been done rashly, nor by chance, neither from having been impelled from without; but by that determinate counsel, whereby he not only foresees, decrees, and executes nothing but what is good and wholesome for us. Where justice and good judgement reign paramount, there it is impious to remonstrate. When, however, our own advantage is bound up with that goodness, how great would be the degree of ingratitude not to acquiesce, with a calm and well-ordered temper of mind, in whatever is the wish of our Father! Nevertheless, the faithful have a sufficient alleviation of their sorrows in the special providence of God and the all-sufficiency of his provision, whatsoever may happen. 186

Our interest in these sentiments markedly increases when we realise that the very next year Calvin lost his infant son too. Although renowned for his reticence to speak of his own personal affairs, he does make the terse statement that “the Lord has certainly inflicted a severe and bitter wound in the death of our infant son. But he is himself a Father and knows best what is good for his children.” 187

Dark providences are, then, of service to God's children, 188 and are ordered and determined by God's paternal sovereignty and wisdom. 189 Sometimes they are reserved until late on in life, at other times they are cast upon novices. 190 Either way they are designed to drive the afflicted to prayer:

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name (cf. Joel 2:32). By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and, in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us. 191

185 “To the Marquise de Rothelin”, dated 26th May, 1559, Letters, vol. 4, 43.
188 To the family of Budé, who had lost a brother greatly respected by Calvin, he asserts that there is great reason for rejoicing. The Christian qualities that set apart the deceased act as a mirror “wherein we may contemplate the strength wherewith our kind heavenly Father assists his children, and most of all, out of their greatest difficulties.” (“To the Family of Budé, Letters, vol. 2, 154; cf. Calvin’s letters “To the Five Prisoners at Chambery”, dated 5th September 1555 (Letters, vol. 3, 221) and “To the prisoners of Paris”, dated February 1559 (Letters, vol. 4, 18-19)).
189 To Madame de Rentigny (dated 8th December 1557), he writes: “He knows how to proportion the trials of his children, so as not to task too sorely their infirmities” (Letters, vol. 3, 382).
191 Inst. III: xx: 2 [CO 2 (30); 626].
That prayer is for the believer's sake rather than God's is most evident from the six reasons Calvin outlines for calling on God when faced with the reality of providence: 192

First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor. Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. Thirdly, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand (cf. Ps. 145:15-16). Fourthly, moreover, that, having obtained what we were seeking, and being convinced that he has answered our prayers, we should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently. And fifthly, that at the same time we embrace with greater delight those things which we acknowledge to have been obtained by prayers. Finally, that use and experience may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm his providence, while we understand not only that he promises never to fail us, and of his own will opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity, but also that he ever extends his hand to help his own, not wet-nursing them with words but defending them with present help.

In short, "prayer was not ordained that we should be haughtily puffed up before God, or greatly esteem anything of ours, but that having confessed our guilt, we should deplore our distresses before him, as children unburden their troubles to their parents." 193 Faith, therefore, enables believers to grasp the providence of God because it rests in God's mercy. 194

4.5 Obedience

"Ever since God revealed himself Father to us," says Calvin, "we must prove our ungratefulness to him if we did not in turn show ourselves as sons (Mal. 1:6; Eph. 5:1; 1 John 3:1)." 195 Gratitude is therefore registered by obedience to the Father's will. 196 The formative mark of an obedient spirit is prayer. Believers pray not just because they are free to, but because they ought to. God has commanded prayer in Scripture because it should be made, but he has also made promises to believers to dissuade them from fearing rejection in prayer. "When these two things are established", says Calvin, "it is certain that those who try to wriggle out of

192 Inst. III: xx: 3 [CO 2 (30): 626-627].
194 Inst. III: ii: 30 [CO 2 (30): 422]. According to Wendel, faith is "indispensable to anyone who wishes to grasp what the Providence of God is, and how far it extends." (op. cit., 179).
195 Inst. III: vi: 3 [CO 2 (30): 503].
196 Leith, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life., 100. "The obedience of Christians is the free obedience of children to their father." (Ibid., 106).
coming directly to God are not only rebellious and stubborn but are also convicted of unbelief because they distrust the promises.”

When obedience is attained in prayer it sets the tone for a proper response to God throughout every area of life. As believers come to God through Christ their mediator, so they offer themselves and all that they have to the Father in his name. The structure of obedience in life is laid down in the moral law, which is summarised in the Ten Commandments. In giving the law, God has accommodated himself to human weakness by expressing his paternal will as a comprehensible reflection of his image. Having already noted the first two functions of the law in chapter two, viz., its mirror reflection of the righteousness of God and its conveyance of the threatenings of his curse against disobedience, we must now consider its third function (tertius usus legis). Contrary to the libertines and the Antinomian “Lutheran” John Agricola, Calvin believed that the law’s third function brings the church nearer to its proper purpose: to speak to those in whom the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.

The law operates, then, to teach believers the perfect righteousness it expresses. By obeying the decalogue the adopted are restored to God’s image by being conformed to it in righteousness and true holiness. “God has so depicted his character in the law that if any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there, he will express the image of God, as it were, in his own life.” However, Calvin carefully outlines the way in which the law should be fulfilled in order to ensure that its use in Christian living does not degenerate into legalism.

One of the ways in which he does this is by underlining what obedience means. It entails reflecting on the author of the law, the believer’s heavenly Father. “What is to be learned from the law can be readily understood: that God, as he is our Creator, has toward us by right the place of Father and Lord; for this reason we owe

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199 Inst. II: vii: 12 [CO 2 (30): 261]. On the third use of the law, Calvin differs from Luther. According to Leith, in the early 1520’s Luther was prepared to say that the believer did not need the law at all. Thus, whereas Lutheranism had to guard against Antinomianism, Calvinism has had to ward off legalistic tendencies. Calvin was well aware of these as shall be seen (Leith, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 50ff.). He notes that even though believers have the law written on their hearts, the law still profits them in two ways: (i) It enables them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord’s will which the Spirit has given them the desire to obey. (ii) It has a hortatory role in arousing the believer to obedience. “The Lord”, says Calvin, “instructs by their reading of [the law] those whom he inwardly instils with a readiness to obey.”
200 Inst. II: viii: 5 [CO 2 (30): 269-270].
him glory, reverence, love and fear’. Therefore, like any son or daughter, the adopted are obliged to obey their Father. If they find they cannot, the fault is theirs for allowing sin to reign within, thus hindering obedience to their Father. However, because God is Father to his people he acknowledges their spiritual infirmities by holding out rewards to the adopted for their encouragement:

Because the eye of our mind is too blind to be moved solely by the beauty of the good, our most merciful Father out of his great kindness has willed to attract us by sweetness of rewards to love and seek after him. He announces, therefore, that the rewards for virtues are stored up with him, and that the man who obeys his commandments does not do so in vain.

Thus, although Calvin stresses the obedience of sonship to ward off an Antinomian abuse of liberty, he has no desire to push the adopted towards the opposite extreme of legalism.

The threat of legalism is mitigated by the fact that it is the Father to whom obedience is rendered. Obedience is therefore filial in nature. Together regeneration and adoption grant the believer both the desire and the liberty to obey the moral law. In particular, “the object of regeneration... is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God’s righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons [Gal. 4:5; cf. II Peter 1:10].” Regeneration and adoption ensure that in obeying God the integrity of the human will is maintained. Therefore, because the believer’s love is filial, the service of God is not irksome. Neither should it be. The incarnate Christ has already exemplified under the economy of redemption what it means to operate obediently even unto death as both a Son and a servant before his heavenly Father.
The purpose of the law, then, is not to keep the consciences of believers bound by threat of the curse for its breakage, but to prod them "to shake off their sluggishness, by repeatedly urging them, and to pinch them awake to their imperfection." 211

Thus, justice cannot be done to Calvin's non-legalistic understanding of the tertius usus legis unless it is seen in the context of the filial relationship that the redeemed have with their Father. This observation squares with the two points that Calvin makes about the gaining of holiness by the fulfilment of the law. 212 First, the law should be fulfilled out of an entire love for God. Although initially influenced by the Devotio Moderna, Calvin departed from its emphasis on the externalities of religion (devotio) by stressing the internal motives involved in the pursuit of holiness. This reflects his preference for the more biblical focus on individual piety (pietas). 213 True piety consists of a pure conscience and a sincere faith that gives rise to love and is particularly expressed in obedience to the first table of the law. 214

Secondly, the law should be fulfilled out of a love for the brethren. Here again Calvin departs from the Devotio Moderna. Whereas its emphasis was simply on service, Calvin focuses especially on service in the world. 215 From the Scriptures he notes that Christ and the apostles often summarise the law in terms of its second table. This is because obedience to the second table of the law manifests a genuine fear of God. 216 However, the fulfilment of the law is not summarised by fear but by love. 217 The way in which believers live demonstrates whether their lives are being conformed to the will of God as expressed in the law: "Our life shall best conform to God's will and the prescription of the law when it is in every respect most fruitful for their whole life to obedience to him." (CTS Isaiah, vol. 3, 284 [CO 37 (65): 58ff.]; cf. van Buren, op.cit., 28)

211 Inst. II: vii: 14 [CO 2 (30): 263]. "Through Christ the teaching of the law remains inviolable; by teaching, admonishing, reproving, and correcting, it forms us and prepares us for every good work".


213 Richard, op.cit., 123, 86-93.

214 Inst. II: viii: 51-52 [CO 2 (30): 303-304]; cf. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life, 114, 116-117. As Richard remarks: "Pietas is not a mercenary relation of do ut des, nor is it a form of werkhelligkeit. Pietas does not in any way consist of an accumulation of prayers and good works or satisfactions to be offered to God in a servile spirit. It demands the disposition of a mind that is ready and willing to accomplish God's will." (op.cit., 120)

215 Richard, op.cit., 174ff..


217 "It is very clear that we keep the commandments not by loving ourselves but by loving God and neighbor; that he lives the best and holiest life who lives and strives for himself as little as he can, and that no one lives in a worse or more evil manner than he who lives and strives for himself alone, and thinks about and seeks only his own advantage." (Inst. II: viii: 54 [CO 2 (30): 305]).
our brethren.” The brethren include not only close friends but also enemies who are to be loved.

Love for the law is, then, a sure sign of regeneration and adoption.\(^{218}\) However, although Calvin is distinguished from Luther by his attributing a third function to the law, its additional use is stressed much less than may be anticipated.\(^{219}\) This is probably accounted for by Calvin’s fear of promoting a legalistic spirit among God’s children. Furthermore, because believers easily procrastinate in their obedience, filial loyalty has to be commended by example as well as by legal imperative. To this end, Calvin draws out from Scripture “a pattern for the conduct of life in order that those who heartily repent may not err in their zeal.”\(^{220}\) This pattern reflects the very nature of regeneration and the prior union in Christ’s death and resurrection. The regenerate are, then, those who are dead to self and alive unto God. Wallace notes that throughout the sermons Calvin refers to the Saviour as patron, miroir, image and exemple. In sanctification the children of God are modelled (configurez) or conformed (conformez) to his life.\(^{221}\)

The pattern consists in two essential characteristics: a love of righteousness established contrary to nature in the heart, and a discipline induced to prevent the believer from meandering aimlessly through life without a channelled zeal for righteousness.\(^{222}\) The fact that Calvin mentions the love of righteousness prior to any compliance to a rule demonstrates once more his concern to guard against legalism. “A godly mind is not formed to obey God by precepts or sanctions so much as by a serious meditation upon the divine goodness towards itself.”\(^{223}\) Therefore, holiness should entail a response of obedient love. It is incumbent upon the children of God to be holy for God their Father is holy. “When we hear mention of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond; not because we come into

\(^{218}\) Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 121.

\(^{219}\) This is asserted not in contradiction to, but also notwithstanding Leith’s comment that the third use of the law is prominent in Calvin’s exegetical and confessional writings (*op.cit.*, 47).


\(^{223}\) *CC Rom.*, 263 [CO 49 (77): 234]. Commenting on the same verse (Roms. 12:1), Calvin writes: “Paul... in order to bind us to God not by servile fear but by a voluntary and cheerful love of righteousness, attracts us by the sweetness of that grace in which our salvation consists. At the same time he reproaches us with ingratitude if, having had experience of so kind and liberal a father, we do not in return strive to dedicate ourselves wholly to Him.” (*CC Rom.*, 263 [CO 49 (77): 233]).
communion with him by virtue of our holiness! Rather, we ought first to cleave unto him so that, infused with his holiness, we may follow whither he calls."

A love of righteousness involves the expressing of Christ: "We have been adopted as sons, by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption." Scripture teaches us that Christ is publicly exhibited when his people are conformed to his likeness. However, this conformity must not be confused with perfectionism:

I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian one who has not yet attained it. For thus all would be excluded from the church, since no one is found who is not far removed from it, while many have advanced a little toward it whom it would nevertheless be unjust to cast away.

Perfection is the believer’s goal and not a current attainment. Therefore, God’s children should not withhold imperfect works from their Father out of fear. Those bound up by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned certain tasks. These servants think they have accomplished nothing, and dare not appear before their masters unless they have fulfilled the exact measure of their tasks. But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their fathers, do not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful Father, however, small, rude, and imperfect these may be.

It is important for believers to understand that they have been freed from "the entire rigour of the law" to follow their calling from God which has been made with "fatherly gentleness". However, although God accepts their works incomplete he does so only when attempted in the name of Christ. Therefore, Calvin writes: "God considers that he is revered by no work of ours unless we truly do it in reverence toward him."

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224 Inst. III: vi: 3 [CO 2 (30): 503].
225 Inst. III: vi: 5 [CO 2 (30): 504].
226 "Antidote to the Canons of the Council of Trent" (Tracts, vol. 3, 156).
227 "The life of the Christian rests securely on the goodness of the heavenly father, which includes his willingness to receive imperfect assignments from his children simply because they are his children." (Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 101).
228 Inst. III: xix: 5 [CO 2 (30): 616]. Says Wallace, "[God's] attitude to our works is rather like that of the father who is pleased to watch and accept what his little child tries to do even though it be of no practical value." (Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life, 302).
229 Inst. III: xix: 5 [CO 2 (30): 616]. Similarly in III: xvii: 6 [CO 2 (30): 594] Calvin writes: "Whenever... we hear that he does good to those who keep his law, let us remember that the children of God are there designated by the duty that ought in them to be perpetual, and that we have been adopted for this reason: to reverence him as our Father. Accordingly, not to renounce our right of adoption, we must ever strive in the direction of our call." That we can revere God is due to his divine enabling alone. Hence in III: xviii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 604] Calvin argues: "Now that God has begun a
The discipline through which zeal for righteousness is channelled is obedience to “a rule”:

Even though the law of the Lord provides the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a man’s life, it seemed good to the Heavenly Teacher to shape his people by an even more explicit plan to that rule which he had set forth in the law. Here, then, is the beginning of this plan: the duty of believers is “to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him,” and in this consists the lawful worship of him [Rom. 12:1]. From this is derived the basis of the exhortation that “they be not conformed to the fashion of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that they may prove what is the will of God.” [Rom. 12:2].

This rule or plan manifests itself in a life of self-denial, of cross-bearing and of meditation upon the future life (Inst. III: vii-ix). What is not clear is the relationship between the moral law and the rule. Hesselink helpfully delineates three facets of the relationship: (i) The law provides the framework in which the plan is outworked; (ii) The plan helps the believer to move beyond the law to the example of Christ. He is the best interpreter of the law, its fulfilment, example and Spirit; (iii) the law and the plan are one, the whole intention of which is that the law should shine through the believer.

When dealing with self-denial, Calvin structures his thought around Paul’s words in Romans 12:1-2. Self-denial involves the recognition of two facts: firstly, that the adopted are not their own; secondly, that they belong to God: “We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.... we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal [Rom. 14:8; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19].”

good work in them, it must also be made perfect when, resembling their Heavenly Father in righteousness and holiness, they prove themselves sons true to their nature.”

231 "In setting forth how the life of a Christian man is to be ordered, I am not unaware that I am entering into a varied and diverse subject, which in magnitude would occupy a large volume, were I to try to treat it in full detail.” (Inst. III: vi :1 [CO 2 (30): 501]). Niesel includes the three aspects of obedience under the imitation of Christ (op.cit., 143-151); Wendel includes them under regeneration and the Christian life (op.cit., 247ff.), and Wallace under dying and rising with Christ (Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 51ff.).
232 Calvin’s Concept of the Law, 279-281.
233 Inst. III: vii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 506]. On Roms. 12:1 Calvin writes: “There are two points to be considered here. First, we are the Lord’s and second, we ought for this very reason to be holy, for it is an affront to God’s holiness to offer Him anything which has not first been consecrated. On this assumption it follows at the same time that we ought to meditate on holiness throughout the whole of
A noticeable aspect of Calvin's perspective on self-denial is the emphasis he puts on the body. Paul, he observes, points to the body to illustrate the fact that believers are not their own. Their bodies are the "temples of the Holy Spirit" and are not, therefore, the believer's private property. They house the Spirit of God who first granted to believers their bodies. They should, then, be instruments of cleanliness, particularly sexual purity. To disobediently abuse the body in acts of self-indulgence is sacrilegious and drives away the Holy Spirit who otherwise guides the adopted towards obedience. In the use of the body, as in everything else, "redemption must hold us bound, and hold the licentiousness of our flesh in check with the bridle of obedience."

The obedience of self-denial does not, however, end with external bodily acts. It must be reflected in the entirety of the whole person. "Then is the man pure and entire, when he thinks nothing in his mind, desires nothing in his heart, does nothing with his body, except what is approved by God." The pure and entire believer is the one who offers himself as a reasonable sacrifice unto God and refuses to be conformed unto the world.

Yet that is only the one side of the coin. Refusing to seek his own, the child of God selflessly works to do his Father's will and to glorify his name. "The Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life." Interestingly, when Calvin expands on this he does not do so immediately in terms of the believer's surrender to God per se, but in terms of how that voluntary self-offering manifests itself in horizontal relationships of self-denial. God's people surrender themselves to him by using the free gifts he has given them. In this way they demonstrate a heavenward gratitude by the denial of themselves in order to help others:

The lawful use of all benefits consists in a liberal and kindly sharing of them with others. No surer rule and no more valid exhortation to keep it could be devised than our life, and that it is a kind of sacrilege if we relapse into uncleanness, for this is nothing but to profane what was sanctified." (CC Rom., 263 [CO 49 (77): 234]).

1 Cor., 132 [CO 49 (77): 400].

Cf. CC Rom., 264 [CO 49 (77): 234-235] and CTS 1 Thess., 304-305 [CO 52 (80): 179], where Calvin makes clear his dichotomic or bipartite understanding of the constitution of man. The soul is subdivided into understanding (Spirit) and will (soul). Calvin acknowledges that the problem has arisen because Scripture often speaks of each element separately.

CTS 1 Thess., 305 [CO 52 (80): 179].

CC Rom., 264-265 [CO 49 (77): 235-236].


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when we are taught that all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and
entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbour’s benefit [cf.
1 Peter 4:10].

However, the true and proper care of a neighbour consists not in mere duty
but in love whereby the believer’s first concern is for the neighbour’s advantage and
not his own. In this way, Calvin says, the believer exercises proper management
over the gifts he has been given. Neighbourly aid is carried out on the basis not of
personal merit but in recognition that vestiges of the image of God remain in all
whether converted or not. Commenting on Galatians 6:10, Calvin draws a
distinction between the Christian and non-Christian:

Paul... applies his doctrine... widely and tells us to do good to all men, but
commends especially the household of faith [domesticus fidel], that is, believers,
because they belong to the same family as ourselves.

Only after having outlined what it means to do God’s will in terms of loving
one’s neighbour does Calvin state, really as an afterthought, more explicitly what it
means to do God’s will per se. When he does so, he ties it in with the believer’s
attitude to the providence of God. The key to a tranquil life is to surrender one’s self,
desires and possessions to the Lord’s will. “We can see”, says Calvin, how uneasy in
mind all those persons are who order their lives according to their own plan.

To guard against this, Calvin offers two pieces of advice. First, Christians
should never seek a way to prosperity outside of the Lord’s blessing. It is the Lord
who must prosper the believer’s skill as he seeks to fulfil legitimate projects.
Secondly, Christians should be content with their lot. They can enjoy ease of mind
only once they have truly denied themselves by subjecting their lives to the rule of
God’s will. They must therefore refuse to murmur against divine providence whether
experienced through disease, war, lost harvests, poverty, bereavement, loss of

241 Calvin calls them “duties of love”. “Now he who merely performs all the duties of love does not
fulfil them, even though he overlooks none; but he, rather, fulfils them who does this from a sincere
feeling of love. For it can happen that one who indeed discharges to the full all his obligations as far
as outward duties are concerned is still all the while far away from the true way of discharging them.”
(Inst. III: vii: 7 [CO 2 (30): 511]).
243 CC Gal., 114-115 [CO 50 (78): 263].
244 Inst. III: vii: 8 [CO 2 (30): 512].
245 Inst. III: vii: 8-9 [CO 2 (30): 512-513]. “No doubt the sons of God, in all their actions, should
keep constantly in mind and firmly resolve as their rule of conduct, not to overlap the bounds of their
property, or persecution. In every circumstance they are to look to “God’s kindness and truly fatherly indulgence”. “Whatever happens, because he will know it ordained of God, he will undergo it with a peaceful and grateful mind so as not obstinately to resist the command of him into whose power he once for all surrendered himself and his every possession.” Thus, Calvin ends his consideration of self-denial with a rule of piety: “God’s hand alone is the judge and governor of fortune, good or bad, and that it does not rush about with heedless force, but with most orderly justice deals out good as well as ill to us.”

The pattern of obedience requires, secondly, that believers take up their cross (Matt. 16:24). While Calvin regards this as a higher level of obedience, in reality it continues his thoughts on adversity:

Whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of his fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil. It is the heavenly Father’s will thus to exercise them so as to put his own children to a definite test. Beginning with Christ, his first-born, he follows this plan with all his children.

The pattern for cross-bearing has, then, been laid down by Christ who, as the Father’s firstborn, went in a definitive way to the death of the cross. On Romans 8:29-30, Calvin comments: 

In calling Christ firstborn Paul meant simply to express that if Christ possesses the pre-eminence among all the sons of God, He was rightly given to us as an example, so that we should not refuse anything which He has been pleased to undergo. As, therefore, our heavenly Father testifies by every means to the authority and dignity which He has conferred upon His Son, He wants all those whom He adopts as the heirs of His kingdom to be conformed to His example.

Thus, in taking up their cross believers bear the image of Christ:

God had determined that all whom He has adopted should bear the image of Christ. He did not simply say that they should be conformed to Christ, but to the image of Christ in order to teach us that in Christ there is a living and conspicuous example which is set before all the sons of God for their imitation. The sum of the passage is that free adoption, in which our salvation consists, is inseparable from this other decree, viz. that He had appointed us to bear the cross.

249 “Whom [God] foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”
250 CC Rom., 181 [CO 49 (77): 160].
As the perfect Son of God learnt obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb. 5: 8), so his brethren must go the same route and, in doing so, they find that their fellowship with Christ is confirmed.  

However, while there was no need for Christ to bear a cross in order to prove his obedience to his Father, Calvin proffers several reasons why his younger siblings should find profit in cross-bearing. Firstly, it prizes them away from confidence in the flesh. Humbled under the weight of the cross the godly look to God continually for protection and preservation. Secondly, it tests their patience and instructs them in obedience. “They are”, says Calvin, “instructed by the cross to obey, because thus they are taught to live not according to their own whim but according to God’s will.” It keeps them disciplined and prevents them from becoming spoilt children. Thus, God wisely tempers each trial according each believer’s need, but never above that which is bearable.  

Thirdly, crosses function as instruments of chastisement. Although they are sent because of past transgressions, they are also applied as inducements to future obedience lest the godly become discouraged. The divine intention is that his children should not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). “In the very harshness of tribulations we must recognize the kindness and generosity of our Father toward us, since he does not even then cease to promote our salvation. For he afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us but, rather, to free us from the condemnation of the world.”

251 “By communion with him the very sufferings themselves not only become blessed to us but also help much in promoting our salvation.” (Inst. III: viii: 1 [CO 2 (30): 515]). See Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life, 24-25, 44.


254 Commenting on this verse Calvin writes: “Those thoughts should help us, not only to be patient, so that we may endure calmly the afflictions laid upon us by God, but also to be grateful, so that giving thanks to God our Father, we may submit ourselves to His discipline in willing obedience.” (CC 1 Cor., 256 [CO 49 (77): 495]).

255 Cf. Calvin’s comments on Heb. 12:6: “However severe and wrathful a judge God shows Himself to be towards unbelievers whenever He punishes them, in the case of his elect He has no other purpose than to take counsel for their salvation. This is the demonstration of His fatherly love.”(CC Heb., 190 [CO 55 (83): 173-174]; cf. Parker, Calvin, 91).
The classic verses obviously occupying Calvin’s mind are Proverbs 3:11-12 and Heb.12:8, even though neither are Pauline.\(^{256}\) Of the writer to the Hebrews Calvin observes that

from the common practice of men he reasons that it is not fitting for the sons of God to be free from the discipline of the Cross. If no man, at least of prudence and sound judgement can be found who does not correct his children, since they cannot be led to real virtue without discipline, how much less will God, who is the best and wisest father, neglect so necessary a remedy?\(^{257}\)

The genuine child of God will not shrink from chastisement but will rather recall from whose hand it has come. In fact, Calvin goes further:

The apostle rightly draws the conclusion that anyone who seeks to be free from the Cross is withdrawing himself from the number of the children of God. It follows from this that we do not value the blessing of adoption as we ought and that we reject all the grace of God when we want to avoid His chastisement. That is what all those who do not bear affliction with equanimity do. Why does he call those who avoid correction bastards rather than foreigners? It is because he is addressing those who were enrolled into the church and thus sons of God. He is indicating that if they withdrew themselves from the discipline of the Father their profession of Christ would be false and untrue so that they were bastards rather than legitimate children.

Thus, whereas the slave to sin grows obstinate under chastisement, freeborn sons are brought to repentance. Thus, the authenticity of personal faith is attested not by whether there is freedom from pain, but by whether the sufferer is kept from intemperateness in the face of it by resting in the spiritual consolation of God.

This does not mean to say that believers never struggle with rebellion.\(^{258}\) They are not Stoics, neither was the Lord, nor did he encourage Stoicism (John 16:20; Matt. 5:4). Although sinless, he wept in the midst of a fallen world (Lk. 22:44; Matt. 26:37-38). Tears and a patient spirit are, then, compatible in the lives of God’s people just as they were in the life of the Lord. However, whereas the Lord went towards this pain, troubles and chastisements come upon the godly as from their Father’s hand and for their good.\(^{259}\)

\(^{256}\) Calvin did not believe the epistle to be of Pauline authorship: “I can deduce no reason to show that Paul was its author; ...the manner of teaching and style sufficiently show that Paul was not the author...” (CC Heb., 1 [CO 55 (83): 5]).

\(^{257}\) CC Heb., 191 [CO 55 (83): 174].

\(^{258}\) Indeed, even when the believer has fallen, “the Father is ever ready to admit us to his mercy” (“To the Duchess of Ferrara”, dated 2nd February 1555 (Letters, vol. 3, 130)). Calvin continues: “When you reflect, Madam, that God, in humbling his children, has no wish to cover them with shame for ever, that consideration will make you hope in him, to the end that you may quit yourself more courageously in time to come. Certes, I am convinced that the same attacks which caused you to backslide, will be again ere long renewed, but I pray you to think how much you owe to Him, who has ransomed you at such cost, and daily invites you to his heavenly inheritance.”

\(^{259}\) Inst. III: viii: 6-11 [CO 2 (30): 518-523]. “If in fatherly fashion God’s countenance beams upon us, even our miseries will be blessed. For they will be turned into aids to salvation.” (Inst. III: ii: 28 [CO 2 (30): 421]).
Thirdly, the pattern of Christian obedience involves meditating on the future life (*meditatio futurae vitae*).\(^{260}\) Weighed down by a multiplicity of trials and troubles, the godly are weaned from the love of this world. As it becomes worthless to them,\(^ {261}\) they are directed to look above and beyond the present struggle. Only then do they rightly advance *via* the *crucis disciplina*.\(^ {262}\) However, although worthless in the light of eternity, there should nevertheless be genuine thankfulness for all the current blessings that believers enjoy even in the midst of life's miseries.

At this juncture in his treatment of the believer's meditation on the future life Calvin introduces the notion of the inheritance: "Before he shows us openly the inheritance of eternal glory, God wills by lesser proofs to show himself to be our Father. These are the benefits that are daily conferred on us by him."\(^ {263}\) Thus, Calvin sets about offsetting the rather dour picture he paints of the Christian life. Although "this life serves us in understanding God's goodness", the fact that it shines through life's trials, prepares the believer for the brighter glory of the heavenly kingdom, for nobody shall triumphantly receive a celestial crown but those who have endured this prior struggle. Thus, no one can taste the goodness of God without being stirred by the prospect of the full revelation of God's goodness. "Whatever", says Calvin, "is taken away from the perverse love of this life ought to be added to the desire for a better one."\(^ {264}\)

It is this desire that makes the present life not only bearable but also happy:

The entire company of believers, so long as they dwell on earth, must be "as sheep destined for the slaughter" [Rom. 8:36] to be conformed to Christ their Head. They would therefore have been desperately unhappy unless, with mind intent upon heaven, they had surmounted whatever is in this world, and passed beyond the present aspect of affairs [cf. 1 Cor. 15:19].\(^ {265}\)

"This truly", says Calvin, "is our sole comfort."

\(^{260}\) Göhler, *op.cit.*, 39ff.  
\(^{261}\) *Inst. III: ix*: 2 [CO 2 (30): 524-525].  
\(^{262}\) *Inst. III: ix*: 1 [CO 2 (30): 524].  
\(^{263}\) *Inst. III: ix*: 3 [CO 2 (30): 525].  
\(^{264}\) *Inst. III: ix*: 4 [CO 2 (30): 525].  
\(^{265}\) *Inst. III: ix*: 6 [CO 2 (30): 527-528].
4.6 The Inheritance

The adopted have, then, been separated from the world and assembled together in the hope of their eternal inheritance. On the classic passage, Romans 8:17f., Calvin comments that, "Salvation consists in having God as our Father". It logically follows that the inheritance is appointed for children (filii): "When... God has adopted us as His children (filios), He has at the same time also ordained an inheritance for us." The inheritance is, then, an accompaniment of sonship and is possessed by all members of the household, from the natural Son to the adopted sons.

Two questions immediately come to mind: what is the inheritance and how can the adopted be assured of it? First, the inheritance richly conveys the meaning of eternal life, and the telos of the Father's predestination of his sons and daughters to glory. It was first held out to Abraham and thereafter to his true spiritual children, and forms the Father's reparation of Adam's deprivation of the world's inheritance. Thus, while the sons of God have a current promise and downpayment of the inheritance, they enter into possession of it immediately after death when, departing the exile of life here on earth, they enter heaven which is the believer's homeland and fatherland (patria/coelestem patriam/veram patriam). Alternatively, Calvin describes it as the heavenly kingdom received by hereditary right of the adopted and obtained through the grace of adoption.

Naturally, the inheritance is eternal: "Those who assign the children of God a thousand years in which to enjoy the inheritance of the life to come do not realize how much reproach they are casting upon Christ and his Kingdom. For if they do not put on immortality, then Christ himself, to whose glory they shall be transformed,

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266 Heinrich Quistorp notes that "Calvin likes to describe the relation of present and future salvation by means of the Pauline image of childhood [sonship is preferable] and inheritance." (Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things. Translated by Harold Knight. London: Lutterworth Press, 1955, 23).
267 CC Rom., 171 [CO 49 (77): 150].
268 "No hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been united with all other members under Christ, our Head." (Inst. IV: i: 2). In the same portion Calvin writes of the elect who "have been called not only into the same inheritance of eternal life but also to participate in one God and Christ [Eph. 5:30]."
270 Commenting on Gal. 6:9 Calvin writes "the word 'blessing' is used variously in Scripture; but here it means adoption into inheritance of eternal life." (CC Gal., 52 [CO 50 (78): 207]).
271 Inst. III: xxv: 9 [CO 2 (30): 740-741],
has not been received into undying glory [1 Cor. 15:13ff.]."\textsuperscript{273} Yet, it is also incorruptible.\textsuperscript{274} Hence, when Paul writes of "the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:18), according to Calvin he does not mean that the sons of God will only be revealed at the last day. Rather, he envisages "that it shall then be made known how desirable and happy their condition is when they put off their corruption and put on heavenly glory."\textsuperscript{275} The inheritance is therefore to be highly extolled so that in the midst of a fallen and hostile world the children of God may find contentment, boldly despise the enticements of the world, and patiently bear whatever troubles may befall them in the world. Thus, says Calvin, "the inheritance to which we are called is too excellent not to be pursued to the end."\textsuperscript{276}

Although the possession of the inheritance is ultimately futuristic, Calvin nevertheless emphasises the comfort derived from the believer's present knowledge of it. For this reason he recognises, but does not stress the distinction between heaven as an intermediate state entered into at death and the new heaven and new earth experienced at the Second Coming. What is uppermost in Calvin's mind is that believers should wait with patience for their receipt of the inheritance irrespective of when they shall receive it. This does not mean that he overlooks the distinction. He merely applies the doctrine more immediately and practically.\textsuperscript{277} In this sense the earnest expectation of creation (Rom. 8:19) sets an example to the adopted. Paul "ascribes hope to irrational creatures, so that believers may open their eyes to behold the invisible life, even though as yet it lies hidden beneath a humble garb."\textsuperscript{278}

One place where we might have expected Calvin to labour the difference between death and the consummation is in his commentary on Romans 8:22-23 (the adoption as the redemption of the body). While Calvin does refer there to the resurrection he holds together the completion of the believer's earthly pilgrimage and the prospect of heavenly renewal as the afterlife in which the inheritance is

\textsuperscript{273} \textit{Inst. Ill: xxv: 5 [CO 2 (30); 734].}
\textsuperscript{274} \textit{CC Rom., 171 [CO 49 (77): 150].}
\textsuperscript{275} \textit{CC Rom., 172 [CO 49 (77): 152].}
\textsuperscript{276} "To the Marquis de Rothelin", dated 22d August 1559, \textit{Letters}, vol. 4, 66.
\textsuperscript{277} "Our Lord, while teaching you that your inheritance is in heaven has made provision for what might be useful for the life of the body, by bestowing contentment upon you, and as regards property, more than was needful to make you contented." ("To Monsieur de Falais", dated September 1545, \textit{Letters}, vol. 2, 18).
\textsuperscript{278} "Paul instructs us that we have an example of the patience to which he had exhorted us even in dumb creatures themselves." (\textit{CC Rom.}, 172 [CO 49 (77): 151]). This does not mean to say that
enjoyed. Although he acknowledges that the adoption refers to the resurrection and is the fulfilment of the eternal decree, he initially links it with the end of the believer’s earthly pilgrimage. “Why”, says Calvin, “is God our Father, if not that we may receive a Heavenly inheritance after we have finished our earthly pilgrimage.” Only then does he note that as the believer carries the seeds of death through life in order to be held by death once dead, the death of Christ ultimately bears fruit in the believer’s “heavenly renewal”. Thus, Calvin at length expresses what is nowadays called the “now, but not yet” eschatological tension.

The adopted cope with their personal experiencing of this tension by exercising faith and hope in the midst of their circumstances, and, indeed, because of them:

Faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when his truth shall be manifested; faith believes that he is our Father, hope anticipates that he will ever show himself to be a Father toward us; faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope anticipates that it will some time be revealed; faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith.

What faith hopes for, the eternal decree shall finally accomplish by bringing the adopted to glory (see ch. 2.1) This is the terminus to which all salvation-history points:

Now what is the purpose of election but that we, adopted as sons by our Heavenly Father, may obtain salvation and immortality by his favor? No matter how much you toss it about and mull it over, you will discover that its final bounds still extend no farther. Accordingly, those whom God has adopted as his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ; for unless he could love them in him, he could not honor them with the inheritance of his kingdom if they had not previously become partakers of him.

The second question asks how the sons of God can possibly know, when beset by the acutest of trials, that their hopes of relief through an eternal inheritance are not deluded. A close reading of Calvin reveals two grounds of assurance. First, there is Christ: “No one hopes well in the Lord except him who confidently glories in the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom.” The inheritance of the heavenly creatures will participate in the same glory as the adopted, but they will share in a better state once God restores the fallen world to perfection.

279 CC Rom., 175-176 [CO 49 (77): 155]. “Paul improperly refers here to our adoption as the enjoyment of the inheritance into which we have been adopted”.
280 Inst. III: ii: 42 [CO 2 (30): 432]. Commenting on Phil. 3: 12 Calvin states that although the believer’s salvation rests in hope, the inheritance is nevertheless secure even though it has not been taken possession of as of yet [CC Phil., 277 [CO 52 (80): 51]].
282 Inst. III: ii: xvi [CO 2 (30): 411]. “True it is, the time seems long, especially during these very grievous trials and persecutions of the children of God. But when we tend heavenwards, and have
Kingdom belongs to the adopted because Christ, the mediator, has in perichoretic manner adopted them as his brethren.\textsuperscript{283} They are assured of their adoption and accompanying inheritance because Christ has taken possession of it when it was conferred on him.\textsuperscript{284} Thus, because Christ possesses the inheritance, all those united to him may participate in it too. "Although glorification has as yet been exhibited only in our Head, yet, because we now perceive in Him the inheritance of eternal life, His glory brings to us such assurance [securitatem] of our own glory, that our hope may justly be compared to a present possession."\textsuperscript{285} Furthermore, believers are assured of the inheritance not only because Christ has already received it but due to the way it was received; namely, \textit{via} the cross. Therefore, when the cross is seen in the personal experience of the adopted there can be confidence in the participation in the inheritance that has already been obtained.\textsuperscript{286}

Secondly, the adopted are assured of the inheritance because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, believers cannot look to Christ apart from the Spirit's help. Even if they were capable of deriving comfort from merely relying on what the Scriptures record of Christ's entrance into his inheritance, it is the Holy Spirit who testifies internally to the authority of Scripture.\textsuperscript{287} However, the Holy Spirit goes further. He also testifies to the certainty of the believer's adoption and the accompanying right of inheritance by operating as the seal and guarantee of the inheritance.\textsuperscript{288} It is precisely because the Spirit acts this way that he is called the "Spirit of adoption",\textsuperscript{289} and typifies the Gospel era in which "the hope of eternal inheritance, of which the Spirit is the earnest [arrhabo] and seal [sigillum], [is] sealed on [believers'] hearts."\textsuperscript{290}

rightly tasted of celestial joys, we shall have a haven in view to draw us on, not only a few steps, but across an ocean, however vast and fathomless. Thus, my brethren, let us continually raise our thoughts to that everlasting inheritance, so as to despise this perishable life and all its vanities." ("To the Church of Paris", dated 28\textsuperscript{th} January 1555 \textit{(Letters, vol. 3, 128}).

\textsuperscript{283} \textit{Inst. II: xii: 2 [CO 2 (30): 341];} This is clarified by Niesel who notes that "By the brotherhood which the Son of God establishes between Himself and us in becoming man, the eternal inheritance which is His own is guaranteed to us also as our possession" (Niesel, \textit{op.cit.}, 114).

\textsuperscript{284} \textit{CC Rom., 171 [CO 49 (77): 151].}

\textsuperscript{285} \textit{CC Rom., 182 [CO 49 (77): 161].}

\textsuperscript{286} \textit{CC Rom., 171 [CO 49 (77): 151].}

\textsuperscript{287} Wendel, \textit{op.cit.}, 157ff..


\textsuperscript{289} \textit{Inst. III: xxiv: 1 [CO 2 (30): 711].}

\textsuperscript{290} \textit{CC Rom., 169 [CO 49 (77): 149].}
To say that the Holy Spirit seals and guarantees the inheritance means that “from heaven he so gives life to us, on pilgrimage in the world and resembling dead men, as to assure us that our salvation is safe in God’s unfailing care.” In commenting on Ephesians 1:13-14 Calvin notes that whereas a seal gave authenticity to charters and wills, but especially letters, a guarantee, earnest or pledge is something used by parties in drawing up a contract. On both accounts Calvin drew out the way in which Paul sought to outline the nature of the believer’s assurance of the inheritance.

As a seal the Holy Spirit differentiates between authentic and inauthentic claims of sonship: “The Spirit of God is like a seal, by which we are distinguished from the reprobate, and which is impressed on our hearts that we may be assured of the grace of adoption.” Thus, says Calvin:

The true conviction which believers have of the Word of God, of their own salvation, and of all religion, does not spring from the feeling of the flesh, or from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit, who makes their consciences more certain and removes all doubt.

In vanquishing doubt, the Holy Spirit “brings it to pass that the promise of salvation is not made to us in vain. For as God promises in His Word that He will be to us a Father, so by the Holy Spirit, He gives us the testimony of His adoption.” It is by the sealing of the Spirit that believers, being assured of their adoption, are conducted into the possession of their inheritance.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit is also the arrha (ἀρρά) or downpayment of the believer’s inheritance. Once given the Spirit cannot be withdrawn but points towards a day when the inheritance will be possessed in full. In the meantime the Holy Spirit serves as the symbol of a pledge until the inheritance is received on the day of

291 Inst. III: i: 3 [CO 2 (30): 395].
292 “In whom ye also having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation - in whom having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of the possession obtained, unto the praise of his glory.” (CC Eph., 131-132).
293 “Doeth [God] touch us with his holy Spirit? We are ingrafted as it were into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the true earnest penny of our adoption. This is the pledge which is given us, to put us out of all doubt that God, taketh us and holdeth us for his, when we are made one by faith with Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son, unto whom belongs the inheritance of life.” (BT 1 Tim (Sermons), 153).
294 CC Eph., 194 [CO 51 (79): 212].
295 CC Eph., 131 [CO 51 (79): 153].
296 CC Eph., 132 [CO 51 (79): 153].
297 CC Eph., 194 [CO 51 (79): 212].
298 CC Eph., 132 [CO 51 (79): 154].
redemption.299 It is because the Holy Spirit is both the seal and downpayment of the inheritance that the adopted can be confident of their inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 1: 21, Calvin writes:

As the Spirit is our surety because He testifies to our adoption, and our sphragis and seal because He establishes the good faith of the promises, so He is well named our 'earnest' [arrha] because it is his work to ratify God's covenant [pactum] on both sides [that is, the divine and the human] and without Him it would hang in suspense.300

This is Paul's colourful way of writing of what is elsewhere called the testimonium Spiritus Sancti (Roms. 8:16).301 In his commentary on Romans 8, Calvin picks up on the apostle's description of the Christian's current experience as but the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). All believers are “sprinkled in this world with only a few drops of the Spirit”.302 Yet these pneumatological first fruits are the precursor to the eschatological harvest for which the adopted groan. This harvest is experienced at the adoption, the redemption of the body. Thus, while the present manifestation of the adoption is restricted to the regeneration of the soul, the adoption simpliciter will finalise the redemption of believers as psychosomatic beings.

For the present, then, the children of God have been granted sufficient incentives to pursue lives of obedience to the Father. Christ teaches us, says Calvin, “to travel as pilgrims in this world that our celestial heritage may not perish or pass away.”303 “Let the first step towards godliness be”, Christ teaches, “to recognize that God is our Father to watch over us, govern and nourish us, until he gather us unto the

299 When commenting on the day of redemption, Calvin is unequivocal in his Ephesians commentary about what he has in mind in a way not found in his Romans commentary (8:22-23): “He is speaking of the day of judgement, for though we are already redeemed by the blood of Christ, the result of that redemption is not yet visible; for every creature groans, desiring to be delivered from corruption. And we ourselves also, who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, long for the same freedom; for we have not yet obtained it, except by hope. But we shall enjoy it in reality, when Christ shall appear in judgement. In this sense Paul uses the word redemption in Rom. 8:23, and so also the Lord, when He says “Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh”(Lk. 21:28).” (CC Eph., 132 [CO 51 (79): 154]). Encountering the term “redemption” again in Ephesians 4:30 Calvin points his readers to his comments on Rom. 8:23 where he believed he had said enough (CC Eph., 194-195 [CO 51 (79): 212]).

300 CC 2 Cor., 23 [CO 50 (78): 24].

301 Zachman captures the importance of the witness of the Spirit for Calvin's theology when he writes: "Only the testimony of the Holy Spirit can seal the truth of our adoption on the conscience, so that we boldly and confidently cry Abba, Father, and confidently await every good thing from God, including the inheritance of the kingdom of God and eternal life." (op.cit., 187).

302 CC Rom., 175. [CO 49 (77): 154].

303 Inst. III: vii: 3 [CO 2 (30): 508].
eternal inheritance of the kingdom.”

As if gratitude were not a sufficient incentive to filial obedience, the Father astonishingly holds out a reward for works done in this life, namely the inheritance. However, “the Kingdom of Heaven is not servants’ wages but sons’ inheritance [Eph.1:18], which only they who have been adopted [cooptati] as sons by the Lord shall enjoy [cf. Gal. 4:7], and that for no other reason than this adoption [cf. Eph. 1:5-6].”

The reward is received by right of inheritance and not by works. Hence Paul calls it ‘the reward of inheritance’, “by which he means that the very thing that is paid to works is freely given to us by God, for inheritance comes from adoption.”

Any reward that is offered and eventually given is not one of a mechanical contractual payment but of love and mercy wherewith the Father willingly accepts the imperfect obedience of his children.
Conclusion

With the inheritance our study of Calvin draws to a close. Before proceeding to the second primary source of adoption in the Reformed tradition, namely the Westminster Standards, it is worth pausing to reflect upon the nature of Calvin's contribution to the exposition of the doctrine and to highlight some of the issues he left unresolved.

One thing that is obvious even from such a limited study as this is that Calvin's pervasive references to adoption, when woven together, create a fulsome understanding of the doctrine. Although it is regrettable that he read adoption (υἱοθεσία) into authors other than Paul, he was nevertheless fully cognisant of the importance of adoption for the apostle. Although we might judge that practically speaking it would have benefited the profile of the doctrine had he included a separate discussion of it in the Institutes, nevertheless he provided subsequent Calvinists with a truly biblical understanding of Paul's doctrine. At the heart of his esteem for Paul was Calvin's shared appreciation of the redemptive-historical setting of soteriology. This much is abundantly clear from the fragmentary comments strewn throughout his writings. By pulling many of the adoption references together we have been able to sketch the trajectory that clearly seems to have been in the reformer's mind, so demonstrating the overt Christological emphasis of his soteriology. As we shall go on to see, this emphasis was later to be challenged by the systematising and subtle anthropological tendencies of the ordo salutis model.

Future Calvin scholarship, if so inclined, can confirm Calvin's reliance on Paul by extending the preceding exposition through a systematic trawling of those sources we have but randomly drawn from, namely the reformer's sermons, commentaries and successive editions of the Institutes between the years 1536 and 1559. This would complete the initial search of the main sources available. That said, the limitations of the present study have not precluded an appreciative exposition of the main features of his thought on adoption. While the remarkable consistency of

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308 Whether correct or not in his diagrammatic use of language, T F Torrance argues that when understood Christologically, Calvin's understanding of salvation is circular; predestination serving as the outer protecting wall "for the central emphases of grace and adoption or sonship in Christ", the main teaching of which being union with Christ ("Our Witness through Doctrine" in Proceedings of the 17th General Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches. Princeton, NJ, 1954. Edited by Marcel Pradervand. Geneva, 1954, 135).
Calvin's thought has made this possible, future research may nevertheless have the
goal to resolve recognised ambiguities, unearth new ones and supply fresh
interpretations.

Whatever comes of Calvin's doctrine of adoption, more is needed than simply
a benefiting of Calvin studies. In line with Calvin's own concerns for theological
exposition, it is vital that future research work toward a better understanding of
adoption. Those Calvin scholars with an eye to the doctrinal understanding of the
church rather than the more exclusive esoteric interests of the academy have the
opportunity to resolve the major questions germane to Calvin's theology of adoption.
Three are particularly noteworthy.

The first is the origin of Calvin's use of the motif. Is it possible to trace with
certainty the source of Calvin's fondness for it? Particularly requisite is an
examination of Calvin's use of the Fathers.309 Did one or more of them sow the seeds
of his interest? And if so, whose were the references to adoption that so appealed to
the reformer?

Secondly, what form of religious language do Calvin's references to adoption
take? Is his use of adoption more characteristic of naïve or critical realism? What can
be deduced from what we know of his use of the term Father for God (ch. 2.2)? All
we have been able to determine is that whereas he refers frequently to various figures
of speech in Scripture, he never appears to refer to adoption in this way.310 This begs
the question concerning the meaning of Calvin's silence for the linguistic status of
the motif?

Jane Dempsey Douglass is perhaps too generous to Calvin. "For the
reformers", notes Douglass, "the metaphors must be biblical to be approved. But
even if they are biblical, Calvin, at least, is unlikely to use them except when he is
working with a biblical text which in some way evokes them."311 Of course, in

309 Most helpful in this regard is Anthony NS Lane's *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), which builds on his earlier articles that were published
separately.

310 See, for example, the metaphors of the tabernacle (*CTS Isa.*, vol. 4, 135 [CO 15 (37): 269
(figuris), 270 (similitudo)]); sealing (*CC John 1-10*, 154 [CO 25 (47): 140 (metaphora)]);
(metaphora[ ] vel similitudo)]); reaping and the household of faith (*CC Gal.*, 114 [CO 28 (50): 263
(similiituidinem et metaphora)]; household and "une autre similitude" temple (*Sermons, Eph.*, 213-
124 [CO 27 (49) 107 (metaphoram aut comparationem)])

311 Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Calvin's Use of Metaphorical Language for God: God as Enemy and
God as Mother" in Gamble, *op.cit.*, vol. 6, 100.
Calvin’s case the whole picture is blurred by the way in which he refers to adoption. Contrary to later Calvinism, where adoption was to form a distinct aspect of the *ordo salutis*, Calvin’s broader use of the motif as a summary of the gospel and a potent expression of the umbrella concept of union with Christ, coupled with his theologising approach to exegesis, explains why adoption is found throughout his writings. Within the limits of the current study, the clearest proof of this is found in Calvin’s opening comments of his sermon on Galatians 3:26-29:

> Last time, we saw that the gospel has elevated us to a position of great dignity. Not only are we called to share the privileges that our holy forefathers enjoyed, who were so greatly blessed by God; but an even greater dignity and honour has been conferred upon us, because, unlike them, we have been delivered from bondage to the law. To reinforce this point, Paul states that we become children of God only through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. The same doctrine is taught in the first chapter of the Gospel of John (*John 1:12*).\(^{312}\)

It might be, but John was not teaching the importance of belief in Christ to the same people nor using the same model to unpack that particular truth. The point is not unimportant, for Calvin’s more reductionist approach to the distinctiveness of each authorial contribution to Scripture was to be greatly accelerated with the development of the more explicit scholastic method of later Calvinism.

In making this point, it ought not to be assumed that the connectedness of the models of new birth and adoption is being denied outright. What is being asserted is the importance of a due appreciation of the humanness of Scripture to complement the appreciation of its divineness. This requires that the models be connected only where there is a textual and theological *rationale* for doing so. In other words, the mixing of scriptural metaphors is only permissible where there is some reason within Scripture for doing so. For example, Paul’s epistles testify to the operation of the two models, although the new birth model (eg. *Tit. 3:4*) is not as pervasive in Paul as in John. Thus, in expounding Paul’s theology it was permissible for Calvin to juxtapose the Pauline models of new birth and adoption. As I have explained elsewhere, problems arise when a conflation of the Pauline model of adoption and the Johannine model of new birth occurs.\(^{313}\) Such a conflation was to occur repeatedly in later

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\(^{312}\) *Sermons (BT), Gal.,* 341 [CO 28 (50): 557]. Care is needed here. In the translations scriptural references from outwith the *corpus Paulinum* can be inserted into Calvin’s text. This is the case with the reference to John 1:12 above. Sometimes it occurs on the basis of but a passing allusion to a cross-reference. This can unfortunately create too strong an impression, for instance, that even when dealing with what he regarded as a book of Pauline authorship Calvin found need to read adoption into John. Cf. the original and translation of *Sermons, Eph.*, 40 and CO 29 (51): 275.

\(^{313}\) See my articles “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation”, *op.cit.*
Calvinism, but it is evident that the problem is found in Calvin. A borderline case is discerned in Calvin’s sermon on Galatians 4: 15-20: “... God desires to use his Word to bring us to new birth [veut enfanter], that we might be his children. Then we will one day obtain the inheritance for which he has adopted [adoptez] us through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thirdly, some attempt needs to be made to resolve the tension in Calvin’s statements concerning the importance of adoption. On the one hand we may ask why it was that he could describe it as “bestow[ing] salvation entire”, embracing the entire gospel, being the true and native source of salvation, the chief of all the promises that are in Christ “yea” and “amen”, and synonymous with salvation and that alone upon which salvation depends, and yet not allot a single chapter to the subject in his Institutes? Was this due to the way that Calvin set adoption in a redemptive-historical context, or was it more to do with the fact that adoption was understood to be co-terminous with union with Christ as one of its most potent expressions?

On the other hand, how could Calvin attribute such epithets to adoption and yet not include the doctrine explicitly in duplex gratia Dei? In other words, what is it that made Calvin insist on duplex rather than triplex gratia Dei, as was to be the case in the Westminster Standards and those more faithful expressions of their soteriology? Was it that Calvin functioned with an unspoken distinction between the adoptive act and state, each aspect essential and maybe climactic to an understanding of justification and regeneration respectively, or was he operating with an entirely different understanding, in which all is subsumed under adoption, the gift of salvation entire, as was also suggested above?

Irrespective of the initial implications derived from the basic exposition provided, the resolution of these additional questions opens up the possibility of fresh reflection on Calvin, whether studies of the reformer are approached from a traditional, hermeneutical or neo-orthodox angle (see ch. 1). For the present, however, it is unwise to disagree with Zachman’s more general assessment that “on the basis of the evidence, ...it is possible to show that the... Fatherhood of God in the Son through the Holy Spirit is the guiding doctrine of Calvin’s theology.” At least this interpretation has the benefit of being both substantive and consistent with the

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314 BT Gal. (Sermons), 428 [CO 28 (50): 632]. Cf. his reference to regeneration (regeneration) as the second birth (une naissance seconde) 422 [CO 28 (50): 627].
importance that Calvin attaches to adoption, while not being so narrow as to do injustice to sheer breadth of Calvin’s doctrinal interests, not least, his categorical statements about *duplex gratia Dei*.

316 With some justification, Wendel writes:

"If we want to speak of a ‘system’ of Calvin, we must do so with certain reservations, owing to the plurality of themes that imposed themselves simultaneously upon its authors thinking.

It would be better, we think, to confess that Calvin’s is not a closed system elaborated around a central idea, but that it draws together, one after another, a whole series of Biblical ideas, some of which can only with difficulty be logically reconciled. As he developed them in turn, the author of the *Institutes* was doubtless striving to bring them into harmony by some sort of application of the formal method taught in the schools; that is, by expounding the opposed conceptions one after the other and showing that they are joined together in a higher principle." (*op.cit.*, 357 and 358).
Section Two
The Westminster Standards and “the Good News 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: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have his name put upon them; receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

Q. 74. **What is adoption?**

A. Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

Q. 34. **What is adoption?**

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

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1 Eph. i. 5. Gal. iv. 4, 5.
2 Rom. viii. 17. John i. 12.
3 Jer. xiv. 9. 2 Cor. vi. 18. Rev. iii. 12.
4 Rom. viii. 15.
5 Eph. iii. 12. Rom. v. 2.
7 Ps. cvii. 13.
9 Matt. vi. 30, 32. 1 Pet. v. 7.
10 Heb. xii. 6.
11 Lam. iii. 31.
12 Eph. iv. 30.
13 Heb. vi. 12.
15 1 John iii. 1.
16 Eph. i. 5. Gal. iv. 4, 5.
17 John i. 12.
18 2 Cor. vi. 18. Rev. iii. 12.
19 Gal. iv. 6.
22 1 John iii. 1.
23 John i. 12. Rom. viii. 17.
Chapter Five

The Confession of Adoption

Of the great creeds of Christendom, none of them contains a chapter, or formal article, on adoption, except the Westminster Confession.


Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that a separate exposition of adoption (definitive of Christian experience for Calvin) is given a place in a major Christian confession for the first time in the history of the Church.

Sinclair B Ferguson, “Westminster Assembly and Documents”.

If Calvin’s theology of adoption provides the foundational evidence for the presence of the doctrine in the history and theology of the Reformed tradition, the Westminster Standards confirm the same. Before elaborating upon this, however, a word is apposite concerning the period between Calvin’s death in 1564 and the opening of the Assembly in 1643.

The link between Calvin and English Puritanism has not been without its uncertainties. In the opinion of Leonard Trinterud, for instance, the reformer’s influence was negligible. He argues that the Puritans were influenced more significantly by the reformers of the Rhineland - men such as Zwingli, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Capito, Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli and others. Certainly, some of them came to England during the reign of Edward VI at a time when the country was becoming an increasing haven for continental Protestants. However, other scholars - Ian Breward and M M Knappen for example - claim that despite the fact that Calvin never visited the British Isles he exercised a profound influence there during the English and, we may add, Scottish Reformations. Nevertheless, while this influence

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27 In England, Calvin’s influence was mediated through the presence of men such as Bucer. “Bucer, in England, was just as anxious to have Calvin make his opinion felt in that country as Calvin was to have Bucer help him. ...Calvin and Bucer were old associates. Bucer had brought Calvin to Strassburg when he was expelled from Geneva in 1538. In Strassburg, Calvin was pastor of the French congregation and worked beside Bucer. The two men agreed on most things, and it was Bucer, according to several recent students of the subject, who had more influence on Calvin’s thinking than any other contemporary.” (Cited by Won, “Communion with Christ”, 81fn.).
contributed to the emergence of the Puritan movement, it must be said that Calvin's
was not the sole contribution to the development of Reformed thought on the British
mainland, nor were the Puritans the only ones who regarded Calvin. As Gordon
Rupp reminds us:

Perhaps we ought not simply to think of this Calvinist view of salvation as
continuing only in the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Congregational Churches. There
was a large body of Anglican clergy who were conformist, and who do not fit into
the list of ejected confessors chronicled by Calamy and Walker, who retained their
benefices not only during the Commonwealth, but also after the Restoration, and
who were neither Trimmers, high-church Tories, nor Latitudinarian Whigs. Was
there not a persistence of Calvinism within the Church of England, whose
descendants would emerge in the eighteenth century as the non-Wesleyan, anti-
Arminian, Calvinist wing of the Evangelical Revival? Is there not a continuous
Calvinist, evangelical tradition within the Church of England from the last decades
of the sixteenth century onwards? Had not the evangelical Calvinism of the
eighteenth century such roots? Be that as it may, the main Calvinist tradition of the
middle of the seventeenth-century England was that of the Presbyterians, and it was
strongly learned, and produced a formidable array of preachers and theologians.

Calvin’s influence remained, therefore, strong enough to face the great social
changes of the seventeenth century.

Whereas the convulsive impact of the Reformation was contained within
Christendom, the same could not be said of the upheavals of the next century. The
new astronomy, the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), not to mention
successive revolts in France, the Netherlands, Catalonia, Naples and, of course,
England with its Civil War and Interregnum, led to the bursting of the boundaries of
establishment and tradition.

As but one by-product of the seismic changes of these years there developed
the much-debated paradigm shift to Scholasticism. Although we alluded generally to
Scholasticism at the end of the Introduction, it is worth noting Lane’s helpful
enumeration of its five specific characteristics: First, the deduction of a logical
system from basic principles by rational means, especially Aristotelian syllogism.

28 Interestingly, Richard A Muller asserts that the attempt to set Calvin against the Calvinists has been
of very little purpose, because, while acknowledging the breadth of Reformation theology, they tend
to treat Calvin’s theology as normative for any evaluation of the continuity and discontinuity of the
theological development that has followed. Calvinistic orthodoxy, he insists, “must be understood not
as a result of or as a defection from the work of a single thinker but as a doctrinal development resting
example, that no less a doughty opponent of Puritanism than Archbishop Whitgift had regard for
Calvin. See his essay “England and International Calvinism, 1558-1640” in International Calvinism
Second, it emphasised the role of reason and logic (especially Aristotle's), making them equal to revelation. Third, scholastics were concerned for a logically watertight system. Fourth, Scholasticism allowed for speculative interest in abstract metaphysical questions, especially concerning God and his will. Fifth, it took on an unhistorical approach to Scripture, treating it as a body of propositions and seeing faith as assent to these propositions rather than trust in Christ.30

Given these characteristics there is little wonder that Scholasticism has gained a pejorative meaning. Following Jenson, however, there is warrant in questioning why the critics of Scholasticism have allowed the label to serve as its refutation.31 For whatever reason this has been the case, the upshot is that negative assessments of Scholasticism help revisionist Calvinists drive a wedge between Calvin and later Calvinists. According to T F Torrance's less generous and debatable interpretation, for example, Beza's "rationalistic supralapsarian form of Calvinism"32 helped give rise to "a rigidly scholastic and rationalistic form of Calvinism in which the logicocoausal relations tended to replace ontological relations." It was this hardened form of Calvinism that apparently first came to view at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) and then again at the Westminster Assembly, also impacting Scottish theology through the influence of Samuel Rutherford.33 Although the debate will continue about the benefit or otherwise of Beza's influence, Torrance notes that Beza's influence on the Westminster Standards was not isolated:

The Westminster Confession of Faith was the great confession of Calvinistic scholasticism which brought into quasi-credal form the core of the systematised doctrine of the great dogmaticians in the early post-Calvin era. It was undoubtedly a magnificent achievement. It rested upon the teaching of theologians of considerable stature. Many of them were well known to the Assembly of divines: particularly Beza, Zanchius, Piscator, Buchanus, Keckermann, Polanus, Wollebius, Ursinus, Amesiun and Wallaeus. In addition mention should be made of the Leiden Synopsis purioris Theologiae (1581) and the Articles of Dort (1618). All of these works were in Latin, although the Medulla Theologiae (1634) of William Ames, was translated and published in English as The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, London, 1639.34

In the recent climate, however, pejorative descriptions of Scholasticism are very much open to review.35 As part of the ongoing reassessment, David Steinmetz

30 Lane, "The Quest for the Historical Calvin", 97-98; Cf. Jenson, op. cit., 5.
31 Ibid., 7.
33 Ibid., 96, 105.
34 Ibid., 125.
35 Jenson, op. cit., 9.
has argued that in one sense Calvin himself was a *scholasticus* in the church. Although not a scholastic of the order of Duns Scotus, his belief in the church as a nurturing and educating mother ensured that while he despised and misrepresented Scholasticism he also respected it and emulated it, and also borrowed from it.\(^{36}\) Thus, if Steinmetz is correct, presenting Beza's positive response to scholastic method as an entire break with Calvin does not do justice to the facts.

In the complex developments of the period, Scholasticism was influenced by many factors, not least the recasting of Aristotelian logic by the French philosopher Pierre de la Ramée (Peter Ramus (1515-1572)). Building on the advent of printing and the re-orientation of knowledge from discourse to visualisation, Ramus emphasised the importance of method – practical, simplified, utilitarian method. By means of dichotomous divisions and diagrams, Ramus' pedagogy began to contribute to the major intellectual and cultural revolution that was then marking the transition from the medieval to the modern world. The extent of Ramus's contribution remains open to discussion,\(^ {37}\) as does his connection to Aristotelianism. It is said that Ramism arose as an alternative to medieval scholastic Aristotelianism,\(^ {38}\) although the new reassessment of Protestant Scholasticism argues that Ramism was more of a re-organisation of Aristotle.\(^ {39}\)

Soon Ramus's method was being applied to biblical exposition by the likes of Johannes Piscator (1546-1625) and Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) of Basel. Thereafter his influence spread to Holland, England\(^ {40}\) and Scotland.\(^ {41}\) Although excluded from Oxford,\(^ {42}\) a number of adherents emerged in Cambridge, the earliest of whom was Laurence Chaderton (1536?-1640), under whom William Perkins, the later leading Puritan, studied.\(^ {43}\)

Perkins works were widely read during the seventeenth century, and, according to McKim, were a factor in shaping the theological viewpoints of those

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\(^{37}\) Clark, *op.cit.*, 121.


\(^{39}\) Clark, *op.cit.*, 120.

\(^{40}\) *NDT*: S.v. "Ramus, Petrus" by R W A Latham.

\(^{41}\) Ramus' influence was felt in Scotland through the work of Andrew Melville (McNeill, *op.cit.*, 307, 391).


who came after him. Perkins differed from Calvin not so much in his theology as in his rationalistic and precisionistic explanations, but above all the context from which he was working. The differences with Calvin are as much to do with the different centuries and cities they were living in, and consequent upon that, the different threats they faced.

Most important here is the influence that Ramism wielded through Perkins on the commissioners of the Westminster Assembly. Yet, the emphasis on this influence can be well overplayed. As McKim writes:

> The philosophy of Ramus provided definitions for and grounded theology’s centering focus on God. This was where Puritans who followed Calvin believed the proper emphasis should be. Ramism as adapted by the Puritans did not give specific content to theology as such. The sources of theology for English Puritanism were more from Calvin’s Geneva than [sic] Ramus’ Paris. But Ramism did offer a secure philosophical base for men like Chaderton, Perkins, George Downname, and William Ames. In addition to its preserving the unity of theology and ethics, serving as an educational tool, providing a method for preaching and memory, as well as a method for Biblical interpretation, it gave Puritans a cosmology in which the very integrity of the Deity stood at the heart of the universe. Epistemologically, humans could know the Creator. ... Ramist Puritans could do these things and come to this knowledge by means of the methods that God Himself had provided. This was the value of Ramist philosophy for such a man as William Perkins.

Thus, although Ramism was influential, it was by no means the only influence on the theological discourse of the divines. In any case, its impact was methodological rather than theological.

Nevertheless, the publication of the Westminster Standards marked the codification of the scholastic method that had been developing since the sixteenth century. If not absolutely different to the humanist method used by Calvin, it nevertheless altered the tenor of Reformed theology. A change of method is one thing, however, a change of theology another. As Lane has noted: “A comparison of Calvin with the Westminster Confession would make it clear that there is a significant shift in this direction. The preoccupation of the Westminster divines with

\[44\] Ibid., 119.
\[45\] Ibid., 132-133; cf. Breward, op.cit., 30; Paul R Schaeffer, “Protestant ‘Scholasticism’ at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart” in Trueman and Clark, op.cit., 151-152. Similarly Collinson writes: “‘Calvin against the Calvinists’ has been an attractive slogan, drawing attention to the significant changes in theological method which are detectable in the work of Beza, Zanchius and Perkins, and thereafter in much English and New English divinity. ... Nevertheless, to mean by ‘Calvinist’ something other than a follower of Calvin will always seem a trifle perverse, while the extent to which Calvin’s legacy was falsified by his immediate successors has been exaggerated.” (op.cit., 217).
the appropriation of salvation and the ordo salutis is foreign to Calvin. Venema unpacks this in greater detail. Ordo salutis, he says:

Largely differs from Calvin's understanding of the twofold grace of God in Christ by virtue of its considerably more technical elucidation of God's grace, and its tendency to speak of "justification" and "sanctification" almost exclusively within the framework of "applied grace" (gratia applicatrix). The ordo salutis tends to equate the grace of God with a series of logically, sometimes even chronologically, distinct occurrences in the human soul. In contradistinction to Calvin's emphasis upon the theological and Christological basis for understanding the nature of God's grace in us through the operation of the Holy Spirit, the ordo salutis threatens always to focus upon the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Moreover, this work of the Spirit tends to be too sharply distinguished from its basis in the work of the Father and the Son, as well as from its setting within the communion of the church. Consequently, the work of the Spirit is often interpreted in terms of an internalised piety. In short, the doctrine of the ordo salutis contrasts with Calvin's more fully Trinitarian development of redemption and finds it more difficult to account for the unity between justification and regeneration.

Even assuming the truth of all this, justice must still be done to the remaining similarities, especially those not included in the relevant discussions to date. Certainly, the doctrine of adoption comes into this category. We have seen how Calvin understood adoption, but the revisionist school has overlooked the significant fact that the Westminster Standards were, as far as can be told, the first creedal documents in the history of the church to allot adoption a separate locus. This may, arguably, be the most underrated contribution that the Westminster commissioners made to the development of Reformed theology. Had it been more universally recognised there could have been maintained a more common esteem for the theology of the Westminster Standards. To this day, however, few realise the import of either the twelfth chapter of the WCF and the seventy-fourth and thirty-fourth questions and answers of the LC and SC respectively. In the words of Sinclair Ferguson: "Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that a separate exposition of adoption (definitive of Christian experience for Calvin) is given a place in a major Christian confession for the first time in the history of the Church. No doctrine is less scholastic in nature." As we trace further the history of adoption in what follows, it

46 Lane, "The Quest for the Historical Calvin", 101.
47 Venema, op. cit., 289.
will become increasingly evident how strategic adoption is for a true (certainly a new) perspective on the "Calvin versus Calvinism" debate.

5.1 The Strength

By beginning with the strength of the Assembly's doctrine we are able to fill in the historical and political context out of which the WCF emerged. This is necessary in order to demonstrate just how significant was the Assembly's insertion of a locus on adoption into the Westminster Standards.

Let us be clear: they broke with creedal history by doing what apparently had never been done before. A comparison of the doctrine's profile in the WCF with those confessions it was intended to replace, viz. the Scots Confession (1560), the XXXIX Articles (Lat. 1563; Eng. 1571) and the Irish Articles of 1615, sufficiently demonstrates the point.50

It is well documented that the formulation of the WCF arose out of the Assembly's fulfilment of the third of the four parts of uniformity stipulated by the Solemn League and Covenant (1643).51 Initially the Westminster Assembly spent the first ten weeks of its deliberations on the unexceptional task of revising the XXXIX Articles. This all changed during the heady days of the Civil War when the English Parliament, faced with a worsening military situation, signed the Solemn League and Covenant with the Scottish Kirk that was acting on behalf of the Scottish Parliament. In return for military aid, the English Parliament invited the Scots to send commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. The Scots accepted the Covenant with a view to promoting the uniformity of religion in Scotland, England and Ireland. Consequently, more was required than a straightforward revision of the XXXIX Articles.52


51 For the history of the origins of the Westminster Assembly see Alexander F Mitchell, op. cit., 96-211; Robert S Paul, The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985, 74-100. Although not taken in the following order, the four parts included the Directory for Worship, the Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, and Catechisms (Minutes, 484; Warfield, op. cit., 35 and 53).

52 DSCHT. S.v. "Solemn League and Covenant," by D.C. Lachman. Warfield writes: "A common Confession of Faith was made one of the bases of the uniformity of religion which the contracting nations had bound themselves to institute." (The Westminster Assembly and its Work. Presbyterian
Of chief interest is the way in which the Westminsterian doctrine of adoption marked a significant advance not only on the XXXIX Articles but also on the Irish Articles and the Scots Confession:

(i) Scots Confession (1560)

Contrary to what is implied by its name, the theology of the Scots Confession is not distinctively Scottish. Its "most basic theological influence", writes Ian Hazlett, "is Calvin's Institutes" (hence this confession has been dealt with first). Given the reformer's frequent references to adoption we would certainly expect to find something on the doctrine. However, there is not one mention of it even though the theology of the Scots Confession is purportedly Pauline rather than Johannine. It is understandable then why Hazlett should qualify his assessment by adding that Calvin's voice is heard through the confession less exclusively than many maintain. This is particularly worth noting given that revisionist Calvinists frequently express a preference for the Scots Confession over the WCF on the basis of the former confession's more authentic Calvinian credentials.

What is reminiscent of the reformer's theology is the redemptive-historical atmosphere of the Scots Confession. This similarity of approach should not surprise us for the chief architect of the Scots Confession was John Knox, an acquaintance of Calvin from his days in Geneva and one for whom the continental reformer served as mentor. There is little wonder then that the tenor of the Scots Confession is Calvinian.

35 "Scots Confession", op. cit.
36 T F Torrance writes that "throughout the theology of the Scottish Reformation, there is the strongest sense of the continuity of the Christian Church with Israel, the Old Testament people of God, for it is the same mighty acting living God who acts in both. But there is a difference marked by the incarnation." (Scottish Theology, 28; cf. Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996. Edited by David F Wright and Gary D Badcock. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, 2). Of Knox, Torrance writes: "No theologian has had a more vivid and dramatic or a more powerful realisation of direct divine intervention in history than Knox and its ultimate soteriological character." (Scottish Theology, 8).
37 While the Scots Confession contains no reference to adoption, Torrance notes the way in which Knox's own theology defines fatherhood "in terms of redeeming grace towards us and free adoption of us as his children. 'We call him Father not so much because he has created us, but by reason of his free adoption by which he has chosen us in Jesus Christ.'" (Scottish Theology, 7).
Thus, in Article VIII election is attributed to God the Father who having chosen us in Christ ordained that the redeemer should, among other things, be our brother (nobis... fratrem). Christ's work was to restore what was lost in Adam, so that “we [are] not affrayed to cal God our Father” because “he hes given to us his onely Sonne, to be our brother”. This means that “God the Father beholding us, in the body of his Sonne Christ Jesus, acceptis our imperfite obedience, as it were perfite, and covers our warks, quhilk ar defyled with mony spots, with the justice of his Sonne” (Art.XV). Consequently, believers are enabled to “have communion and societie with God the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus, throw the sanctificatioun of his haly Spirit” (Art.XVI; cf. Art.XXI). Symbolic of this union and communion is baptism, which signifies engrafting into Christ, and the Lord’s Supper in which “Christ Jesus is so joined with us, that hee becummis very nurishment and fude of our saules” (Art.XXI). The Supper “we confesse to appertaine to sik onely as be of the houshald of Faith”. In fact, “sik as eite and drink at that haly Table without faith, or being at dissension and division with their brethren, do eat unworthelie” (Art.XXIII). Indeed, the sons of God are to “fecht against sinne [adversus peccatum pugnant]” (Art.XIII).

In spite, then, of the absence of any reference to adoption the above certainly suggests the indirect influence of Calvin upon the Scots Confession. While revisionists Calvinists are right to note this influence, their hesitance to observe the doctrinal emphasis on adoption in both Calvin and Westminster Calvinism is either lacking in awareness or simply unfair. Indeed, with the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant the way was paved for the superseding of the Scots Confession by the

58 Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 3, 445. However, textual support for this is derived solely from the Hebrews epistle (2: 7, 8, 11, 12).
59 Ibid. Torrance’s comment on this is that “the incarnation involves more than the completion of God’s purpose of creation. All that was lost in Adam is here fulfilled, but here creation is transcended, and a higher and closer relation between God and man is wrought out on the basis of the incarnation rather than just on the basis of creation. Here for example God is Father, and Christ is our Brother, but we may now think of God as our Father, not so much on the basis of creation as on the basis of redemption.” (Scottish Theology, 12-13).
61 Ibid., 458; cf. 467.
62 Ibid., 468
63 Ibid., 474.
64 Ibid., 453.
WCF. This in turn was accompanied by an immediate upsurge in the creedal fortunes of adoption.

(ii) XXXIX Articles (1563/1571)

Although there is no mention of adoption in Article XI ("Of the Justification of Man"), nevertheless the doctrine is referred to in two other articles:

Art. XVII "Of Predestination and Election"
... they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

Art. XXVII "Of Baptism"
Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others, that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

(iii) The Irish Articles (1615)

According to Schaff, these "prepared the way for the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Assembly. They were the chief basis of the Westminster Confession, as is evident from the general order, the headings of chapters and subdivisions, and the almost literal agreement of language in the statement of several of the most important doctrines." It is not unreasonable then to expect more on adoption in the Irish Articles than in the XXXIX Articles, especially given that they "have a distinctly Calvinist flavour, and form a kind of bridge between the thirty-nine

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65 DSCHT. "Scots Confession." According to Thomas Macklin the first draught of the WCF was principally prepared by the Scots commissioners (A Brief Historical Sketch of the Westminster Assembly, with Direct Reference to Present Controversies about the Confession of Faith. Glasgow: David Bryce & Son, 1889, 37).
67 Ibid., 504-505.
68 As "the [Westminster] Confession follows a pattern which differs substantially from the Thirty-nine Articles, but is fairly close to the Irish Articles of 1615." (Documents of the English Reformation. Edited by Gerald Bray. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 1994, 486).
Articles (1571) and the Westminster Confession (1647). Indeed, Mitchell says that "the [Westminster] Confession may confidently, and I may now say confessedly, be traced up to those unquestionably Augustinian Articles of the Irish Church, which are believed to have been prepared by Ussher when Professor of Divinity in Trinity College, Dublin, and which in 1615 were adopted by the Irish Convocation".

In terms of adoption, however, the link is by no means so clear. In fact, the Irish Articles treat the doctrine in a manner closely resembling the XXXIX Articles. Although the concept is mentioned in relation to predestination (Art. XV) and the sacraments (Art. LXXXIX), surprisingly it is omitted in the article entitled 'Of Justification and Faith' (Arts. XXXIV-XXXVIII):

XV. Such as are predestined unto life, be called according unto God's purpose (his Spirit working in due season) and through grace they obey the calling, they be justified freely, they be made sons of God by adoption, they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity. But such as are not predestined to salvation shall finally be condemned for their sins.

LXXXIX. Baptism is not only an outward sign of our profession,...but much more a sacrament of our admission into the Church, sealing unto us our new birth (and consequently our justification, adoption and sanctification) by the communion which we have with Jesus Christ.

XCII. The Lord's Supper is not only a sign, but much more a sacrament of our preservation in the Church, sealing unto us our spiritual nourishment and continual growth in Christ.

The question that obviously arises is why the Assembly decided to allot adoption a separate locus. It is frustrating that no answer is forthcoming. Even the (still) unpublished minutes of the Westminster Assembly are silent. What we do know is that:

69 The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 1, 665; Documents of the English Reformation, 437.
71 The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 1, 763 and vol. 3, 529.
72 Ibid., vol. 1, 765 and vol. 3, 542.
73 Ibid.
74 There are three volumes of the Minutes of the Sessions of the Assembly of Divines, the first two of which remain unpublished. Volume 3 was published as the Minutes, op.cit.. Volumes 1 and 2 are almost wholly taken up with discussions of justification and issues relating to church government (see the Transcript made from the original in Dr. Williams' Library in Queen Square, London, in Feb-July 1868 by E M Thompson, assistant. Department of MSS. British Museum. (New College Library: University of Edinburgh). Although these unpublished volumes give no reason why adoption was allotted a separate chapter, the doctrine is variously referred to: adoption (MSAD, I: i: 29, 63); adoption and the right to heaven (MSAD I: i: 29; cf. 30, 41); adoption merited by Christ (MSAD, I: i: 29, 32, 50); receipt of adoption (MSAD I: i: 33 (x2); adoption and sanctification (MSAD, I: i: 39); adoption and justification (MSAD, I: i: 61 (cf. 63); 77); Spirit of adoption (MSAD, I: i: 163, 183).
On July 16, 1645, it was “Ordered - The third Committee [to prepare the Confession of Faith on]...Adoption.” On November 20 next, “Mr. Prophet brought in a report from the Third Committee about Adoption.” It was reviewed and ordered July 23, 1646. The Scriptural proofs were reported February 5, 1647: debated and ordered February 11; and reviewed April 8.\footnote{Warfield, The Westminster Assembly, 110; cf. Minutes, 114, 165, 259, 326, 328, 347 (N.B. the dates given on 326 and 328 should read 1647 and not 1646). Robert Paul explains that “one of the problems in writing of the Westminster Assembly is the paucity of scholarly work on its methods and procedures. We would like to know much more than we do about how matters were managed before they arrived on the floor of the Assembly.” (op. cit., 79). Going by what can be known, Hetherington writes that “no report of these [committee] deliberations either was or could be made public. The results alone appeared, when the committee, from time to time, laid its matured propositions before the Assembly.” (History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. 3rd ed. Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1856, 345).}

Such knowledge, however, is tantalising. All the more so, because whereas the third committee was ordered to prepare the Confession of Faith on “Effectual Vocation; Justification; Adoption; Sanctification” as if separate chapters were in view, exactly fifty-three weeks later (July 23, 1646) a report was given by the notable member John Arrowsmith entitled “of Justification and Adoption”, implying that the doctrines would be incorporated in the same chapter. This report was then debated and agreed, and, as the Minutes record, “...is as followeth”.\footnote{Cf. Minutes, 114 and 259.}

Had we been flies on the wall sometime during the period July 23rd 1646 and the second review of the work of the third committee on April 8th 1647 then, undoubtedly, we would have heard whether there was any particular reason why the Assembly decided to do what no other ecclesiastical body had ever done before.\footnote{In the absence of details of discussion of the relationship of justification and adoption, it is interesting that there was consideration of the relationship between justification and repentance and the question as to whether repentance should have a separate chapter or be included with justification (MASD, I: i: 130-138).}

The subject surely must have been discussed at some point because at every stage adoption was considered in conjunction with justification, sanctification or both.\footnote{The chapter on adoption was prepared in conjunction with effectual vocation, justification and sanctification; the report was given on adoption along with sanctification; it was reviewed and ordered with justification; the scripture proofs were reported on together with the chapters on sanctification and saving faith; adoption was debated on along with the remainder of the chapter on justification (MASD, I: i: 108).}

What is evident as a fact of historical theology is that once adoption attained its creedal status it ceased to be (at least officially) the doctrinal Cinderella it had been hitherto. What is more, it ensured that as far as adoption is concerned the

Other relational terms include: the Fatherhood of God (MSAD, I: i: 4, 65, 105, 241, 242); children of God (MSAD, I: i: 12, 57, 156); justification and inheritance (MSAD, I: i: 130ff.); family (MSAD, I: i: 265, 267); brotherhood (MSAD, II: 159).
publication of the Westminster Standards registered a high watermark in Protestant soteriology, if not also in theology. While the Assembly avoided theological innovation, by merely collating what they understood of the scriptural use of adoption they were nevertheless acting as exemplars of theological innovation in the creedal realm. After all, the inclusion of a chapter on adoption was far from a matter of course. Although the third Committee was "Ordered" to prepare the confessional statement on adoption, they were also given the proviso that "if they [thought] fit to leave out any... [head], or add any other, they [were] to make report to the Assembly."

Ironically, in endeavouring to forcefully highlight the historic neglect of adoption there is the risk of undervaluing what the Standards positively declare of the doctrine. In making the point it is tempting to play down the notable inclusion of adoption in the Westminster documents. However, the acknowledgement of the valid contribution of one confession, as significant as that confession has been, cannot offset the otherwise varied and overwhelming neglect of the doctrine. Although the Standards could have said more, to date there has been insufficient appreciation for the groundbreaking step taken by the Assembly. In a balanced effort to rectify this we shall now turn to the doctrinal content of the Standards.

5.2 The Content

The immediate feature that strikes the reader is that adoption is largely expounded as part of an *ordo salutis*, and is included under the benefits of the...
covenant of grace, viz., effectual calling, justification, adoption and sanctification (WCF X-XIII). Straightaway then, there is observable a methodological difference between the way that Calvin approached adoption (historia salutis) and the manner in which the commissioners dealt with it (ordo salutis). Although we shall not stop at this point to evaluate the change of paradigm, we ought to note that such a methodological development did occur. According to Graafland, it is not certain when or who first used the term ordo salutis. While the nomenclature did not come into use in both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions for a long time after the reformation, other expressions may have been used earlier. Along these lines Graafland mentions the diagram used by the continental theologian Theodore Beza in his Summa totius Christi and the golden chain of the English Puritan William Perkins. Contrasting Calvin and Perkins, Graafland writes: “Calvin hätte niemals wie z.B. [zum Beispiel] W. Perkins seine Theologie unter dem Titel zusammenfassen können: ‘Die goldene Kette des Heils’”. Rather,

insofern gibt es bei Calvin wohl schon Ansätze, die nach ihm als Bausteine gedient haben, um zu einem mehr oder weniger systematisierten Ordo salutis zu gelangen. Diese Systematisierung aber ist nicht Calvin selber entnommen, sondern vielmehr mit Hilfe der scholastischen Denkmittel entstanden, die schon während Calvins Leben durch andere und vor allem nach ihm in der reformierten Orthodoxie eine wichtige Rolle gespielt haben.

Bearing this paradigm shift in mind, there are four areas of the doctrine that the Standards focus on:

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85 Graafland, “Hat Calvin einen ordo salutis gelehrt?”, 221.

86 “Der Begriff erscheint also erst lange Zeit noch kein ordo salutis gelehrt worden ist. Dies ist gewiß der Fall gewesen, aber man gebrauchte dafür andere und unterschiedliche Ausdrücke” (Ibid., 221).

87 For easier access, see Heppe, op.cit., 147-148.

88 “Beim Letztgenannten begegnen wir schon dem Wort ‘Ordo’ also Terminus, wenn auch nicht ausdrücklich als Ordo salutis.” (op.cit., 221).
They who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are there any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. (III:vi)

In contemporary discussions of the relationship between the theology of Calvin and Westminster Calvinism it is often argued that whereas the reformer dealt with predestination in the course of his treatment of soteriology (Inst. Bk III), by comparison the doctrine of the Westminster Assembly appears rather abstract, because it is expounded it in terms of “God’s Eternal Decree” (WCF III). Certainly, as we saw in chapter two, Calvin understood predestination to serve as the protological context of adoption. While it cannot be denied that predestination is dealt with early in the WCF and in terms of God’s decree, nevertheless it is in connection with predestination that we first find a reference to adoption. Whatever organisational weaknesses there are in the way that the WCF deals with predestination, more needs to be made of this reference, because it demonstrates that the commissioners were at least concerned to apply predestination soteriologically. This is confirmed by the citing of Ephesians 1:5 at the apposite point among the proof texts. The citation anticipates the Assembly’s later stress upon the way that adoption originates in “an act of the free grace of God”, and involves being “taken/received into the number” of the elect. Whatever differences exist, then (and we shall discuss these below), the general point is the same: predestination serves as the protological context of adoption. As the Westminster commissioners were as concerned as Calvin to apply predestination soteriologically, there is little purpose in driving a wedge between Calvin and the later Calvinists, as is often the case.

89 Ibid., 244.
90 1 Thess. v. 9, 10. Tit. ii. 14.
91 Rom. viii. 30. Eph. i. 5. 2 Thess. ii. 13.
92 1 Pet. i. 5
93 John xvii. 9. Rom. viii. 28-39. John vi. 64, 65; x. 26; viii. 47. 1 John ii. 19
94 Schaff writes that “the most assailable point in the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism [is] the abstract doctrine of eternal decrees, which will always repel a large portion of evangelical Christendom.” (op.cit., vol. 1, 791).
95 LC 74; cf. SC 34 and WCF III: v.
There can be no adoption without the elect being united to Christ. The WCF and LC express this by stating that adoption takes place "in and for his Son Jesus Christ" and that those adopted "have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them". In the answer given to Question 69 of the LC, union with Christ is described as "the communion in grace which members of the invisible church have with Christ, [which] is their partaking of the virtue of his meditation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him." Thus, it is unio cum Christo that undergirds the benefits of justification, adoption and sanctification and not vice versa. Justification, adoption and sanctification flow from union with Christ.

The fact and the manner in which adoption is here connected with the communion in grace with Christ reminds us once again of Calvin's substantial use of adoption as a most colourful expression of union with Christ. Thus Calvin and the Assembly were of one mind that to be adopted is to be united with Christ in his Sonship. Not all are agreed on this, however. For instance, while T F Torrance rightly says that Calvin understood union with Christ as foundational for the believer's participation in the benefits of grace, he wrongly claims that the Assembly understood union with Christ to be reached through various stages of grace. To be fair, the Westminster documents are lacking in emphasis on this essential aspect of the gospel. Most of what is said on the issue is not found until chapter XXVI entitled "Of Communion of Saints". Even then it does not say anything pertinent to the order of grace vis à vis union with Christ. Thus, the prima facie evidence suggests that Torrance is correct: union with Christ is reached through the various stages of grace such as justification, adoption and sanctification, and ultimately repentance.

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96 WCF XII; LC 74; SC 34.
97 WCF XII; LC 74.
98 LC 74; WCF XII.
99 Rom. vii. 30.
100 Eph. i. 5.
101 1 Cor. i. 30.
102 During session 70 of the Assembly union and communion with Christ are said to be differentiated without separation (MSAD, I: i: 186). This union or communion has practical effects on the way the saints relate to the church (MSAD, I: ii: 677, 752).
103 Scottish Theology, 128.
However, this is not the case as the LC subtly reveals. Question 66, "what is that union which the elect have with Christ?", receives the reply that "the union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, 104 whereby believers are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; 105 which is done in their effectual calling" (italics inserted). This last clause is most significant for in the WCF effectual calling is dealt with in WCF X, while all the benefits of the covenant of grace, adoption included, are treated subsequently. Thus, despite appearances, Torrance is mistaken in his claim that the ordo salutis reverses Calvin's understanding of union with Christ. On the contrary, union with Christ occurs when believers are effectually called. It is thus foundational and not subsequent to the experience of grace.

What differences exist between Calvin's doctrine and that of the commissioners are a matter of degree rather than kind. Whereas Calvin's primary interest in union with Christ was soteriological (spiritual union excepted), the Puritan's main concern was, generally speaking, expressed in terms of its application to the believer. 106 For example, whereas the Puritans deal with the Lord's Supper, there is less emphasis on it as an expression of union with Christ. 107 Nevertheless, the Standards testify to a calvinian influence by their expression of the sacramental symbolisation of this union. For Calvin, we remember, baptism signifies the initiation of the union, the Lord's Supper has reference to its continuation. 108 The Standards bring out these sacramental aspects at least in embryonic form especially in the LC. In answer to Q.165 (as to the nature of baptism), the LC says that baptism is, "a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, 109 of remission of sins by his blood, 110 and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life;" 111 Furthermore, in response to Question 168 (as to the nature of the Lord's supper), it is stated that "by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of

104 Eph. i. 22; ii. 6, 7, 8.
105 1 Cor. vi. 17. John x. 28. Eph. v. 23, 30.
106 Won, "Communion with Christ", 8.
107 Ibid., 9.
109 Gal. iii. 27.
110 Mark i. 4. Rev. i. 5.
111 The SC is less specific. It merely writes of baptism as that which "doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to
Jesus Christ, his death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed
upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace;¹¹² have
their union and communion with him confirmed,¹¹³ testify and renew their
thankfulness,¹¹⁴ and engagement to God,¹¹⁵ and their mutual love and fellowship each
with other, as members of the same mystical body."¹¹⁶ Although we could wish that
the Standards were more explicit in this area, nevertheless it is clear that they have
retained the calvinian doctrine.

(iii) The Locus of Adoption

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth... to make partakers of the grace of
adoption¹¹⁷

Nowhere is the Assembly's doctrine seen in a clearer light than in its relation
to justification. Whereas Calvin could be interpreted as having wittingly or
unwittingly (but certainly cryptically) subsumed the adoptive act under justification,
the commissioners brought adoption out from under its huge shadow so that the
doctrine could be seen in its own light. What the Southern Presbyterian John L
Girardeau was later to write in regard to the SC is applicable to the standards in toto:
"If adoption were only the second element of justification, no articular definition of
adoption would have been necessary."¹¹⁸ However, the commissioners finely
balanced their statements so that adoption is neither overshadowed by, nor set in
isolation from, justification. Although treated distinctly, the layout is such as to make
clear that adoption is utterly grounded upon justification and is not possible without
it. There is an added hint of this in the chapter on justification itself (WCF XI), where

be the Lord's" (Q. 94). Unfortunately the confession is remiss in containing no reference to adoption
in connection with baptism. (WCF XXVIII: i).

¹¹¹ Matt. xxvi. 26, 27, 28. 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 25, 26.
¹¹² 1 Cor. x. 16.
¹¹³ 1 Cor. x. 24.
¹¹⁴ 1 Cor. x. 14, 15, 16, 21.
¹¹⁵ 1 Cor. x. 17 (italics inserted); cf. WCF XXIX:i; SC 96.
¹¹⁶ WCF XII; cf. LC 74.
¹¹⁷ DTQ, 484. For his treatment of the distinctiveness of justification and adoption see 479-486. See
also Webb, RDA, 18f.; Francis R Beattie, The Presbyterian Standards: An Exposition of the
Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Richmond, VA.: The Presbyterian Committee of
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955; First British ed. taken from Grand Rapids, USA: Wm.
132f.. Sometimes, however, this is misunderstood. See, for instance, Hendry, op.cit., 140.
it is stated that the justified "may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure" (italics inserted).

Thus, although treated separately, there are notable similarities between justification and adoption. Just as in justification there are both the actual and declarative elements - that is, God's actual acceptance of the sinner as righteous in his sight as well as his declaration of the sinner to that effect - so in adoption the Christian actually receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:5), which is declared to them by the Spirit who "witnesses with [their] spirits that [they] are the children of God." (Rom. 8:15). They are adopted (the adoptive act) and also receive the Spirit of adoption (the adoptive state or experience).¹¹⁹

The structuring of the Standards, and especially the WCF, strongly suggests that the Westminster Assembly regarded adoption as the pinnacle of soteriology. As forensic as the adoptive act is, however, it nevertheless forms the threshold of the familial; that is, the adoptive experience of sonship. Unsurprisingly, then, the Westminster doctrine has been described as "the apex of redemptive grace and privilege".¹²⁰ In contrast, T F Torrance has dismissively referred to the Assembly’s seminal creedal contribution as but "brief sentences on 'Adoption'".¹²¹ This explains why Torrance can so easily reject Westminster's soteriology even when seeking to be restrained in his criticisms. The fact is, Torrance, consistent with the general revisionist Calvinistic stance, entirely misses the Assembly’s endeavour to balance the forensic and the familial elements of the gospel.¹²²

Although the jury is still out on the metaphorical background of Paul’s references to adoption, the distinction between the adoptive act and the adoptive state or experience remains valid. It helps us to distinguish between the legally obtained status of a son and the ensuing life of sonship, which is familial. While it is

¹¹⁹ WCF XII.
¹²⁰ Murray, Collected Writings, vol. 2, 233. Similarly, Buchanan writes that "the privilege of adoption presupposes pardon and acceptance, ... it is higher than either ... as being founded on a closer and more endearing relation." (ibid., 263).
¹²¹ Scottish Theology, 144
appropriate then to speak of adoption in legal terms, its meaning is not exhausted by the forensic aspect alone. In short: the forensic process possesses familial implications to which it points. It is clear from the Standards that the commissioners would have agreed with this distinction, as we shall now proceed to demonstrate.

(iv) The privileges of Adoption

Adoption not only admits believers into the status but also the experience of adoption. As it is put in the Standards, the adopted are “admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God”\(^{123}\) and “enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God”.\(^{124}\) These are their rights.\(^{125}\) However, the adoptive experience refers not only to individual sonship but also to the family of God as the sphere in which filial liberties and privileges are enjoyed. Although too little is made of this obvious application of adoption, the WCF later describes the visible church as “the house and family of God”.\(^{126}\) Ironically, on an issue on which the Assembly could have enlarged, Torrance applauds the commissioners for their view of the Church as the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and household or family of God. This, he says, is symptomatic of their high doctrine, which it is, and follows Calvin, which it does.\(^{127}\)

The Standards emphasise the liberties and privileges themselves. The adopted “have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father;” they are “pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption,” (WCF XII). A number of these privileges have an obvious compatibility with what the Standards have to say on assurance.\(^{128}\) In fact, they all assume the ministry of the Holy Spirit as is evident from the indwelling of the adopted by the Spirit of Christ.\(^{129}\) In actuality, the Spirit’s

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\(^{123}\) LC 74; SC 34.

\(^{124}\) WCF XII.

\(^{125}\) SC 34.

\(^{126}\) WCF XXV:ii.


\(^{128}\) SC 36, but particularly LC 80, where assurance is expressed in terms compatible with adoption.

\(^{129}\) It is a moot point as to whether the WCF should have a chapter on the Holy Spirit. See T F Torrance (*Scottish Theology*, 141; and also *Disruption to Diversity*, 12; “The Substance of the Faith: A Clarification of the Concept in the Church of Scotland”, *SJT* 36 (1983), 329). Whatever the pros and cons of the issue it is important to stress that the Spirit’s ministry is assumed every bit as much as adoption is assumed in Calvin’s theology despite the absence of a chapter on the doctrine! For an insightful response to the absence of a chapter on the Holy Spirit in the WCF see Sinclair Ferguson (*DSCHT*, “The Teaching of the Confession”, 36). See also Douglas Milne’s article “The Doctrine of
ministry is not only assumed but is overtly linked with adoption (WCF XVIII: ii). An infallible assurance of faith is founded among other things on "the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption."

Other clauses in WCF XII are linked with God's paternal providence. The adopted, says the LC, are "under [God's] fatherly care and dispensations". In addition, they "inherit" or are "made heirs of [all] the promises" and are "heirs of everlasting salvation", and "fellow-heirs with Christ in glory". These privileges are not all exclusive to adoption. The SC makes clear that there are those benefits that are jointly attributed to justification, adoption and sanctification. These are: "assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end."

Thus, while the privileges and liberties of the sons of God are largely self-explanatory it is worth noting once again that they resemble those liberally peppered throughout the works of Calvin (ch. 4). To an extent we would expect this. As John H Leith has noted, the commissioners of the Assembly "were not creative minds so much as summarisers and interpreters of the tradition." Thus, it may well be that in summarising and interpreting the tradition the commissioners were far more in touch and in tune with Calvin's theology than revisionist Calvinists are prepared to acknowledge.

What differences there are turn largely on presentation or form rather than content. Yet even here, the point ought not to be overplayed. As mentioned before (in ch. 1), the fact that Calvin does not include a single chapter on adoption in the

the Holy Spirit in the Westminster Confession" in RTR (A) 52 (1993), 121-131. It is worth noting Milne's calculation that the Holy Spirit is mentioned on 48 occasions in the Confession alone.

130 Rom. viii. 15, 16.  
131 Eph. i. 13, 14; iv. 30. 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.  
132 WCF XII and LC 74.  
133 WCF XII.  
134 LC 74.  
135 Rom. v. 1, 2, 5.  
136 Rom. xiv. 17.  
137 Prov. iv. 18.  
138 1 John v. 13. 1 Pet. i. 5.  
139 Assembly at Westminster, 46. Indeed, at one time the Westminster Standards were criticised for undue deference to the views of John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger. Given this, together with the more recent unfavourable comparison of Westminster Calvinism with Calvin, it is obvious that Westminster theology has been placed in a no-win situation! (Mitchell, op.cit., 371).
Institutes has probably contributed as much to the loss of adoption in Calvinistic theology as anything else. It is ironic, then, that in an age when Westminster Calvinism is customarily regarded as the poor man’s Calvin, it is to the Westminster commissioners that we are indebted for bringing together many of Calvin’s insights into adoption, and thereby maintaining the presence of adoption in Reformed theology.

5.3 The Weaknesses

Inevitably, the Westminster Standards are not without their deficiencies. While the scholastic method ensured the unique exposure of adoption, by the same token it ironically led to the overall diminishing of its rich implications throughout the Standards.

(i) The statements are insufficiently substantive

When James Torrance writes that “many of [the] chapters on the Christian life are magnificently stated but their weakness lies not so much in what they say as in what they do not say”, we have to ask, how practical is this criticism? After all, how maximalist can a confession really become? As it is, confessions do not come more all-inclusive than the WCF. Nevertheless, when we specifically apply his general statement to adoption Torrance seems to have a point. Allowing for the historical significance of WCF XII, it is nevertheless true to say that the chapter on adoption is the shortest in the confession (101 words).

Before any theological capital is made from this, two noteworthy points of history ought to be considered. The first pertains to the events of the Assembly itself. In Mitchell’s account of the preparation of the confession he explains that:

While [the] review of the Confession was going on, various Orders were sent down from the Houses for hastening the completion of it, and particularly one on 22nd July 1646, ‘desiring the Assembly to hasten the perfection of the Confession of Faith and the Catechism, because of the great use there may be of them in the Kingdom, both for the suppressing of errors and heresies and for informing the ignorance of the people.’ This

140 “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Westminster Theology”, 44.
Order was accepted by the Assembly as an indirect release from the task of preparing elaborate answers to the queries of the House of Commons, and, leaving that work meantime to be unofficially done by the authors of the *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, they returned with promptitude to the preparation of the Confession of Faith.\textsuperscript{142}

The 22nd July 1646 is a most significant date, for it was the very next morning that the chapter on adoption reached the report stage. No wonder then that having received such an order from Parliament the WCF’s statement on adoption was debated and agreed upon by the Assembly in one morning.\textsuperscript{143} Even had they wished to expand the statements, pressure from the House of Commons would probably have impeded their attempts.

In response, it may be countered that were pressure from Parliament the sole reason for the brevity of WCF XII then the chapter on justification would have suffered likewise. On the contrary, the chapter on justification runs to as many as six paragraphs. The difference lies, however, in the fact that the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* had been repeatedly controverted both within and without Protestantism. Having sought to state the doctrine of justification in such a way as to hedge it in from numerous aberrations, it is not surprising that the commissioners produced a much longer chapter on justification than on adoption. As Warfield reminds us, in spite of the marked ecclesiastical divisions within the Assembly, “doctrinally [the commissioners] were in complete fundamental harmony, and in giving expression to their common faith needed only to concern themselves to state it truly, purely, and with its polemic edges well-turned out towards the chief assailants of Reformed doctrine, in order to satisfy the minds of all.”\textsuperscript{144}

As we saw in the Introduction, the history of adoption contrasts greatly with that of justification in whose shadow the doctrine has usually lingered. As adoption had never received sufficient limelight to become the subject of controversy, the formulation of the doctrine required no refutation of opposing error. Indeed, such was the commonly received opinion passed down from Calvin that the commissioners evidently had no reason to enlarge upon what was agreeable to all.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} Mitchell, *op.cit.*, 365 (italics inserted).
\textsuperscript{143} *Minutes*, 258-259.
\textsuperscript{144} *Op.cit.*, 55-56.
More controversially, the commissioners were inadequately aware of Paul's exclusive use of the adoption motif. This is surprising given the claim that the theology of the WCF is Pauline. A close look at the Westminsterial understanding of adoption reveals that they failed to take into account the authorial diversity of Scripture, a concept that is essential for grasping Paul's unparalleled biblical use of φιλοθεσία. That said, their oversight was not original to themselves. It was a legacy of the church's historical neglect of adoption.

One only has to look at the proof texts appended to WCF XII to understand the point. Of the twenty-one references given, only nine are Pauline; one is taken from Matthew; two from the Johannine corpus; two from 1 Peter; three from Hebrews, and four from the Old Testament. Naturally, if these were the texts that the Assembly had chiefly in mind when they formulated the chapter on adoption, this must have had some impact, however small, on the confession's doctrine. This does not mean to say that the sentiments included are unscriptural. It does mean, however, that some of them are not necessarily those that Paul had in mind when writing of φιλοθεσία. For instance, the filial status of the adopted is referred to as often in terms of childhood as in terms of sonship, even though the apostle usually refers to the

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145 Beke makes the same point in regard to assurance (op.cit., 141).
146 See for instance R L Dabney, "The Doctrinal Contents of the Confession", op.cit., 89; see also 95.
147 For an expansion of the following, see also "The Metaphorical Import of Adoption I", 140-144.
148 Eph. i. 5; Gal. iv. 4, 5; Rom. viii. 17; 2 Cor. vi. 18; Rom. viii. 15; Eph. iii. 12; Rom. v. 2. Gal. iv. 6; Eph. iv. 30. The use of φιλοθεσία in Ephesians is consistent with Paul's usage in Galatians and Romans and is, we believe, a significant piece of evidence in favour of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians.
149 Matt. vi. 30, 32.
150 John i. 12; Rev. iii. 12.
151 1 Pet. i. 3, 4; v. 7.
152 Heb. i. 4; vi. 12; xii. 6.
153 Jer. xiv. 9; Ps. ciii. 13; Prov. xiv. 26; Lam. iii. 31. For a similar picture consult William Ames's twenty-seven propositions on adoption (The Marrow of Theology, 164-167). Of these twenty-seven points, eight have no cross references; six are supported solely by Pauline references and eleven in total have reference to the Pauline corpus; a total of eight refer to the Johannine writings while four are solely reliant upon John; Of the fifteen points outstanding, three are exclusively supported by references to the epistle to the Hebrews and the Book of the Revelation. Thus, over half the points that Ames makes are supported by texts written by authors who did not employ the adoption metaphor. Less than a quarter of the points are supported solely by Pauline references! Cf. Thomas Watson's treatment on adoption in A Body of Divinity, 231-240. This familiar approach opens up the whole question of Puritan exegesis. It seems that their particular employment of the analogia fidel lead them to erode the distinctive emphases of the various authors of Scripture by conflating the themes they treat.
adopted as υἱοὶ (hence υἱοθεσία) so as to draw the parallel between Christ, the natural υἱοὶ, and believers, the adopted υἱοὶ.

Furthermore, the WCF refers to the adopted as “pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a father; yet never cast off”. Yet this description is made up of familial sentiments found out with the corpus Paulinum rather than accurate exegetical statements derived from the apostle’s theology. While these descriptions of the liberties and privileges of the adopted could be inferred from Paul’s motif, they are not necessarily what he had in mind. When one considers that not one of them is supported by a Pauline text, their relevance to the apostle’s doctrine can at best be said to be coincidental.154

(iii) The statements are insufficiently redemptive-historical

Given that Westminster’s understanding of adoption is insufficiently Pauline, it comes as no surprise to discover that it is also somewhat lacking in redemptive-historical overtones.155 This is because the Puritan use of the scholastic approach to theology focused on a logical ordering of doctrine more akin to systematic theology than the historical ordering of salvation-history characteristic of Pauline theology. Thus, as Reformed scholastics, the commissioners were more concerned to grapple with the premises and deductions of adoption relevant to the order of salvation (ordo salutis) than with its unfolding in the history of the covenant people of God. However, given that a redemptive-historical approach was an option open to them it is regrettable that the commissioners overlooked the difference between the minority sonship of the God’s people under the old covenant and the majority sonship of the adopted under the new. Indeed, given the one explicitly redemptive-historical paragraph in the WCF, we are left wondering why they did not:

This covenant [covenant of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel; under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the

154 The tenuous nature of some of the proof texts hinders us from necessarily concurring with Schaff that their selection was “careful and judicious, and reveals a close familiarity with the sacred writings” (op.cit., vol. 1, 788). Given that the proof texts were an afterthought, we should not be surprised that they are not always apposite (Hetherington, op.cit., 346). For the record, the two concepts to the fore in Paul’s model are acceptance and freedom.

155 This is a point made by T F Torrance in connection with election (Scottish Theology, 134-135; Disruption to Diversity, 10).
Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations. 156

To be fair, the failure of the commissioners is as much a reflection on the inability of creeds and confessions to reflect the multi-perspectival nature of theological methodology as it is a criticism of the WCF as a statement of faith. 157 Certainly it would have been difficult for the commissioners to have balanced an historical overview of the continuity and discontinuity of the covenantal aspects of adoption alongside a more logical and systematic *ordo salutis*. Nevertheless, certain detrimental results can be traced to the lack of a redemptive-historical approach to the theology of the Standards.

For example, the differing methodological approach imparted to the Standards an almost legal aura alien to the atmosphere of much of the New Testament. Moreover, the absence of the redemptive-historical approach probably explains the but isolated references to the doctrine of union with Christ. While it is clear from the Standards that in adoption God’s children have access to the Father through union with the Son there is no substantial doctrine of incarnational union the like of which is found in Calvin. We read nothing in the Standards of Christ, the firstborn, stretching forth his hand of fraternal alliance for a bond of brotherhood with the human race. Thus, while not concurring with J B Torrance’s deductions, it can be understood why he should write that:

> The logic of the incarnation is not the logic of Aristotle. It seems to me a danger in “Systematic Theology”, … to have neatly structured Christ and atonement logically into pigeon holes, and fail to see that every doctrine must be seen in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The logic of the incarnation may at times conflict with the logic of Aristotle. 158

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156 WCF VII: v and vi.
All in all, then, the alternative approaches to adoption opted for by Calvin and Westminster Calvinism respectively poignantly illustrate the historic lack of cooperation between biblical and systematic theology, of which adoption has been but one victim.  

(iv) The statements are insufficiently pervasive

It is with some caution that this observation is made, for when the Puritans are criticised for allowing their scholastic methodology to determine the form of Westminster theology, it must be remembered that it was due to this very approach that adoption received its distinct locus. As Douglas Kelly rightly says:

The Westminster Standards were structured in terms of systematic theology rather than in terms of the Biblical history of redemption (as was the Scots Confession of 1560) or than in terms of the Apostles’s Creed (as to a certain degree were Calvin’s Institutes). This has given them great advantages by virtue of their clarity, precision, brevity and range. They have been eminently adaptable to academic theological work, and in that sense have been considered ‘scholastic’ in form....

Thus, while Ferguson is right to say that, “there is a special emphasis in the Confession on the Fatherhood of God in a separate chapter devoted to the Christian’s adoption into God’s family”, nonetheless we could wish that the redemptive-historical connotations of adoption were more pervasively peppered throughout the Standards. As Kelly goes on to say:

But if precision of content and clarity of structure are achieved by the “modified” scholastic form of the Westminster Standards, is it not also the case that something of the rich human and familial quality of less logically precise but more historico-redemptively organised symbols is lost?

In brief, then, although the scholastic drive for precision lent itself to a unique creedal exposition of adoption, the tendency to allot doctrines specific theological loci created a “pigeon-hole” effect in which recognition of the interrelatedness of the various doctrines became minimalised. The Assembly’s rigorous

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159 D A Carson’s comments are pertinent in this regard. See The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism. Leicester, England: Apollos, 1996, 544-545
160 “Adoption”, 110.
162 “Adoption”, 110. As part of his definition of Scholasticism Richard Muller writes: “The term scholasticism well describes the technical and academic side of this process of the institutionalization of Protestant doctrine.... It is a theology designed to develop system on a highly technical level and in extremely precise manner by means of the careful identification of topics, division of these topics into their basic parts, definition of the parts, and doctrinal or logical argumentation concerning the divisions and definitions.” (Richard A Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Vol. 1. Prolegomena to Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987, 17-18).
scholastic use of logic was not easily combined with a more flexible approach reflecting the inter-relationship between various biblical doctrines.\textsuperscript{163} Thus, the commissioners failed to strew the implications of adoption throughout the Standards.

Although this might appear an inconsequential criticism, the resultant cold and clinical appearance of Westminster theology ought not to be confused with misleading accusations to the effect that the Standards are legalistic.\textsuperscript{164} It is surely the historic inclusion of adoption in the Standards which helps rebuff this charge, for while the concept is fundamentally forensic it possesses an all-important familial orientation.

The commissioners unwittingly undermined their own unique creedal emphasis by largely curtailing the implications of adoption to its specific confessional and catechetical loci. For example, the weakness of the WCF’s doctrine of predestination is not found in the location of the doctrine as revisionist Calvinists claim, but in the fact that there is still more that the Standards could have said of the familial telos of election. While we would expect WCF III (“Of God’s Eternal Decree”) to be theocentric in character, the chapter is markedly silent about the fact that it is God the Father who predestines his people to adoption as is explained in the given proof text (Eph. 1: 3-5). The WCF does say that believers are “chosen in Christ and “redeemed by Christ” (III: v,vi), but there is no reference to the effect that thereby God becomes to them once again their heavenly Father. Whereas Calvin placed the Fatherhood of God prior to what we know of him as Lawgiver and Judge,


\textsuperscript{164} George S Hendry, \textit{op.cit.}, 14-15. T F Torrance correctly says that “the Confession of Faith does not manifest the spiritual freshness and freedom, or the evangelical joy, of the Scots Confession of 1560, and was not so much a ‘Confession’ as a rational explanation of Protestant theology composed in fulfillment of a constitutional establishment.” (\textit{Scottish Theology}, 127). In this, Torrance follows Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) of the Free Church of Scotland (\textit{The School of Faith}, xvii) who, in the words of Douglas Kelly, preferred “the more Biblical-story form of earlier Scottish Reformation Catechisms to ‘the skillful metaphysics and lawyer-like precision’ of the more abstract and systematic Shorter Catechism.” (\textit{op.cit.}, 110; \textit{Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation}. Edited by Horatius Bonar. London: James Nisbet and Co., 1866, vii). Of the SC, Schaff writes: “It lacks their genial warmth, freshness, and childlike simplicity, it substitutes a logical scheme for the historical order of the Apostle’s Creed. It deals in dogmas rather than facts.” (\textit{Op.cit.}, vol. 1, 787). For a similar assessment of the standards \textit{ibid.}, vol. 1, 790-791. Likewise Toon writes: “It loses the dynamism of the Bible’s portrayal of our sin and redemption in Christ.” (\textit{Op.cit.}, 60); see also Ferguson on the SC (“Westminster Assembly and Documents”, \textit{op.cit.}). To echo these sentiments, however, is not the same as saying that Westminster theology is legalistic. Indeed, the Southern Presbyterian J L Girardeau was later to appeal for the retention of federal theology precisely because it guarded against legalism (\textit{The Federal Theology: Its Import and Regulative Influence}. Edited by J Ligon Duncan III with an introduction by W Duncan Rankin. Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994, 16).
the widespread silence of the documents on the divine paternity has unwittingly made the judirical aspects of God’s character appear predominant. Furthermore, while the confession speaks about us being “chosen... unto everlasting glory” and “elect unto glory” (III: v, vi) there is no allusion to the present in which we enjoy the grace of sonship to which we were in the immediate sense pre-horizoned. This is disappointing for, as Torrance notes, the followers of Knox had earlier thought of election in terms of adoption rather than the divine decrees. As for the glory itself, we read nothing in the Standards of the adoption simpliciter, viz., the redemption of the body (WCF XXXII and XXXIII) even though WCF XII ends with a reference to their heirship of eternal salvation.

Furthermore, it is curious that having broken ground by markedly distinguishing between justification and adoption, the Standards are silent on the nexus existing between the new birth motif (expressive of regeneration) and adoption. What it does say of regeneration comes under the rubric of effectual calling (WCF X, XIII: i; LC 67-68; SC 31). It would have greatly helped to improve the familial tenor of the Standards to have had a separate article on the new birth in addition to that on adoption. As we saw in the Introduction there has been some recognition of this need by the Reformed community, for in subsequent attempts at reform greater attention has been paid to regeneration and adoption. Nevertheless, while these more recent confessions improve upon the Westminster Standards, their attempt to reflect the wider familial implications of Scripture is based on an assumed understanding of the connection between regeneration and adoption.

Lastly, the implications of adoption for the church as the household of God (οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ (Eph. 2:19)) could have been more pervasively conveyed. While we have already noted the confession’s description of the visible church as “the house and family of God” (WCF XXV “Of the Church”), one would have thought

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165 Whereas T F Torrance says that the WCF has a distorted view of God (Scottish Theology, 227) it is fairer to the commissioners to say that their view is lopsided. Torrance is right to imply, however, that in the confession there is no doctrine of the general or creative Fatherhood of God (ibid., 131). This he attributes to the Assembly’s failure to give prime place to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity (ibid., 133).

166 Disruption to Diversity, 4-5.

167 According to Bernhard Citron “the Westminster Standards use neither the term conversion nor regeneration (though both the noun and the verb ‘regenerate’ occur several times), but substitute ‘effectual calling’ for them.” (op.cit., 11-12, 77, 79).

168 For a few isolated comments on the household or family of God see MSAD, II: 25, 26, 71.

169 Eph. ii. 19; iii. 15.
that the relational application of this would have been made clearer in the next chapter "Of Communion of Saints". While reference is made to the unity in love possessed by those united to Christ, there is little reference to the fact that those enjoying such a union are brothers and sisters in Christ.170 There is one exception however, and is found in the answer given to Question 167 of the LC where baptism is said to encourage Christians to "walk in brotherly love".

Thus, it is clear that the Assembly's doctrine of adoption shows signs of both marked continuity and discontinuity with Calvin. Whereas the discontinuity is primarily methodological, the breadth of the doctrines of union with Christ and the church apart, the continuity is markedly theological. That said, it was the methodological discontinuity that was to set the agenda for the discussions of subsequent centuries.

170 It is curious that T F Torrance commends Westminster theology for its high doctrine of the church (in part because the church is identified as the house and family of God) for earlier he claims that the Westminster doctrine of election produced a particularisation of salvation "without adequate attention to the corporate nature of salvation in Christ" (Scottish Theology, 145 and 136). For Bruggink's view of the reasons for the depreciation of the church in federal theology see "Calvin and Federal Theology" in Gamble, op.cit., vol. 8, 42ff..
From the evidence of adoption found in the Calvinistic tradition there has come to light a number of issues that remain unresolved to the present day. Three of those mentioned at the outset are now apparent. First, there can be discerned a confusion of different New Testament models of sonship in both Calvin and the Westminster commissioners. Both parties were guilty of conflating specifically the Johannine model of new birth with the Pauline model of adoption. This confusion is particularly evident in the Standards, and that for two reasons. For all the hints of Scholasticism in Calvin, his interests were generally biblico-theological. While, therefore, concerned to give due attention to the constituent parts of Scripture, his theologising approach to exegesis nevertheless led him to read the thought of one biblical author into the writings of another. In the work of the Westminster commissioners, however, their scholastic method clearly lent itself to a discussion of the difference between the models of new birth and adoption. However, instead of distinguishing their distinctive structures, the Puritans, being predominantly concerned with doctrinal clarity, ironed out the particularities of the different models, so enabling them to neatly claim that whereas the new birth gives the nature of a son adoption gives its status. That may well be, but it was regrettable that in order to make the point they were constrained to harmonise the two models in a manner detrimental to them and the humanness of Scripture to which they point. Nonetheless, so embedded did this line of thinking become in Westminster Calvinism that the conflation of the Johannine and Pauline models was assumed legitimate ever after.

More obvious, secondly, are the contrary approaches to the discussion of adoption represented in the tradition. Whereas Calvin provided no separate chapter on adoption but strew his references to the doctrine throughout his works, for whatever reason the Westminster commissioners made creedal history by including in the WCF its distinctive chapter on adoption. Had the tradition considered adoption more thoroughly, there may have arisen discussion of the respective strengths and weakness of the alternative organisational approaches. The fact is it did not. In any case there was more than a simple organisational matter at stake.

The different approaches also indicate, thirdly, the methodological ambiguity between Calvin's predominant redemptive-historical perspective and the Assembly's
doctrinal concentration on the ordo salutis. Through this paradigm shift adoption was largely reduced to one self-contained element of the application of redemption. This was possible because of Westminster's omission of a chapter on union with Christ (so crucial to adoption), which made possible the circumvention of any attempt at explaining its complex connection to the entire application of redemption.

In part two we shall follow the subsequent history of Westminster Calvinism as it developed between the mid-seventeenth century and the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Despite the evident place of adoption in Calvin and the Westminster Standards, the doctrine was destined never to become more than an undercurrent in Reformed thought. Whether knowingly or not, many later Calvinists left the doctrine languishing in the annals of the tradition. The following chapters go some way to revealing the lasting effect of this on the theology of the tradition, as well as the resultant revolt against the lopsided legal expression of Westminster Calvinism that characterised the early decades of nineteenth-century Scotland. Along the way several additional peculiarities of the tradition emerge.
Part Two

The Legacy of Adoption in the Later Theological History of Calvinism
Chapter Six

The Neglect of Adoption

The standards throughout give a separate place to this doctrine [adoption]. Each of the Catechisms has a question upon it, and the Confession devotes a separate chapter to its consideration. In view of this fact it seems a little strange that some of our leading theologians should give no distinct place to adoption in their systems, and many of them devote but little attention to it. By some it is made a factor in justification, by others it is regarded as belonging partly to justification and partly to sanctification. It is clear that the Standards give to adoption a place of its own...

Francis Beattie, The Presbyterian Standards.

The appearance of the Westminster Standards promised a greater dogmatic interest in adoption with accompanying prospects for its development. Sadly, this did not materialize. On the contrary, in the ensuing centuries adoption faded from the theological currency of the tradition and with it a significant opportunity to enrich not only the Reformed faith but also the faith of the church at large. Although there were those who in after years maintained the rightful profile of adoption in Calvinistic soteriology - the importance of justification and sanctification notwithstanding - generally the doctrine was to fare little better in Westminster Calvinism than in the wider church despite the contributions of Calvin and the Westminster Assembly.

While the decline in interest in adoption was ultimately due to the consistuency’s consistent neglect of the doctrine, it is true to say that the seeds of its demise are traceable back to Calvin and the Westminster commissioners. For all the richness of Calvin’s understanding of adoption and the significance of the commissioners’ historic insertion of the chapter on adoption into the WCF, in reality the manner in which the two parties had dealt with the doctrine ensured that their contributions to adoption would serve as but an undercurrent in the theology of the tradition.

For whatever reasons, the absence of a separate chapter on adoption in Calvin’s Institutio, coupled with the commissioners’ failure to outwork sufficiently the doctrine’s implications throughout the theology of the Westminster documents, led in part to the obscuring of the doctrine in the theological annals of the tradition.
Had they not opted for this either/or approach to the arrangement of the treatment of adoption then later Calvinists would have been better positioned to realise its importance for Reformed soteriology. Whatever the theological pros and cons of the respective Calvinian and confessional method, a two-dimensional approach (that is, pervasive as well as localised) to the arrangement of the doctrine in the *Institutes* and the WCF respectively would at least have signposted more effectively the doctrine’s significance. It does not appear, however, that for all Calvin’s striking claims concerning the soteric importance of adoption and the commissioners’ historic compilation of the twelfth chapter of the WCF that either party were overtly concerned with the self-conscious heightening of the profile of adoption. Certainly there is absent any evidence that they were aware of just how considerable was the neglect of adoption in the earlier records of historical theology or how significant were their respective theological and confessional references to the doctrine. Thus they provided few overt clues to their successors with regard to the importance of developing adoption as an integral, comprehensive and yet climactic feature of Reformed soteriology.

In the light of this it is apparent that if later Calvinists were to enhance their doctrine of salvation by a due emphasis on the adoption as sons then they would have required not only a greater interest in the scriptural doctrine *in se* but a closer reading of its importance in the annals of the tradition. In actuality, however, they exhibited neither of these, and thus were unable to note or resolve either the profile of adoption in the theology of the tradition or the methodological discontinuity between Calvin’s biblical-theological approach and the Puritan’s more scholastic interest in adoption *vis à vis* other doctrinal elements (such as justification and regeneration) of the *ordo salutis*. While there is some evidence of interest in both *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* among later Calvinists it is clear that the combined application of these approaches to adoption was never undertaken. On the contrary, with few exceptions the doctrine faded from view with the result that the Reformed understanding of adoption failed to progress substantively from what it was in the mid-seventeenth century. This has remained the case down to the present.

Perhaps the single most obvious factor in all this was the predominant influence of Francis Turretin (1623-87), and especially his *Institutio Theologiae*
Elencticae. ¹ Writing in 1881 Robert Duff was later to observe that “Turretin has been accepted for two centuries as an authoritative teacher in the Christian Church, and... the doctrines he defined and upheld are those which distinguish much of the evangelical theology of the present time”. ² As we shall see, subsequent theologians of the tradition could neither have gained from Turretin an adequate understanding of the place of adoption in the tradition nor help in resolving the tension between the respective methodological approaches of Calvin and those Puritans that expounded the doctrine.

What might have been had successive generations of Calvinists continued to work through the doctrinal implications of God’s Fatherhood and the adoption of his sons? Certainly, the further orientation of Reformed theology towards the familial could have resulted in profoundly significant benefits for the tradition yet without the loss of any of the gains of the Protestant Reformation. It was not to be, however. The history of Reformed thought between the mid 1650s and 1820s panned out very differently. Forces became operative that were to lead not to decades but to centuries of neglect of adoption. Notwithstanding the fact that the doctrine remained an official element of Westminster theology ever after its inscription in the WCF, in reality it quickly ceased to maintain a profile in the regular theological discourse of Westminster Calvinism. Throughout much of the history of later Calvinism WCF 12 has been in danger of serving as but an obsolete creedal adornment of little value to the working theology of the tradition.

Beset in particular by successive Deist, Arian and Socinian, and Arminian and Neonomian challenges, successive generations of clergy and theologians became increasingly bogged down with rearguard actions intended to secure what advances their Protestant forebears had achieved. In Scotland, for instance, where the WCF possessed a relevance surpassing anywhere else the pressures of the age were characterised by the supplementing of the notion of confessionalism with that of the


idea of subscription. Once the WCF had been legally ratified in 1690\textsuperscript{3} and supported by the 1695 "Act Against the Atheistical Opinions of the Deists and for Establishing the Confession of Faith",\textsuperscript{4} the General Assembly sought to counter effectively the denial of a number of the major features of revealed religion such as the Trinity, the incarnation and justification by faith. Accordingly, the Kirk encouraged the apposite reading of orthodox divines. Yet the prevailing rationalism proved to be not so easily countered. Not to be defeated the General Assembly passed another act in 1710 for the "Preserving and purity of Doctrine", and the very next year brought into force subscription to the Confession by every minister and licentiate of the Kirk.\textsuperscript{5} By this time, however, subscription was doing double-duty, first as a defence against heterodoxy, but also as a safeguard of the Church’s independence in the light of the recent union of the English and Scottish Parliaments (1707).\textsuperscript{6}

Notwithstanding attempts such as these to bolster the cause of the Faith, there was to occur over time,

the weakening in the social prestige and cultural centrality of orthodox Christianity, which was the most important theological event of the period, and which... depended far less upon the effects of the Industrial Revolution than upon the Church’s failure successfully to counter-attack the intellectual and political revolution which was also developing throughout the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{7}

The assault on classic dogma succeeded in seriously challenging both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy. Given such a climate, it is little wonder that adoption was left by the wayside.

\textsuperscript{3} A Webster, Theology in Scotland: Reviewed by a Heretic. London: The Lindsay Press, 1915, 7.


\textsuperscript{5} A C Cheyne reminds us, however, that as early as 1647 the General Assembly of the kirk had approved the WCF as “most orthodox, and grounded upon the Word of God”; and that two years later all ministers were required positively to further its teaching. Thus, the introduction of subscription in 1711 was not so much a radical imposition as a further development of the measures already in place for the preservation of doctrinal purity (The Westminster Confession in the Church Today: Papers prepared for the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine. Edited by Alasdair I. C. Heron. First published 1982. Reprint ed.; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1982, 17). For an eighteenth century version of these details see The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow. Edited from manuscripts in the library of the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh, by Thomas M’Crie. Vol. 3. Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1843, 84-85.


Accordingly, in what follows we shall trace out why this was. While a number of distractions can be distinctly identified it is necessary to remember that these were very much interwoven throughout the period. Together they explain why Westminster Calvinists were so pre-occupied over succeeding generations as to be prevented from the constructive furtherance of the soteriology they had inherited.

### 6.1 The Influence of Deism

The failure of Westminster Calvinists to continue the enrichment of the soteriology of the tradition was not simply due, however, to the methodological ambiguity represented by Calvin and the Westminster commissioners. Many changes were afoot that were to hinder possibilities for the sort of fruitful reflection that could resolve the unfinished business of the past. The intense instability of the years of the Civil War and the Interregnum, the restoration of the Stuarts and the “black hole” created by the discrediting of the Puritans, as well as the Glorious Revolution and the Revolution Settlement (1641-1688) did not easily subside. As A C McGiffert has observed, “during the greater part of the century, controversy ran high, and the whole country was torn with religious dissension.” Whereas other doctrines such as justification had flourished during days of controversy, this was not to be the case with adoption. The tensions of the age ensured that anything but adoption became the focus of attention.

In the aftermath of the Restoration the ecclesiastical landscape was shaped by the rivalry between Puritanism, the Church of England and the Roman Church. Whereas Presbyterianism had had its heyday in the 1640s its standing was to continually diminish over the next half-century. At the same time “a succession of learned theologians had produced an impressive rationale of the Church of England as a via media between Puritanism and Rome, with its roots in the primitive tradition of the first Christian centuries.” Thus, Alan Sell explains that, “after the Restoration of

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10 Rupp, *op.cit.*, 53-54.
1660, the possibility of a full-blooded, parochial Presbyterianism, illegally existing alongside the parishes of the Church of England, was inconceivable. For this reason it is sometimes said that by the end of the seventeenth century the Presbyterians had become virtually independent". While retaining the label “Presbyterian” it is not surprising that some Presbyterian ministers (conformists) hankered after a Parish ministry while others moved towards a formal adoption of an independent ecclesiology, turning their assemblies Congregationalist in the process.

Only after the Revolution of 1688 was some measure of toleration generally admitted. While the Toleration Act of 1689 permitted the public preaching of those dissenting ministers registering their places of worship, taking the necessary oaths and accepting the doctrinal portion of the Articles of Religion, the act was little more than a measure of expediency against the political machinations of Catholic monarch James II. The mere suspension of the penal acts ensured that persecution, while stayed, remained an ever-present threat.

Although dominant, the Church of England was not without her own tensions. In the final decades of the seventeenth century the phrase “high church” came into use as the antithesis of “low church” or latitudinarian, the latter term originating in Cambridge in the early 1660s. While both parties were committed to the Church of England they were bitter rivals; the low church reacting against Puritan teaching and stressing Christianity as a way of life and a vision of God, the high church concerned with the return to the concept of a national church in a Christian realm. The extent of this rivalry was amply demonstrated in the personality of the high churchman, Henry Sacheverell, made famous for the riots he evoked through the publication of a vigorous sermon as damning of the Latitudinarians as of the Whig government who sought his impeachment for crimes and misdemeanours before the Bar of the House of Lords in 1710.

Amid the tensions of the age there developed a disillusionment which threatened to turn the eighteenth century into “a period of religious eclipse in modern

13 Rupp, op.cit., 29 and 53.
14 Ibid., 31 and 53.
15 Ibid., 64-71.
civilization; that is, "a lull, a period of relatively feeble activity for the churches." As it happened this was stayed by the Evangelical awakening that ran from the late 1730s onwards and the dawning of the early modern missionary movement. Nevertheless, according to T M Post's admittedly overt Protestant account, the scepticism that greeted the opening of the eighteenth century was born of a wariness concerning the intense religiosity of the past, the stalemate of Protestant and Catholic division in particular, the Roman usurpation of European politics, and the fresh acceptance of dissent. By themselves these factors may have contributed to but a confined or passing sense of disillusionment had it not been for the ever-growing effectiveness of the press, on the one hand, and shifting patterns of thought in the realms of science and philosophy. These fields of knowledge played an important role in shaping the rationalism of the eighteenth century.

Foundational to this development was the revolutionary impact of the heliocentric astronomy of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543). His influence grew as it did primarily through the popularisation and development of his thought by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). Not only so. Their advances towards a rationalistic understanding of the cosmos were supplemented by John Kepler's (1571-1630) pantheistic approach to science. Advances in science and the inventions that went with these ideological developments – such as Galileo's thermometer and pendulum that made mechanical physics experimental and Isaac Newton's (1642-1727) discovery that the universe is run by precise and regular laws of motion (Principia Mathematica (1687)) - challenged the priority of the supernatural over the natural and went so far as to question the textual verity of the Bible and helped generalise the paradigm shift from a revelational to a rationalistic view of life. If belief in the existence of God was left unthreatened, certainly confidence in his ongoing involvement with the created universe was undermined. What was forgotten, however, was that creation is itself an act of revelation, and that if an omnipotent and omniscient God could establish natural laws as part of his design, it was equally

18 Post, op. cit., 43-45.
19 McGiffert, op. cit., 192.
possible for him to superintend the regularities of their outworking through providence.

Yet the challenge to the predominant Christian worldview of the Middle Ages did not come from science alone. The philosophical rationalism of René Descartes (1596-1650), Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibnitz (1646-1716) — "the three great rationalists of the 1600’s" — also proved determinative. Although a devout Catholic, Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637), *First Philosophy* (1641), and *Principia* (1644) profoundly affected the faith of the masses by insisting that everything must be doubted until adequately proven to the point of mathematical demonstration. His was a scepticism vis à vis the truth of received opinions and beliefs as well as the sense-data previously relied on, for example, for the belief that the sun revolved around the earth. Thus for Descartes divine existence was evident not because of the witness of Christ and the apostles written on the hearts of subsequent disciples, but because it could be ontologically proven.

Soon Cartesian influence was transformed by Spinoza’s monistic and pantheistic stress on the unity of the one substance that is God. His contribution to the development of rationalism was derived from what he understood as the two fundamental attributes of the one substance: thought and extension, which idea gave expression to the perfect agreement between God and finite things or the world.  

Although Spinoza’s work in the Netherlands was later to be of importance for Pietists and Romanticists such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, it was the work of Leibnitz, the founder of the German philosophy of the eighteenth century, which, meanwhile, gave expression to the confidence with which man can know anything. His espousal of the theory of innate ideas followed Descartes’ and Spinoza’s dogmatic form of philosophising with its emphasis on the power of human thought to transcend. Yet Leibnitz’s contribution to the development of rationalism was

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22 This can be understood from Spinoza’s approach to the Bible. The Bible, he taught, should not be interpreted so as to agree with human reason, nor is reason to be made subject to the teaching of the Bible, for the Bible pretends to reveal not natural laws but laws of ethics (*ibid.*, 61).
particularly to be discerned from his monadological understanding of a gradation of
beings. Whereas God is the primitive monad, other monads, although differing in
size, figure and position are nevertheless the same in terms of quality or internal
character.²³ As thinking beings or spirits, they are, like human souls, capable of clear
and distinct ideas.

Not all were in agreement with Leibnitz. In his famous *Essay Concerning
Human Understanding* (1690) the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704)
denied the concept of innate ideas. Ideas, he taught, are the product of impressions
born of sensations that combine with reflection to provide first simple then complex
notions. Far from stemming the growing reliance on reason, however, Locke
intended to show that all claims to knowledge must be reasonable; that is, based on
experience. Thus, while in disagreement with Leibnitz, Locke nevertheless became
very much a leading figure of the age of reason.

The philosophical influence of Locke combined, then, with the scientific
influence of Isaac Newton thereby contributing to the emergence of rationalism in
the cities and universities of England, the home of Puritanism. Although aided by
science and philosophy the new rationalism did not flourish in a vacuum. Rather it
fed off the increasing awareness of world religions, the pitiful state of Christian unity
(or the lack thereof), and especially the Cambridge Platonist and Latitudinarian²⁴
attacks on what was considered to be the harsh dogmatisation of Puritan
Scholasticism.²⁵ But defining rationalism remains difficult. Generally speaking, it
was identified with three main ideas: First, that true Christianity is consistent with
reason, natural religion and morality; secondly, that true religion is primarily moral,

²⁴ Cambridge Platonists were centred at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. In seeking to relate theology
and philosophy they applied to religion the idealism of Plato and Neoplatonism (*NIDCC*. S.v.
“Cambridge Platonists” by Arthur Pollard). As Rupp reminds us, Cambridge Platonists and
Latitudinarians are not to be confused. While many of the Cambridge Platonists were latitudinarian,
not all latitudinarians were Platonists (*op.cit.*, 30).
²⁵ See, for example, the work of Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* referred to by Martin I J
Griffin Jr., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*. Annotated by Richard H
disliked the Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity, preferring to believe that the reason of the
creature was an inner light rather than simly a natural faculty (*NIDCC*. S.v. “Cambridge Platonists”
by Arthur Pollard).
individual and social; and, thirdly, that enlightened reason is sceptical of all claims of supernatural revelation and miracles.\(^{26}\)

However rationalism is defined it is certain that it was not confined to the realms of science and philosophy. In Deism it took, in the main, the form of a non-Christian theism.\(^{27}\) Later commenting on this period from across the Atlantic Jonathan Edwards could complain:

In this kingdom, those principles, on which the power of godliness depends, are in a great measure exploded, and Arianism, and Socinianism, and Arminianism, and Deism, are the things which prevail, and carry almost all before them. And particularly history gives no account of any age wherein there was so great an apostasy of those who had been brought up under the light of the gospel, to infidelity; never was there such a casting off of the Christian and all revealed religion; never any age wherein was so much scoffing at and ridiculing the gospel of Christ, by those who have been brought up under gospel light, nor anything like it, as there is at this day.\(^{28}\)

But who were the Deists? Certainly some Atheists appear to have taken refuge in Deism,\(^{29}\) yet it would be a mistake to equate the two "isms". According to Samuel Clarke, the most formidable Latitudinarian,\(^{30}\) Deists generally came in four types: those who accepted the existence of God, but denied his governance of the world; those believing in God and in his providence, but who supposed that he took no notice of the morally good or evil actions of men, good or bad being defined by arbitrary human laws; those who acknowledged the moral perfections of God, but accepted that the perishing faced no chance of restoration; fourthly, those who held basically orthodox views of God, but believed that such truths were accessible by reason.\(^{31}\) According to Clarke the last group – although a minority – was the group worthy of rigorous refutation.

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\(^{26}\) DHT. S.v. "Deism" by Anthony R Cross. Later radical Deists were to reject the supernatural altogether.

\(^{27}\) Pollard notes that the degeneration of the views of Cambridge Platonists could lead to the narrow and complacent views of eighteenth-century Deism. What generally kept Cambridge Platonists from Deism, though, was their mystical apprehension of God (op.cit.).


\(^{30}\) Rupp, op.cit., 251.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 260-261.
Among the principal Deist writers were: Matthew Tindal (1653-1733), *Christianity as Old as Creation*; John Toland (1670-1722), *Christianity Not Mysterious*; Thomas Woolston (1670-1733), *The Miracles of Our Saviour*; Bernard de Mandeville (1670-1733), *The Fable of the Bees*; Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713), *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*; Anthony Collins (1671-1729), *Discourse of Free Thinking*; and Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751), *Essays*. The circulation of these powerful books together with numerous tracts ensured that Deism — with its plea for free inquiry, its limitation of revelation to the natural order, its derision of the supernatural as well as its deep-seated antagonism against the clergy — not only confronted historic Christianity but continued to do so for the next half-century. In the words of Roger Lund:

To the orthodox it seemed that subversive ideas were spreading everywhere, particularly in the coffeehouses and behind closed doors, beyond the reach of the law. Worst of all, deist ideas were turning up apparently right within the camp of the faithful, particularly among those rational Anglicans, the Cambridge neoplatonists and Latitudinarian divines, who were so intent on exalting reason and combating enthusiasm that they seemed to anticipate, perhaps even to originate, much of the deist position.32

While Christianity outlasted the onslaught of Deism it nevertheless lost esteem in the eyes of many. That it survived at all was due to the popular impact of the protracted Evangelical revival (spearheaded by Wesleyan and Calvinistic Methodists) as well as the efforts of the orthodox throughout the land.

The defence of the faith was not straightforward. According to Kent:

those who still retained their belief in the fixed dogmatic orthodoxy of the past, ... saw themselves faced with the problem of how to restore the Church’s past ascendancy in western society without compromising theological traditions which they had inherited.33

The “undogmatic rationalism”34 of Locke’s early response to Deism provides ample evidence of the difficulties involved. “My book [*The Reasonableness of Christianity*]”, he claimed, “was chiefly designed for deists”.35 In contrast to later

33 Kent, “Christian Theology in the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries”, *op. cit.*, 461.
apologists who posited the plausibility of Christianity more classically in tradition, ecclesiastical authority or the corroborative weight of reason, Locke rested his case on the true light of the mind, which he regarded to be the basis of the self-evident truth of the propositions of Christianity. According to Kent,

Locke tried to go behind the Biblical and dogmatic controversies which had divided seventeenth-century Christendom, and to read the Bible without prejudices of either the Roman Catholic or classical Protestant theological systems, to take, as he claimed, "the plain, direct meaning of words and phrases".

In opting for this "Back to the Bible" approach, Locke came to see "from an exact survey of the history of our Saviour and his apostles" that the whole aim of their preaching was to convince the unbelieving world of two great truths: the one eternal, invisible God and the Messiahship of Jesus, the Saviour and King. These two biblical truths, he insisted, are absolutely necessary to be believed to make a person a Christian, and sufficiently substantive for the proclamation of the gospel to a generation of sceptics. Yet, lest it be thought that Locke's understanding of the essential gospel was an early form of "easy-believism" (the acceptance of Jesus as Saviour but not as Lord), it is worth noting how far-reaching Locke considered the implications of such belief to be. The sort of belief necessary to be a Christian must be joined with repentance, which is not simply an initial "metamelomia", but involves the doing of works fit for repentance. In other words, the requisite belief is a faith that works by love and what characterises sincere obedience to the law of Christ for the rest of life.

Notwithstanding, Locke's *apologia* was seen to play down the importance of the historic creeds and the idea of creed-making. In his defence Locke argued that whereas he was concerned to emphasise what is necessary to be believed for a man to

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3 "Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah." 3. That the believing Jesus to be the Messiah includes in it a receiving him for our Lord and King, promised and sent from God: and so lays upon all his subjects an absolute and indispensable necessity of assenting to all that they can attain the knowledge that he taught; and of a sincere obedience to all that he commanded. (Ibid., 421).


35 Kent, "Christian Theology in the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries", *ibid.*, 465.


38 Victor Nuovo in his introduction to *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, op. cit., xxviii.

be a Christian – leaving, as he acknowledged, the making of creeds to others, his critics (notably the Anglican divine John Edwards (1637-1716)), being at cross-purposes in their disagreement with him focused more broadly on the necessary articles of the faith.

Even where the threat of heterodoxy was avoided in later rebuttals of Deism (and this was by no means always so as we shall see), there was nevertheless the inevitable sense of distraction as issues of prolegomena now took precedence over the soteriological issues of the Reformation era. Numbered among the most important refutations of Deism were those by Bishops Berkeley (Alciphron), Conybeare (A Defence of Revealed Religion), Sherlock (A Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus), Warburton (The Divine Legation of Moses), Newton (A Dissertation on the Prophecies) and Butler (The Analogy of Revealed Religion). In addition, mention ought to be made of William Law’s volume An Appeal to all that Doubt the Truths of Revelation and The Case of Religion and Reason or Natural Religion fairly and fully stated, Daniel Waterland’s Scripture Vindicated, Isaac Watts’ Treatise on the Trinity, Nathaniel Lardner’s The Credibility of the Gospel History and John Leland’s volume A View of the Deistical Writers. Perhaps not insignificant here is the fact that most of the notable written responses to Deism came from Anglican Bishops, although some of the attempts were somewhat stilted.

While each sought in a particular way to uphold the cause of revealed religion over natural religion, typically their endeavours were set to counter the argument of a selected, if often unnamed, opponent. Daniel Waterland (1683-1740), Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, painstakingly aimed for instance at the vindication of those texts that he had found abused or misrepresented in Tindal’s work Christianity as Old as the Creation. In Law we find umbrage taken with an author who, “by arguments drawn from the nature of God, and natural Religion,

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42 A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity in The Reasonableness of Christianity, op.cit., 176.
43 Ibid., 168. There Locke argues that the way to see if an article of the faith is necessary to be believed for a man to be saved is by reducing the article to a proposition and then consider whether it is necessary to be believed for a person to be a Christian. Only if the proposition is can the doctrine of which it speaks be considered fundamental.
pretends to prove, that no Religion can come from God, which teaches anything more than that, which is fully manifest to all mankind by the mere light of nature.\textsuperscript{45} In response Law set out to undermine that confidence that would stand over revelation as judge of its reasonableness. Sherlock was a little more explicit. His \textit{Trypt of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus}\textsuperscript{46} was designed to refute Woolston's \textit{Sixth Discourse on our Saviour's Miracles}. Set up as a legal investigation of the nature of the evidence of the apostles to the ministry of Christ, his death and resurrection, as well as their own ministry,\textsuperscript{47} Sherlock unsurprisingly concluded that the apostles had not given false testimony.\textsuperscript{48} McGiffert, however, fairly summarises the debate when he writes:

He [Sherlock] and others were abundantly successful in showing the groundlessness of Woolston's accusation of deliberate conspiracy to deceive on the part of Jesus and his disciples, but whatever measure of success may have attended their defence of the fact of the resurrection, it is clear enough from all the replies to Woolston that the miracles could no longer be appealed to with the same confidence in their convincing power.\textsuperscript{49}

Butler's approach, by contrast, was not so much a personal rebuttal or specifically issue driven. Rather, like Law, he dealt with the big picture as is indicated by the full title of his famous work: \textit{The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature.}\textsuperscript{50} In his introduction he explains his meaning:

... if there be an analogy or likeness between that system of things [the constitution of nature] and dispensation of Providence, which experience together with reason informs us of, i.e. the known course of nature; this is a presumption, that they have both the same author and cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former's being from God, drawn from anything which is analogical or similar to what is in the latter, which is acknowledged to be from him; for an Author of nature is here supposed.\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, whereas Law really sort to deflate the human pride lurking behind the elevation of reason, Butler's purpose was to give personal and public expression to the belief that contrary to the growing scepticism with regard to Christianity there is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{47} Op. cit., 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 109.
  \item \textsuperscript{49} Op. cit., 219.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Op. cit., 10.
\end{itemize}
"strong evidence of its truth", but also certainty that “no one can, upon principles of
reason, be satisfied of the contrary”.52

During this period Westminster Calvinists, while seemingly one-step
removed from the apologetic countering of Deism, were nevertheless influenced by
the spirit of the age. No longer could their agenda be set solely by those concerns of
the Puritan era such as predestination, the nature, efficacy and application of Christ’s
death, and justification.53 More and more their attention was being drawn to the
foundational issues of theology proper: epistemology and divine existence. In fact,
Rupp wonders whether there was something in the Puritan theology itself that may
have prepared the way for the advances of rationalism into Presbyterianism:

One may ask if it was accidental that from within a Puritan Calvinist tradition this
new rationalism emerged. The emphasis on the Divine Majesty, the divine sovereign
freedom, not so much in Calvin himself, but in some Puritan theologians, might not
seem immeasurably distant from the new emphasis on a Supreme Being, and a view
of the person and work of Christ which was subordinationist.54

Given, however, that the hiatus between Calvin and the later Calvinism of the
Puritans was predominantly methodological we demur from hasting to this
conclusion. As we shall see, what interest they maintained in matters of soteriology
was due to the necessity of defending the doctrine of justification; but the opportunity
cost of the energy invested in such a pursuit was the more creative development of
Reformed soteriology. Fresh thinking proved to be an ill-affordable luxury as the
increasingly vocal scepticism abroad made inappropriate and impossible the calm,
irenic and creative furthering of doctrinal discussion. Thus adoption was left
substantially untouched ever after in the Puritan era.

6.2 The Influence of Arianism and Socinianism

The challenge of Deism did not come alone. Rationalism also gave vent to a
growing heterodoxy within the professing church as Unitarianism, Arianism and
Socinianism gained a widespread appeal. Whereas Deism was considered dangerous

52 Op. cit., 2
53 “All is changed when we turn to the theological literature of King William’s days – Tillotson,
Burnet, Bentley, Locke. We miss Anglican and Puritan sweep of thought, minuteness of detail,
54 Rupp, op. cit., 113.
because of its infidelity, to the orthodox Unitarianism, Arianism\textsuperscript{55} and Socinianism\textsuperscript{56} were heretical. In his sermons of 1739 on the history of redemption, Jonathan Edwards lamented:

Another thing which has of late exceedingly prevailed among Protestants, and especially in England, is Deism. The Deists wholly cast off the Christian religion, and are professed infidels. They are not like the heretics, Arians, Socinians, and others, who own the scriptures to be the word of God, and hold the Christian religion to be the true religion, but only deny these and these fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion: they deny the whole Christian religion.\textsuperscript{57}

Whereas Arianism classically denied the deity of Christ and was a belief aired in certain quarters of the Church of England, by the eighteenth century Socinianism had come to refer to a radical form of Unitarianism tantamount to a humanitarian (non-adorationist) view of Jesus, which had gained hold of many of the Dissenting academies that had sprung up after the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and had markedly increased in numbers after the Toleration Act (1689).\textsuperscript{58} The waning of the Presbyterian ("like Puritan of old")\textsuperscript{59} influence was thus attributable not only to the loss of ecclesiastical identity mentioned earlier, but, precisely to its openness to heterodoxy.\textsuperscript{60} Contrary to the Congregationalists who by and large kept the faith,\textsuperscript{61} by 1732 Presbyterians were admitting not only Calvinists but also Arminians, free thinkers, and Arians or Socinians into their communion, the theology of the WCF

\textsuperscript{55} Note Joseph Priestley's later fivefold differentiation of Unitarianism from Arianism: 1. Arianism attributed creation to Christ, Unitarianism to God; 2. Following on, Arianism must be polytheistic, Unitarianism monotheistic; 3. Alternatively, on this reasoning Arianism must consider Christ to be the one God by virtue of his creative power, whereas Unitarianism understood Christ to be maker and governor of the world under God; 4. For Arians Christ was an object of worship, for Unitarians not so; 5. For Arians Christ was the logos, for Unitarians not so (An History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ compiled from Original Writers; Proving that the Christian Church was at first Unitarian. Vol. 1. Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1786, 73-83). In view of these differences, Priestley concludes: "For these reasons I own that, in my opinion, those who are usually called Socinians (who consider Christ as being a mere man) are the only body of Christians who are properly entitled to the appellation of Unitarians; and that the Arians are even less entitled to it than the Athansians, who also lay claim to it." (ibid., 80-81)).


\textsuperscript{57} Jonathan Edwards, The History of Redemption, 281-282; cf. the quotation as it is found in The Works, op.cit., 601).

\textsuperscript{58} NIDCC. S. v. "Dissenting Academies" by Peter Toon.

\textsuperscript{59} Rupp attributes the phrase to Richard Baxter (op.cit., 108).

\textsuperscript{60} We distinguish here between Presbyterianism in England and English Presbyterianism. The former description takes into account the presence of exiled Scottish Presbyterians who first organised themselves in Founders' Hall, London, in 1672 (ibid., 120-121, 145).

\textsuperscript{61} Sell notes that leading Congregationalists such as Nathanael Lardner, Caleb Fleming, Joseph Priestley and Thomas Belsham forsook Trinitarian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, he argues that the covenanted nature of fellowship helped maintain orthodoxy to a degree that simple adherence to a creed, however sound, could not (Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches, 60f.)
notwithstanding. Why this was so we cannot be entirely sure. Certainly it seems that the shift in focus from the broader confessional issues to the more minimalist investigation of matters of theological prolegomena, while innocent of itself, often resulted in a dumbing down of orthodoxy to that which was deemed defensible.

What we do know is that the felt tension characteristic of the early years of the age of reason resulted inevitably in open controversy, most notably over the Trinity, which Rupp dates from 1690:

Controversy about the Trinity erupted in 1690 when a number of the more voluble divines rushed into the defence of the faith, blissfully unaware of the pitfalls ahead, or of the difficulty, in a public controversy on so intricate a theme, of avoiding the language of Tritheism or Modalism. Thus what happened was less like a marriage of true minds than a pile-up on a modern motorway as one theologian after another crashed into the other. 63

The controversy involved most prominently Arthur Bury, John Willis, Daniel Whitby, Robert South and Stephen Nye, not to mention William Sherlock and Joseph Bingham, the former disputing along lines of reason, the latter from the trajectory of tradition. 64 Producing greater heat than light, such was the furore that in 1695 an Act was passed imposing sanctions on all denying the Trinity. Rupp summarises “the debates of the 1690s” by explaining that they “were in an older framework. But now,” he continues, “with the new day of Locke and Newton there came a new dimension of enquiry.” 65

Heresies, however, continued, especially after 1698 when both the King and the Commons (possibly shocked into reaction by the execution for blasphemy of Thomas Aikenhead in Edinburgh in 1697) 66, refused to issue proclamations against the current immorality and profanities. Yet the Commons did concur with William’s concerns, which were rooted in his Calvinism. They therefore passed an act supporting orthodoxy, but it never took effect and was consequently repealed in 1813. Even then, however, such action was perhaps too late. The seeds were sown for a second phase of the controversy that ran from 1712 onwards.

At the height of the Trinitarian controversy Locke had published anonymously The reasonableness of Christianity (1695). The volume succeeded in

62 Ibid., 125.
63 Ibid., 248.
65 Rupp, op.cit., 249.
66 See DSCHT. S.v. “Aikenhead, Thomas” by D F Wright.
capturing the new intellectual spirit fostered in the Dissenting academies and resulted in some younger Dissenters being lost to rationalism and Unitarianism. Locke’s argument, as we noted earlier, was very much open to misunderstanding. Both *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and his work *The Reasonableness of Christianity* were both suspected of Socinianism. In his defence Locke argued that far from being the Socinian conveniently seeking room for his heresy by evading the constraints of a maximalist confession, he was rather expressing the fear that the proliferation of creedal articles would obscure the basic truths of what makes a person a Christian. In the process, however, he disregarded what he considered to be the complexities of Calvin and Turretin, and of systems of theology in general:

> ... I have spoken against all systems... and always shall, so far as they are set up by particular men, or parties, as the just measure of every man’s faith; wherein everything that is contained, is required and imposed to be believed to make a man a Christian: such an opinion and use of systems I shall always be against...

Yet sentiments like these seem to convey a disdain for the historic creeds, their enforcement by the implementation of ecclesiastical authority (where applicable) as well as the doctrinal definiteness they represented. While distasteful to many of the faithful, Locke’s view was bound to have a more persuasive impact on others. Certainly, it did not help the faithful to learn that in the very cause of the defence of the faith apologists were capable of conceding the sort of arguments to rationalism that others would deem essential to the very nature of Christianity; as, for example, in Newton’s stress on the unity of God that, according to Rupp, may have led him to Arian views.

67 Rationalism and Unitarianism often went together. As Priesley was to argue from the ancient Unitarians “the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and of the trinity, is an infringement of the great doctrine of natural and revealed religion, the unity of God.” *(op.cit., vol. 3, 415 and following).*

68 Cf. Victor Nuovo’s introduction to *The Reasonableness of Christianity, op.cit., xxvi* and Lund, *op.cit., 49.* Rupp notes that Locke was not helped by the fact that two of his associates, Tolland and Collins, were both eminent Deists *(op.cit., 249).*


70 *Ibid.,* 305.


72 *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity in The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures, op.cit., 387.*

73 Caution is warranted here: “Until Newton’s massive manuscripts on early church history and doctrine have been assessed by theologians nobody can confidently pronounce on the extent to which Newton himself departed from orthodoxy.” *(Rupp, op.cit., 249).* For a sample article on Newton interest in theology see Maurice Wiles’s essay “Newton and the Bible” in *Language, Theology and*
Significantly, it was in Newton’s Cambridge that Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* met with remarkable euphoria. There Newton exercised an undoubted influence on two of his friends and pupils: the mathematician William Whiston (1667-1752) and the churchman and philosopher Samuel Clarke mentioned earlier. Clarke - the most celebrated theologian of the day in England and, after Locke’s death, also the most famous philosopher - ensured that public debate of trinitarian issues when he published his semi-Arian work *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712). Its publication instigated a pamphlet war from 1714 onwards which rumbled on until 1730. Clarke understood there to be three divine persons but held that only the Father enjoyed independent self-existence and was underived. In this he was followed by a number of Presbyterian ministers, a few Independents and a great number of General Baptists.74

Of the debate Sell comments: “Certainly it was symptomatic of the desire to apply reason to the Scriptures; but, significantly, what seems to have weighed most with proponents on all sides was not the question of the Trinity but rather issues of subscription and a hatred of Calvinism.”75 That the debate began to revolve around the question of subscription as much as the Trinity became obvious at the Salter’s Hall Conference of 1719. Represented there was the fresh attitude emerging among the younger generation of Dissenters vis-à-vis the notion of subscription to doctrinal formulae. They demonstrated that it was possible to hold to the Trinity, the necessity of dogma and confessions and yet oppose the binding of the consciences of others.76 Interestingly the majority of the non-subscription party were Presbyterian who believed quite appropriately that the church formularies whether of ancient councils or recent assemblies could not rank alongside Scripture as expressions of true faith.

As for the question of the Trinity itself, little seems to have been achieved by way of its advancement. Bearing in mind Priestley’s Unitarianism, his later assessment of the debate is nevertheless worth noting:

There was a remarkable era of this kind occasioned by the publication of Dr. Clarke’s *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*; in less than twenty years after which a great majority of learned Christians in this country were, I believe, pretty well

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75 Ibid., 75.
76 Ibid. and Rupp, *op.cit.*, 113.
Notwithstanding Priestley's claim, Waterland, Clarke's intellectual equal, eventually succeeded in rallying the clergy to the Nicene and Athanasian confession of God, with the result that by the 1740s the intellectual force of English rationalism had begun to recede (vide infra).

Reflecting on this period Stoughton notes significantly that just as the Alexandrian study of philosophy during the fourth century had heralded controversies about the Divine nature, so the revival of philosophy at Cambridge had paved the way for fresh discussion of the being of God. However, as in the alte Kirche so now, the trinitarian and christological controversies tied up the church to the extent that there was little opportunity to discuss other related doctrines, especially those relating to the development of soteriology.

6.3 The Influence of Neonomianism and Arminianism

The supplementary threats of Deism, and Arianism and Socinianism only tell, however, part of the story of the neglect of adoption. Although the Latitudinarians may have exemplified the late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century "distaste for the puritan doctrine of salvation and its implications, a doctrine involving justification by faith alone, imputed righteousness, and absolute predestination," within the community of dissent views were developing that were not only to ensure the sustenance of the classical interest in justification despite the prevailing concerns regarding theology proper, they were to guarantee the permanent overshadowing of adoption.

77 Op.cit., vol. 4, 332. In the same section he continues: "The common people are now much interested in theological discussions, the appeal being made to the Scriptures, and to reason, of which they are judges, as well as to antiquity, with respect to which they are less qualified to determine; though even as to this, by a careful attention, and a comparison of the allegations on both sides, they may be enabled to come to a satisfactory conclusion. And when the minds of a sufficient number of the more intelligent of the laity are enlightened, they will be followed by the less intelligent; and then the concurrence of the state, and of the clergy, to a reformation of the public forms of worship in favour of Unitarian principles, will come of course." (ibid., 335).


79 The reader is again reminded of John McIntyre's assessment of the neglect of soteriology (see the Introduction).

Even without the intra-Puritan disputes over Neonomianism and Arminianism justification would have maintained a focal standing in the soteriology of Reformed orthodoxy, let alone in the light of them. By contrast later Calvinists only accorded adoption the most fleeting of treatments. Indeed oftentimes it was swiftly dismissed as but the positive side of justification. In his *Institutio* Turretin, for instance, inquires as to the nature of the adoption given in justification, explaining that it is but "the other part of justification... or the bestowal of a right to life, flowing from Christ’s righteousness, which acquired for us not only deliverance from death, but also a right to life by the adoption with which he endows us." Given Turretin’s influence in Reformed orthodoxy it is no surprise that his understanding of the relationship between the two doctrines held normative sway in the history of the tradition. As Kelly notes:

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

Consequently, even those Puritans who allocated the doctrine a distinct *locus* nevertheless tended to deny it a distinctive meaning. Edward Morris states that in the theologies of John Owen and Thomas Watson, for instance, adoption was “not so much a separate or added benefit as an integral part or feature of justification itself - a presentation in the language of Owen, of the blessings of justification in new phases and relations; or in the phrase of Watson, a concomitant of justification”. Thus adoption occupied a disadvantageous position *vis à vis* justification even prior to the impact of Neonomianism and Arminianism.

Whereas the reformers had fought against the external threat from Rome, the two “isms” constituted the threats to justification that Puritans faced from within.

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82 *Adoption:*, 112.

Protestantism. On the one hand, Arminianism began to undermine the efficacy of the atonement by teaching that Christ’s death accomplished merely the possibility of immunity from the payment of sin’s penalty while rejecting the view that faith is wholly God’s gift. Bereft of an able exponent other than John Goodwin (although Richard Baxter was accused of crypto-Arminianism), Arminianism was supposedly too unsubtle to win over many Puritans. That is not the picture that Edwards presents however:

The Church of England divines before that [the synod of Dort] were almost universally Calvinists: but since that, Arminianism has gradually more and more prevailed, until they are become almost universally Arminians. And not only so, but Arminianism has greatly prevailed among Dissenters, and has spread greatly in New England, as well as Old.

Whatever the extent of the spread of Arminianism its tenets and impact were generally sufficient to shock Puritans (especially of the Congregationalist variety), who, in turn, reacted with a rigid high-Calvinism that sought to do justice to the sovereignty of God’s decrees but endangered a due emphasis on the universal offer of the gospel.

Neonomianism or “new methodism” had, on the other hand, the advantage of the patronage of Richard Baxter (1615-1691). This he used to counteract the Arminianism found among the forces of Oliver Cromwell. Baxterianism, as it was otherwise known, was considered Amyraldian. The ‘new method’ placed the decree of (universal) redemption prior to the decree of election, while denying the decree of reprobation. Furthermore, it modified the doctrine of justification. According to Baxter’s Neonomianism, God is the governor and the gospel a legal code that requires a double righteousness. While Christ’s righteousness is the basis upon which God enacts the new code, the believer’s righteousness is demonstrated in a believing and penitent obedience to it. Thus Neonomianism’s teaching of a double

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85 Rupp, op. cit., 114.
88 Ibid., 85ff.
89 Under this scheme “faith”, explains Packer, “is imputed for righteousness because it is real obedience to the gospel, which is God’s new law.” (Among God’s Giants, 207).
righteousness wrested justification from its sole grounding in Christ’s imputed righteousness, so remedying the Antinomian distortion of the free grace of God.

The merit of Neonomianism came under close scrutiny in the protracted Crispian controversy of 1690-1699.\textsuperscript{90} Beginning with Baxter’s vehement written and spoken opposition to the republication of the said Antinomian sermons of Tobias Crisp (1600-1643) in 1689-1690,\textsuperscript{91} the acrimony and confusion created by the controversy succeeded in splitting the united front of Presbyterian and Congregational dissent by preoccupying them with issues that lay at the heart of the Neonomian/Antinomian divide: regeneration and conversion, the nature of Christ’s death and the imputation of his righteousness to the elect, the nature of the covenant of grace, the free offer of the gospel and the sins of the elect.\textsuperscript{92}

Serving as catalyst for the protraction of the debate was the evangelistic ministry of Richard Davis. Suspected of Crispian errors by fellow high Calvinists of the United Ministers of London, Davis was especially pursued by Daniel Williams who exerted his powerful influence to expose what he saw as the clear link between the teaching of Davis and that of Crisp. Publishing \textit{Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated}, Williams based his case against Davis’s propagation of Crispian errors not simply on the high-Calvinistic teaching of the WCF or the Savoy Declaration, but on a Baxterian version of Reformed theology. It was this move that fragmented the union of Dissenters.

Chief among the advocates of orthodox Calvinism was Isaac Chauncy. Not only did Chauncy secede from the union of ministers, taking others with him, he also wrote an exposé of Williams’s Neonomian \textit{Gospel-Truth Stated} that stretched to five hundred pages. Meanwhile the pamphlet war that had broken out gave ample evidence of the intricacy and heat of the controversy involving those for as well as against Williams (John Edwards (Anglican) and John Dunton, and Thomas Cole, Thomas Edwards and Samuel Crisp respectively), not to forget those advocating peace (Thomas Beverley, John Humfrey, John Howe and Stephen Lobb). Only in

\textsuperscript{90} In the brief summary of the controversy that follows I am indebted to Toon’s account in \textit{Puritans and Calvinism}, 87-101.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid.}, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid.}, 93-96.
1699, after further position papers and divisions, did the two parties, being weary of controversy, eventually settle to agree to disagree.93

Generally speaking, while a majority of Presbyterians supported Williams a majority of Congregationalists had opposed him. In their opposition, the Congregationalists, generally misunderstood as supporting Crispian doctrine, were simply intent on preserving orthodox Calvinism from Arminian and Neonomian errors. Whatever light was given forth by the controversy, it is clear that heat was more characteristic of it, and although John Locke could surely speak for many in recalling how the controversy had led him “into a stricter and more thorough inquiry into the question about justification”,94 the controversy neither resolved the broader issues nor did it further soteriological discussion beyond the realm of justification. In fact, only in the eighteenth century did justification finally escape the heat of controversy, but not before disabling the Dissenters’ unified front.

Commenting wisely, Toon writes:

Harsh controversy always seems to have the unfortunate effect of forcing most contestants logically to develop their thought to conclusions which they really never intended to reach. If this is so, heated theological controversy (as against ‘dialogue’) is very dangerous; Biblical doctrine is not capable of being reduced into any finally neat and fully tidy system since it contains seemingly irreconcilable elements – e.g. predestination and free will. Any human, dogmatic, doctrinal system must of necessity emphasise certain Biblical doctrines to the virtual exclusion of, or inadequate reference to, others. Therefore, Christian charity should teach theologians to live peaceably with their brethren who hold different views.95

This was certainly the repeated plight of adoption during the period as it had been throughout the history of theology. However, in the years subsequent to the Crispian controversy a more positive approach to justification became possible, as was typified by Jonathan Edwards’ series of sermons on justification by faith (1734) and George Whitefield’s popular appeals to the masses. Yet the renewed evangelistic emphasis on justification could not undo the fortress mentality that had begun to permanently fix the general outlook of the Reformed down to the present. This is hardly surprising for further controversy was to arise several decades later.

In 1770 there were framed the “Minutes of the Conference” to secure the course of Methodism in the light of John Wesley’s inevitable passing. The purpose

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93 Ibid., 99.
95 Toon, Puritans and Calvinism, 100.
of the “Minutes” was to serve as a bond of union for Methodist preachers and as a protest against antinomianism. However the wording of Wesley’s emphasis on practical religion appeared contradictory of his doctrine of justification. Despite signing a declaration disavowing justification by works Wesley and his followers could not dispel the controversy initiated. Fletcher of Madeley entered the fray on Wesley’s side by seeking to uphold both the importance of morality and the freeness of grace with his Checks to Antinomianism. Meanwhile Augustus Toplady went ahead with the publishing of a translation of Zanchius’ treatise on absolute predestination and later, in response to an attack by Wesley, a disreputable tract entitled An Old Fox Tarred and Feathered. Small wonder, then, that in an age when brotherly love was so partisan the profile of adoption remained very much unchanged. What fresh Methodist expressions there were of familial piety were directed to God as Father, but there was less inquiry into the specific manner of their adoption; that is, the manner in which they entered into a filial relationship to God. More of that below.

6.4 The Influence of Wesley

The under-emphasis on adoption was not always accidental. There is strong evidence to suggest that the doctrine was not simply overlooked but proactively denied further theological attention. As surprising as it may seem, vested interests were at work to foil its exposure to greater theological inquiry. This was only possible because of the already established all but normative absence of the doctrine from familiar theological discourse.

Probable evidence of this sort of repression is found ironically in the early history of Methodism. Ironic, because on the one hand, the Methodists succeeded in

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97 By this I do not mean that Wesleyan Methodists were not interested in soteriology. I simply mean that the filial or familial expression of their piety did not result in serious theological investigation of adoption. This is not to demean the earnest nature of their piety, the like of which was seen, for instance, in the notion of covenanting with God, which Wesley took from Richard Alleine and introduced to his congregation in London in 1755. Cf. The Works of John Wesley. Third edition. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979, 338-339 and vol. 13, 337.
keeping faith and devotion alive where the apologists had failed, and on the other hand,

it is to Methodism and the Evangelical Revival that we owe the rise of those influences that restored the Fatherhood of God to its pre-eminence upon the foundation of the Catholic faith. And this, not by reason of its formal theology, for the original Methodist Theology was not systematic. Yet the evangelism of Wesley, with its transforming results, was founded upon and gave expression to the reinterpretation of the Gospel in terms of the universal Love of God, as manifested in the Atoning work of Christ and made effectual by the regenerating gift of His Spirit.

However, despite the Methodist emphasis on the Fatherhood of God and the abundant measure of the Spirit of adoption known among members of the movement, John Wesley felt compelled to eradicate every reference to adoption from his revision of the Shorter Catechism. This astonishing move is most difficult to account for, especially when we remember that the closely aligned doctrine of assurance was a distinctive feature of his teaching and contributed in no small part to the Methodist emphasis on the Spirit of adoption. Wesley may have felt that there were no words in human language that could “adequately express what the Spirit of God works in His children”, but that does not explain why he should banish the very word adoption from his revision of the catechism. At the heart of adoption lies the very cause of confidence before God.

The primary and maybe sole reason is probably found in the integral connection in Scripture between adoption and predestination, the locus classicus of which is Ephesians 1:4-5. Alternatively, we can only surmise that Wesley sought to cast justification and sanctification into bolder relief. Whatever the actual reason, the effect was determinative. Methodists received little encouragement to grapple

98 McGiffert, op.cit., 243. “It is no accident”, writes McGiffert, “in view of the prominence they gave to the necessity of redemption, that the Evangelicals restored the doctrines of the deity and atoning work of Christ to the place of importance which they had widely lost.” (Ibid., 165). Also see McGiffert for more on the strengths and weaknesses of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism (ibid., 175).


100 Ibid., 52-53.


with the theology of adoption. They could have only worked it out from the inconsistency between Wesley’s theology and piety: “By the testimony of the Spirit I mean, an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ has loved me and given Himself for me; and that my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.”

To highlight the point, it may be noted that Wesley’s approach stands in sharp contrast to that of his contemporary and critic, the Baptist, John Gill (1697-1771). As we saw in the Introduction, Gill has a separate section on adoption in Book Six of his Body of Doctrinal Divinity, the presence of which alerts us to his interest in the doctrine, which may well have been governed by the clear nexus he perceived between predestination and adoption. For Gill adoption is rooted in what he calls an internal act of God. As opposed to God’s external acts, his internal acts are those done in eternity past and include the union of the elect with God, their justification and adoption. In thinking aloud about these acts, Gill reasoned:

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

Gill’s concern to ensure due emphasis on God’s sovereignty in salvation must then have influenced his focus on adoption, especially given the close nexus between

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105 Germane to what follows is the question of whether Gill was a hyper Calvinist, a claim that is Arminian in origin (George M. Ella, John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth. Eggleston, Co. Durham: Go Publications, 1995, 263). In fact it has generally been assumed that Gill was hyper Calvinist (see P Toon, The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765. London: The Olive Tree, 1967). Recently, however, Ella has rigorously denied the claim (op.cit. 253ff) by pointing to Gill’s exemplary zeal for evangelism (consistent with the size of his congregation (ibid., cf. 257 and 286)), his emphasis on repentance and faith as well as on God’s unchangeable standard of holiness (ibid., 255), not to mention the scholars’ disregard for the original sources (ibid., 258). In this latter regard Ella sees Toon’s work The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism as especially guilty.
106 See also Book Two (Gill, op.cit., 172, 201ff.). According to Toon, the distinction between the internal and external acts of God was common to hyper-Calvinists of the first half of the eighteenth century; the former including predestination, eternal union, eternal adoption and eternal justification (The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism, op.cit., 108-111). Yet this does not mean per se that the idea was essential to hyper-Calvinism.
107 Gill, op.cit., 198.
predestination and adoption in Eph. 1:4-5, such that at conversion the elect realize that they were adopted into the family of God in eternity past.\textsuperscript{108}

This most high Calvinistic approach throws into relief the extent of Wesley’s contemporaneous downplaying of adoption. Sadly, Calvinistic Methodists of the period do not appear to have compensated for Wesley’s influence. To have done so would not have required agreement with Gill’s locating of adoption in eternity past, for they could have, in principle at least, stressed the sovereignty of God in adoption by drawing on Calvin’s exposition of predestination to adoption (Eph. 1) thus offsetting the contribution of Wesleyan Methodism to the neglect of adoption and their own neglect of the familial orientation of predestination.

Instead, Presbyterians, possessing in the Westminster Standards a creedal theology of adoption, ironically made little use of it. According to Stoughton, they attached no authority to the teaching of other days, nor did they care for uniformity of belief.... Not that Presbyterians were destitute of reverence for the past. They never threw overboard old traditions; but their reverence was restricted to the character, spirit, and temper of Reformers and Puritans; it extended not to their opinions.... They valued [the Westminster Confession and catechisms], more for what they had thrown off, than for what they had preserved. With a strong, one-sided tendency, they exalted the memory of their fathers, as pioneers of free inquiry; but those fathers, could they have risen from the grave, would scarcely have accepted the kind of admiration sometimes bestowed on them by their sons.\textsuperscript{109}

However, Stoughton writes in general terms. By failing to preserve the Reformed interest in the Fatherhood of God and the adoption of his sons they were contributing significantly to the altering of the “character, spirit and temper” of the Reformed faith. In other words, the underplaying of adoption led in effect to the formulation of a truncated version of the Reformed doctrine of salvation. By inordinately expressing the gospel’s forensic or legal character the familial became overshadowed with the result that Reformed soteriology took on a lop-sidedness that it has yet to correct. The truth of God, as “just and the justifier” (Rom. 3:26), was not only to be proclaimed but defended at all costs. “They thought”, says Stoughton, “of errors which ought to be exploded, more than truths remaining to be learnt”.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{108} Toon, The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism, 124.  
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 298.
Whatever the causes of the consistent neglect of adoption and its cognate themes, the subsequent history of Calvinism in Scotland at least demonstrates that a costly price was eventually to be paid for it. In spite of the presence of the familial lurking in the annals of the tradition Westminster Calvinists nevertheless were guilty of losing sight of the warmth of the familial expression of the gospel. As a result, with the passing of the years there opened up a chasm between the tenor of Protestant theology and that of the New Testament so much so that by the early nineteenth century there had developed a growing dissatisfaction with the juridical tenor of Westminster Calvinism.

Not only was such discontent due to a view of God and his salvation that only partially expressed the fullness of the message conveyed in the New Testament, the practical effect of the neglect of adoption was to create a lopsided emphasis on justification, and with it an imbalanced concentration on the retrospective aspect of the gospel. As Francis Beattie was later to complain:

\[\text{The standards throughout give a separate place to this doctrine [adoption]. Each of the Catechisms has a question upon it, and the Confession devotes a separate chapter to its consideration. In view of this fact it seems a little strange that some of our leading theologians should give no distinct place to adoption in their systems, and many of them devote but little attention to it. By some it is made a factor in justification, by others it is regarded as belonging partly to justification and partly to sanctification. It is clear that the Standards give to adoption a place of its own...}^{111}\]

Granted that the full impact of the neglect of adoption was undoubtedly unforeseeable at the time, it is nevertheless surprising that later Calvinists were so blind to the counter-productivity of the defensive mindset that kept them from the progressive development of their soteriology, and still does despite the backclash that was felt against Reformed theology from the early nineteenth century onwards.

Although it took centuries for the reaction against Westminster Calvinism to develop and become vocalised, it eventually became public in Scotland where the WCF regulated ecclesiastical life as nowhere else.\(^{112}\) With this in mind we shall turn our attention there in the remaining chapters, for it was in Scotland that adoption was first to undergo revived yet ambiguous fortunes from the 1830s onwards. The unfolding story features the six theologians that stand out precisely because they

\[^{111}\text{Beattie, The Presbyterian Standards, 212.}\]
\[^{112}\text{In 1872, A M Fairbairn could say that, “Scotland has enjoyed abroad the reputation and cherished at home the belief of unique and almost unanimous fidelity to her old Confession.” (“The Westminster Confession of Faith and Scotch Theology”, CR 21 (1872), 63).}\]
sought to develop a theology of sonship, if not of adoption *per se*. Their motives in doing so were either driven by the cause of revolt (Thomas Erskine and John McLeod Campbell) or reaction (Robert Candlish, Thomas Crawford, John Girardeau and Robert Webb). Either way, the times they catered for hindered them, ironically, from the disinterested exposition of adoption - a factor that was to limit the value of their studies. Nevertheless, for all the limitations of their attempts, the fact that they made the effort at all set them apart from their late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Calvinistic forebears, as well as from their contemporaries. Thus, we shall find them worthy of study. Certainly the chequered history of the good news of adoption would be incomplete without their inclusion.
Chapter Seven

The Restoration of "Adoption"

The theological student has directed so much attention to the history of the Nineteenth Century German theology, that there is a tendency to forget the Anglo-Saxon development, which, as a matter of fact, has had far more influence on the religious life of Britain and America than the theology of Germany despite the concerns of theologians therewith.

Eugene Garret Bewkes, Legacy of a Christian Mind.

By the opening of the nineteenth century the time was ripe for the aforementioned backlash against the predominance of the Westminster legacy in Scotland. Many factors help explain the marginalising of the tired influence of Westminster Calvinism.

First of all there was the Church of Scotland's overall loss of spiritual vitality. This was due in large measure to the spate of divisive ecclesiastical cases that kept the church pre-occupied during the early decades of the eighteenth century. Initially troubled by the spread of Bourignianism - "a quasi-pantheistic conception of religion, in which Modalistic, Pelagian and Socinian elements all found a place"¹ - the general rationalistic ethos of the age inevitably encouraged the pressing of confessional boundaries that was bound to result in actions in the courts of the Kirk.

This was especially so during the protracted period from 1714-1729. In particular the General Assembly became embroiled in two cases involving Professor John Simson of Glasgow University (1714-1717 and 1726-1729).² From the start Simson was viewed with suspicion because his training had differed from that offered by the older traditions. Perceived to side with the new learning and philosophy of men like James Owen, Edmund Calamy and Samuel Clarke, he was soon accused of being out of line with the WCF.³ In particular, James Webster, the

¹ DSCHT. S.v. "Bourignianism" by NR Needham. According to Needham Bourignianism was named after the Flemish mystic Madame Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680) whose writings were translated into English from the 1670s on. The movement is said to have had more of a following in Scotland than in any other country. Although more prevalent in Episcopalian circles it was nevertheless rejected at the General Assemblies of 1701, 1709 and 1710.

² For a brief overview of Simson's career and the cases mentioned see H M B Reid, The Divinity Professors in the University of Glasgow 1640-1903. Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson and Co., 1923, 204-240.

³ Thomas Boston believed Simson to have attacked the doctrines of grace and the person of Christ and to have attempted the overthrow of the very foundations of Christianity (The Whole Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston of Ettrick. Vol. 12. Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1852, 290-291; alternatively see Memoirs of the Life, Times, and Writings of Thomas Boston of Ettrick Written by
then leader of the Kirk’s Evangelical party, charged him with Socinian and Arminian errors. Given the sectarian spirit of the age the Assembly did not take such accusations lightly. Wodrow – Simson’s friend – believing that “this poor church since the Reformation has been entirely free of any disputes in point of doctrine,” nevertheless prayed that the concern over Simson “may end so as the truth may prevail.” Wodrow’s prayers for the moment went unanswered.

The Assembly did not rule either for Webster or Simson, choosing merely to rebuke the latter for the divisiveness of his excessive use of natural reason and hypotheses. The indecisiveness of this judgement contrasting markedly with the same Assembly’s (1717) condemnation of the Auchterarder Creed. Nevertheless by the Assembly of 1726 the Kirk was back in the throes of the Simson case. This time patience with the professor’s subtle “teaching [of] heresy orthodoxly” had run out. With testimonies against Simson to the effect that he had exchanged his Trinitarianism for Arianism the Assembly suspended him from preaching and teaching in 1727, although he remained in the pay of the University until his death in 1744.

Meanwhile, the trying of twelve “Marrowmen” in 1722 at the height of what became known as the Marrow controversy (1718-1723), demonstrated the general inconsistency of the Kirk in deciding which challenges genuinely contravened the WCF. The controversy began with the republication of Edward Fisher’s tome The

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5 The same year John Flint published his book entitled: Examen Doctrinae D(omini) Johannis Simson, S.S.T. in Celebri Academia Glasguensi Professoris. According to Flint, Simson, despite conscientious motives, was guilty of an excessive enlargement of the gospel. Through natural revelation humankind could understand the way of salvation. Furthermore, he had exaggerated the natural powers of man and a sharing of the supreme authority of Scripture with natural reason (Ibid., 217-218).

6 The Auchterarder Creed was a series of propositions compiled by the Presbytery of Auchterarder (Perthshire), which all licentiates and ordinands were required to sign. The Creed was an attempt to guard against prevalent doctrinal errors such as preparationism (the forsaking of sin in order to come to Christ). Although rejected by the Assembly of 1717 the commission of Presbytery reported to the Assembly of 1718 that the Presbytery of Auchterarder was nevertheless “sound and orthodox” (DSCHIT. S.v. “Auchterarder Creed” by D. C. Lachman).

7 Reid, The Divinity Professors in the University of Glasgow 1640-1903, 222.

8 According to James Walker, Marrow theology was distinguished by three characteristics. First, it pleaded for the awe-full teaching of reprobation, so as to highlight the reality of grace. Secondly, it exhibited a greater concern to put the gospel near to sinners. Thirdly, it signalled a shift away from a
Marrow of Modern Divinity (1645 (MMD)). Indirectly promoted by Thomas Boston, the volume presented the doctrines of grace from a particularist understanding of the atonement coupled with a belief in the free offer of the gospel yet set within a federal-theological framework. From this it is apparent that although MMD taught that assurance is of the essence of faith the volume was otherwise in overwhelming agreement with the theology of the Westminster Standards. Nonetheless MMD was condemned by the General Assembly of 1720, the prohibition being renewed in 1722.

In passing it is worth noting the curious nature of the Marrow controversy. Strange it is that as undoubted a federal theologian as Boston was disciplined for judaic or theocratic theology of mission, whereby God was said to initiate national covenants. Instead, direct evangelisation was preferred and undertaken on the basis of a gospel offer extended to all (The Theology and Theologians of Scotland chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. 2nd ed., revised. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888, 91-94). For a discussion of the two questions raised relating to the issue of faith and the atonement, namely the nature of saving faith and the extent of the atonement, See Beaton, “The Marrow of Modern Divinity’ and the Marrow Controversy”, PTR 4 (1906), 327-335.

9 Boston had been greatly effected by the volume back in 1700 when struggling to discern the truth of the doctrines of grace he stumbled across it (see C G M'Crie's introduction to The Marrow of Modern Divinity. Glasgow: David Bryce and Son, 1902, xxi). Sitting in the General Assembly of 1717, having heard the acquittal of William Craig in the case of the Auchterarder Creed, Boston suggested to John Drummond, a minister of the Presbytery of Auchterarder that he read the MMD. Eventually the book was passed onto James Hog who republished it in 1718. For the fullest discussion of the controversy, see David C Lachman, The Marrow Controversy 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis. Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology. Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988.

10 Wherein, says McCrie, “the real, abiding, and imperishable value of the book is to be found” (op.cit., xix). Of the developed federal theology Robert Rainy wrote: “It was especially favourable to the exhibition of the interest which Christ and His people have in one another, and the faithfulness and care with which He administers their concerns. In the hands of vigorous preachers it furnished rich and profound conceptions of union and communion with Christ; and the ‘Marrow men' found in it special facilities for urging on all men the free offer of the Gospel.” (“Federal Theology“, CP 6 (1881), 434. Further evidence of the Marrow’s Reformed credentials is gleaned from a list of the people it influenced – the Erskines, George Whitefield, James Hervey and Thomas Chalmers in addition to Thomas Boston – as well as the theologians it quotes – Luther, Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, Peter Martyr, Thomas Goodwin, Lightfoot, Sibbes, Marshall and others (see D Beaton, op.cit., 317 and 319).

11 The distinction in the WCF between faith and assurance is often overstated. While the confession acknowledges that a believer may go along time without assurance, nevertheless even where it is missing there is still a seed of faith (WCF XVIII: 3-4).

12 See McKinlay, “The relation of incarnation to atonement in the Christology of R.S. Candlish, and its contribution to the development of Scottish Theology”, 6ff.. McKinlay writes: “The verdict of the General Assembly of 1720 notwithstanding, we can confidently affirm that the Marrow-men stood closer to both Scripture and the Reformation theology when they set forth their distinctive teaching regarding the Atonement.” (ibid., 8). Similarly, Beaton writes: “The sweeping condemnation of the Act gave a sever blow to the friends of evangelical truth in the Scottish Church, for in their estimation the Assembly had condemned a ‘bundle of sweet and pleasant Gospel truths.’” (op.cit., 324).

standing by a volume in essential agreement with the WCF, especially given the far more serious challenges that the Kirk faced than the nature of the relationship of assurance and faith. The Kirk’s opposition to the Marrow men suggests that in the oscillation of power between her various internal parties she had herself shifted sufficiently from her confessional moorings so as to condemn a volume that is “an English embodiment of the Federal idea of Revelation”.14 As Lachman writes: “That [MMD] became the focus of theological controversy in early eighteenth century Scotland indicates the extent of the changes which occurred in Reformed thought over the previous century.”15 This helps explain the contrasting leniency of the Kirk towards those of the same period who were distinctly out tune with the confessional heritage of the denomination. Had the Kirk only dealt more constructively with the Marrow men she could have pre-empted the necessity of John McLeod Campbell’s more radical protest a century later. As we shall see, however, Campbell was to be deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland under the conditions of the very same act as the Marrow men. Furthermore, Campbell could have learnt from Boston that the rejection of a given expression of Westminster Calvinism need not have entailed the Westminster Calvinism in toto.

As if the troubles of the Simson case and the Marrow controversy were not enough, the Kirk also had to deal with John Glas (1695-1773), a minister of the Kirk in Tealing in Angus, whose adopting of an independent ecclesiology lead him to favour the separation of church and state. Not only did this negatively impact on his esteem for the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, he refused to sign the WCF on the ground that the civil magistrate had no authority to reform religion or suppress false worship. Not surprisingly Glas was deposed from the Kirk by the General Assembly of 1730.16 Although he himself had few ambitions to gather around him what became known as Glasites, his son-in-law

14 McCrie, op. cit., xix. See McGowan’s volume The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston (op. cit.) for the substantiation of this thesis. Although Boston believed it better to speak of two covenants rather than three, one has only to look at the layout of his Complete Body of Divinity (Works, vols. 1 and 2) to see the affinity between the theology of Boston and Westminster. The difference on the covenants did not lead him to reject Reformed orthodoxy. He merely infused it with a fresh warmth (DSCHT S.v. “Boston, Thomas” by D C Lachman).
Robert Sandeman (1718-1771) succeeded in extending his influence to the north of England and even to New England.\(^17\)

The Kirk’s suspicions of heterodoxy continued with an investigation into the teaching of Professor Campbell, occupant of the chair of Ecclesiastical History at the University of St Andrews. Criticised at the General Assembly of 1736 for “shocking the simple” he was nevertheless considered orthodox. The dropping of the matter, however, only fuelled suspicion among the Seceders who had recently broken away to form the Associate Presbytery that the Kirk was failing to denounce incipient heresy.\(^18\)

Such ecclesiastical cases coupled with the looming question of patronage, the persistent fear of both the alien Jacobite threat as well as that of English Episcopalianism\(^19\) all helped create a culture of suspicion in the Kirk. Whereas Jacobitism remained religio-politically dissatisfied with the Protestant settlement of 1688-1689 and the Union with England (1707), hence the successive uprisings in 1715, 1719 and 1745, by contrast English Episcopalianism was regarded as a threat because guilty by association with heterodoxy in its rationalistic Arminian form.\(^20\)

Although the Jacobite threat ended in 1746 just as the deist offensive was receding, measures against the Highlands and the Episcopalian Church of Scotland nevertheless remained in force until the late eighteenth century.\(^21\)

The Kirk was not left unaffected by the various challenges of the age. As Reid notes: “The times were indeed out of joint. One trouble after another kept the church in a state of irritation.”\(^22\) Consequently, according to MacGregor’s admittedly loaded account, she turned somewhat despotic, losing her spiritual vitality in the

\(^{17}\) *DSCHT*. S.v. “Glas, John (1695-1773)” by D B Murray. According to Murray: “Sandeman developed and romulgated Glas’ views in theology and Church practice. Sandemanianism, which for some years disturbed Baptists and Congregationalists on both sides of the Atlantic, is characterised by a search for primitive Christianity, free of the corruptions that even the Reformers allowed.” (*DSCHT*. S.v. “Sandeman, Robert”)

\(^{18}\) Drummond and Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843*, 48; cf. 42-44.

\(^{19}\) James K Cameron, “Theological Controversy”, op. cit., 17.

\(^{20}\) Rationalistic Arminianism, which embraced to greater or lesser degrees Socinians, Arians, Unitarians and Latitudinarians, is to be distinguished from the evangelical Arminianism of the Wesleys. According to Alan Sell, like the Deists rationalistic Arminians owed a debt to post-Renaissance Humanism and rationalism. Thus, they “sought to accord reason its due place, while acknowledging the continuing need of a revelation of things supernatural.” (*Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches*, 68).

\(^{21}\) *DSCHT*. S.v. “Jacobitism” by H R Sefton.

\(^{22}\) *Op.cit.*, 220.
process. Often it is implied that mandatory subscription to the Westminster Standards was evidence of this. The orthodox for their part, however, must have been relieved that subscription was mandatory, for no sooner had the recent threats receded than the early wafted winds of secularized Enlightenment beginning to blow in France came settling over Scotland, her traditional ally.

Mention of the Enlightenment brings us to the second reason for the diminishing influence of Westminster Calvinism. Prior to the Scottish Enlightenment the social hegemony of the Church of Scotland was already being challenged. Not only had the Toleration Act of 1712 permitted episcopalian to meet publicly for worship using the English prayer-book, a development that loosened the Presbyterian hold on church discipline, the laity were increasingly playing a part in ecclesiastical government, thus enabling some Calvinists – holding to the rights of the congregation over against the rights of patronage – to join the various seceded bodies. Meanwhile in the Kirk the Enlightenment gradually gained support from numerous clergy and the professoriate. Indeed, David Bebbington states, that, “nowhere was the enlightenment more fully assimilated by an Established Church than in Scotland.” Soon, however, the Scottish Enlightenment succeeded in practically every field of intellectual life or technical ability then available, thus challenging the prevailing cultural backwardness.

According to T D Campbell, “it is now generally acknowledged that [Frances] Hutcheson [(1694-1746)] is the ‘father’ of the Scottish Enlightenment”.

24 Cheyne, The Transforming of the Kirk, 10. Such conditions were later consolidated by the conservative reaction to the threat of the French Revolution in 1789. “Threatened by the new social, political and religious challenges of the 1790s, the C of S became defensive and inward looking, until revived by the evangelical party early in the nineteenth century.” (DSCHT. S.v. “French Revolution” by S J Brown).
27 DSCHT. S.v. “Enlightenment” by David Bebbington.
28 Drummond and Bulloch, The Scottish Church 1688-1843, 193.
A son of the manse, a pupil of John Simson, and in ministry popular with all but the orthodox (who accused him of heresy in the courts of the Kirk (1738)), Hutcheson was inspired by Locke to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity. In the process he sought to cut between the prevailing theologising and secularising theories of the day while nevertheless maintaining a close affinity between morality and religion. His significance lay not only in the considerable influence he exercised over his students as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University but in the dissemination of his ideas by Scottish émigrés in the American colonies.

According to Richard Sher, however, the Scottish Enlightenment took off not with Hutcheson but with the coming of age of his pioneering generation of moderate but diverse literati – Lord Kames, Colin Maclaurin, Alexander Monro, George Turnbull and Robert Wallace; and reached its peak with the opposing contributions of Thomas Reid and David Hume, not forgetting William Robertson and Adam Smith to name those more popularly known; ending with the work of Dugald Stewart.

Sutherland has helpfully noted that the Scottish Enlightenment took three forms:

A preoccupation with the practical and empirical world, which as temporal allowed one to avoid the entanglement with the metaphysical and theological snares of the eternal; or, as in the case of, for example, Thomas Reid, the production of major philosophical writings which ignored, by adopting unexamined, the conclusions of a Butler-type natural theology; or, the radical

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30 *Frances Hutcheson*, *op. cit.*, 4.

31 Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches*, 76.

32 T D Campbell, *op. cit.*, 167.

33 Although Reid’s Common-Sense realism was intended to counter Hume’s scepticism, Sutherland reminds us that Reid shared two aspects of Hume’s scepticism about reason: A belief in human fallibility in all judgement and in all reasonings and a realisation that the truth and fidelity of human faculties can never be proven by reason. Thus Reid’s endorsement of common sense involved elements of scepticism (Stewart R Sutherland, “The Presbyterian Inheritance of Hume and Reid” in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment, op. cit.*, 145).

34 The dating of the commencement of the Scottish Enlightenment follows the case laid out by Richard B Sher in his volume *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, 1985, 5-10. Cf. Mautner in *Frances Hutcheson, op. cit.*, 3. As Roberts implies (*op. cit.*, 2) and Mautner states (*Frances Hutcheson, op. cit.*, 3), Hutcheson eventually was overshadowed by some of those he influenced, such as Hume, Smith and Kant.
scepticism of David Hume with regard to religious matters. Presbyterianism in its "moderate" forms could encompass the first two of these, but not the last.  

In the Kirk the Enlightenment found ready supported in the Moderate party. However, given that it was widely believed that Hume was an atheist, the Moderates had to be careful to distance themselves from him while yet opposing the Kirk's more Evangelical and Calvinist traditionalism. An example of this is seen in regard to *The Edinburgh Review* the founding of which was kept secret from Hume although its purpose "was to some extent to serve as a propaganda vehicle for the moderate party".  

In actuality it is uncertain whether the Scottish Enlightenment was able to impacted the Kirk because the hold of Westminster Calvinism was already loosening or whether the development of the Scottish Enlightenment was in fact the reason for the diminishing appeal of Westminster Calvinism. According to Leckie the former was the case: "The national genius did not assert itself in the world of religious speculation until the Genevan orthodoxy had begun to lose its power." That loss of power, we suggest, was not due to the inadequacies of Westminster Calvinism but to the complacency of those who chose, in the face of many a challenge, to play safe by defensively resting content with well-worn seventeenth-century formulaic expressions that had been allowed to lose their potency. In other words, the very defensive stance intended to save the faith of the Reformed community actually helped to foster the siege mentality that would, with the passing of the years, encourage the casting off of the old Calvinism of the pre-modern era. As MacGregor has put it: "Scotland ... produced scarcely a single noteworthy page of theology, [so that] the Kirk's Calvinism ... hardened to the point of total sterility".

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36 Hume, it has been said, "prefigured nearly all subsequent critiques of religion, including those of Nietzsche and Freud." (*DHT.* S.v. "Hume, David (1711-76)" by Gerard Loughlin). In particular, his emphasis on impressions (being copied in the mind as ideas) - the ultimate data of investigation - "arouse[d Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)] from his dogmatic slumbers". *Cf. NIDCC.* S.v. "Hume, David (1711-1776)" by Paul Helm and *NIDCC.* S.v. "Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)" by Oonagh MacDonald.
37 Brumfit, *op. cit.*, 324.
39 MacGregor, "The Row Heresy", 284. Drummond and Bulloch have also summarised the situation: "The fact any explicit deviation from the accepted pattern of theology in the Westminster Confession
This does not mean to say that the tight dogmatic commitment involved in mandatory subscription was to blame for the stagnation. What was needed was not the reduction of confessional commitments in order for fresh theological progress but an openness to the continual reading of the WCF through the eyes of Scripture and not *vice versa*. This could have allowed for moderate theological creativity while maintaining continuity with the findings of the past. That said, what is often forgotten by commentators when hastily or somewhat one-sidedly assessing the sterility of the Kirk, is that the stagnation was as due to the way that many Moderates had been distracted from the serious pursuit of their calling by the new Enlightenment interest. Perhaps Eugene Bewkes states the respective outlooks of the Evangelical and Moderate parties most fairly when he says that whereas the Evangelical party was “engrossed with doctrine and the fostering of the religious life through doctrinal faith and introspection” the Moderate party “desired to soothe the sting of rigid orthodoxy and emphasised morality in... preaching, avoiding the intricacies of doctrine which did not satisfy”.

By the late eighteenth century what the Kirk needed was both the necessity of honest doctrinal and confessional commitment and the expectation of new light yet to shine from Scripture. Given the proliferation of Reformation and post-Reformation creeds and confessions Westminster Calvinists belonged to a noteworthy tradition of constructive Calvinism. What the Scottish Enlightenment exposed was in terms of its impact on the Kirk was the reality of the vitality that was missing.

In the *third* place Westminster Calvinists faced the challenge of the Romantic antithesis that succeeded the Enlightenment. Although Romanticism triumphed over

excluded a man from the ministry was responsible for the total absence of any constructive thought by clergy in what should have been their distinctive field.” (*Op.cit.*, 193).


41 *E.g.* MacGregor’s description of the situation: “All pulpit oratory had to be moulded to a rigid, monotonous pattern, exhibiting what was held to be strict Calvinistic orthodoxy at every turn, ... and the least deviation from this staple diet, the slightest hint of even an untraditional emphasis, not only was a bad mark for the preacher but placed him directly under suspicion of heterodoxy.” (‘The Row Heresy, 284-285). One must bear in mind that of all those covering the Row controversy MacGregor’s article is most hyperbolic in its antagonism against the Calvinistic orthodoxy of the period.

42 Sher, *op.cit.*, 152. One only has to read the accounts of Thomas Chalmers’ ministry prior to his conversion to learn the effect of this distraction.

Enlightenment rationalism it could do so only by accommodating to it. Accordingly, while the romantics typically manifested a recognition of the depth and largeness of human nature they broadened out reason to include not merely the logical faculty but also its creative and unifying functions. In doing so they revived a spirit of wonder that bordered on a mysticism born of the fresh perception of the harmony between humankind and nature. Thus imagination came to complement reason with far-reaching and wide-ranging effects both inside and outside the church. According to Tulloch:

The same general character is more or less stamped on all [Romanticism's] manifestations, various as these otherwise are. This character may be said to be expansiveness. The theological mind is seen opening in all directions. There is a general breaking up of the old closed traditional systems transmitted from the earlier time. The idea of God as the loving Father of all men - of the religious life as having its root in immediate contact with the Divine, rather than in adherence to any definite forms whether of Church belief or Church order; the recognition of the religious consciousness as a pervading element of human nature with its own rights in the face of Revelation, and especially in the face of the scholastic dogmas which had been based on Revelation; the desire after a more concrete and living faith merging into one of the abstractions of theological nomenclature; and more than all perhaps an optimistic Catholic ideal displacing the sectarian ideals of the older schools of thought; all these larger features meet us with more or less prominence.

Romanticism was born in part through an aspect of the manifold influence of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): his opening up of the possibility of knowing God through experience and aesthetics. In terms of experience it is said that he made the real evidence for religion that of the moral sense, of the conscience and hearts of men themselves. The real ground of religious conviction is the religious experience. He thus set free both science and religion from an embarrassment under which it laboured [that is, mutual contradiction], and by which both had been injured.

In terms of aesthetics, Prickett observes that Kant's hint that the gap between pure and practical reason might be bridgeable by art became a central thought in Romanticism. Such a possibility was given classic expression by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the Father of liberal theology, and Samuel T Coleridge,
the Father of British liberal theology,⁵⁰ and gained widespread influence in Protestant theology. It provided a basis for the philosophical Romanticism of Johann Fichte (1762-1814) and Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854),⁵¹ as well as its ethical implications later espoused by Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889).

Although Schleiermacher’s classical expression of Romanticism is found in his work On Religion⁵² one only has to read his introduction to his seminal work The Christian Faith (1821)⁵³ to discern something of the romantic redefining of religion. Defining the task and method of Dogmatics, Schleiermacher describes Dogmatics as “the science which systematizes the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time”.⁵⁴ Thus he stresses the limitations of “dogmatic presentations”⁵⁵ as also terms such as orthodox and heterodox: “Consider... how much there is which was originally decried as heterodox in our Church, and which afterwards came to pass muster as orthodox, but always through an earlier orthodoxy becoming obsolete.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, Schleiermacher’s recasting of Christian theology objective dogma gives way to a subjective feeling of God-consciousness or absolute dependence that shapes not only the understanding of the Christian faith but also the nature of Protestant theology.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 88 (italics inserted).
⁵⁵ “That each presentation [of doctrine] confines itself to the doctrine existing at a certain time, is indeed seldom expressly avowed, but it nevertheless seems to be a matter of course; and this seems, for the most part, to be the only possible explanation of the large number of dogmatic presentations which follow upon each other. It is obvious that the text-books of the seventeenth century can no longer serve the same purpose as they did then, but now in large measure belong merely to the realm of historical presentation; and that in the present day it is only a different set of dogmatic presentations that can have ecclesiastical value which these had then; and the same fate will one day befall the present ones too. But of course it is only from the universal crises of development that large alterations in doctrine arise, while the alterations which are continually going on amount to so little that it takes a long time to render them perceptible.” (Ibid., 89).
⁵⁶ Ibid., 110.
According to Stromberg, German Romanticism made its way to the British Isles via Coleridge, although it is said of the poet, that being more wedded to the quest for rationality he was less inclined to appeal to feeling. Nevertheless his concern to integrate art, morals and theology was characteristic of his involvement with the romantic reaction to Enlightenment rationalism, and contributed significantly to the transformation of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism:

The evangelical tradition brought religion to a man from without. It took no account of man's spiritual constitution, beyond the fact that he was a sinner and in danger of hell. Coleridge set out, not from sin alone, but from the whole deep basis of spiritual capacity and responsibility upon which sin rests. He asserts experience. We are as sure of the capacity for the good and the experience of the good as we can be of the evil. The case is similar as to the truth.... Coleridge contended that faith must rest not merely upon objective data, but upon inward experience. The authority of Scripture is in its truthfulness, its answer to the highest aspirations of the human reason and the most urgent necessities of the moral life. The doctrine of an atonement is intelligible only in so far as it too comes within the range of spiritual experience.

For all the personal influence that Coleridge wielded, Moore states that “even after [his] impulse the [Romantic] movement remained in England a sporadic and uncertain one. It had nothing of the volume and consecutiveness which belonged to it in Germany.” Nevertheless, as we shall see below, somewhat independently Romantic influences were felt in Scotland through which a new moral sensitivity to the analysis of doctrine was introduced based on an ethical awareness that challenged the two essential foci of Presbyterianism: Scripture and the WCF, or, at least, the sometimes harsh dogmatic exposition of them that had developed among some Calvinists. Describing the years 1760-1800 Stoughton writes:

Religion had become with many Presbyterians more an intellectual exercise than anything else. Free inquiry had been idolized, and hard dogmas reached by that process had been raised to the highest point of veneration. Only one side of human nature had been provided for; the emotional had been sadly neglected.

Understandably the now arid Kirk became susceptible to romantic influence with its counter-balancing emphasis on the emotional aspect of human existence. This was not entirely negative. Westminster Calvinists would have done well to have

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59 Moore, Christian Thought Since Kant, 198.
60 Mention is made of the personal impact of Coleridge in the following chapter.
61 Moore, Christian Thought Since Kant, 16.
picked up from the Romantics, even so belatedly, the necessity of balancing their heavy emphasis on the propositional statement of doctrine with a more personal and emotional appreciation of the faith. Instead of being reminded of the the loss of the familial elements of earlier Calvinism by the romantic stimulation of a renewed but liberal interest in the Fatherhood of God, the Calvinistic response was merely to counter the Victorian interest in the universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood by a perennial repetition of the lopsided forensic aspects of the gospel. The short-sighted ineptitude of such an apologia could not stay the growing disenchantment with an exclusively juridical expression of Westminster Calvinism.63

Thus, Romanticism’s rejection of a more juridical presentation of God and the gospel, together with a fresh concentration on the Fatherhood of God, based on a rejection of Puritan Scholasticism (particularly with its emphasis on election and reprobation), was perhaps more responsible than any other single factor for setting in motion the anti-Calvinistic backlash that finally broke out in Scotland in the 1820s and 1830s. From then on the nineteenth century witnessed the dismantling if not of old expressions of faith then at least their widespread authority.

Fourthly, Westminster Calvinists had the difficulty of responding to the extraordinary social developments that accompanied the industrial revolution.64 The Scottish churches were not immune to the influence of the spreading urbanisation. On the one hand, the central belt Scotland underwent great changes with Glasgow becoming the second largest city of the Empire. Churches not only had to resolve how best to proclaim the gospel in the new context, they also faced the predicament of the legitimacy of political and social involvement given the marked poverty and alcohol abuse. Not until later did drunkenness come to be regarded as the symptom rather than the cause of financial distress. On the other hand, the demographic explosion of the central belt created another culture within Scotland that was distinct from the rural life of the highlands and islands – traditionally inhabited, as Douglas

64 I am indebted to James Lachlan MacLeod’s account of the social changes afoot in Scotland during this era (The Second Disruption: The Free Church in Victorian Scotland and the Origins of the Free Presbyterian Church. Scottish Historical Review Monograph Series No. 8. East Linton, East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000, 9ff.).
Ansdell has recently described them, by “the People of the Great Faith”65. It was not simply that the central belt became an urban and industrial society while the remainder of Scotland continued to be rural and agricultural. Rather there grew a significant influx of Irish Catholics who provided cheap labour for the new industrialists. This resurrected old fears of popery and priestcraft, which were to contribute to the moulding of Scottish Calvinism in the following decades. Meanwhile the highlands were affected by two waves of the Clearances (1800 and the 1840s), leading to a contrasting decline in population and not a little bitterness against the outside world. This infiltrated the church and contributed to the tensions that were to beset her throughout the century.66

Such were the influences that contributed to the marginalisation of Westminster Calvinism over the course of the period from the early 1800s to early 1900s: The Kirk’s general loss of spiritual vitality, Enlightenment rationalism, Romanticism and industrialisation. When the reaction against the theological hegemony of Westminster Calvinism set in, there were three men who uniquely challenged the status quo: Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870), John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872) and Edward Irving (1792-1834).67 Although the study of Irving is most crucial for an understanding of the period, out of this trio of “‘amateur’ scholars”68 the theology of Erskine and Campbell constitutes our current concern. They were to the fore (both chronologically and also theologically) in highlighting the pre-eminence of the paternal love of God and its intended goal: to bring humankind into a filial relationship to God.69 It was especially their labours that

66 See MacLeod (ibid.) and K R Ross, Church and Creed in Scotland: The Free Church Case 1900-1904 and its Origins. Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology. Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988. 67 Although Erskine, Campbell and Irving are regarded as a trio in the Scottish context, in the Anglo-Scottish context the trio normally comprises Erskine, Campbell and F D Maurice. According to A I C Heron, Maurice “ranks with John Henry Newman (1801-90) as one of the outstanding English theologians of the whole nineteenth century.” (A Century of Protestant Theology. reprint ed. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1985, 63). However, Lidgett writes of an open-ended quartet: “It fell to later teachers of the nineteenth century, in their conflict with Calvinism - to Erskine of Linlathen, M’Leod Campbell, Maurice, Kingsley, and others - to reassert in its fulness the truth and supremacy of the Divine Fatherhood, and to bring it into the foreground as shaping the main tendencies of our present theology.” (The Fatherhood of God, 145 and 271).
69 “Pfleiderer compares the work of Erskine and Campbell in Scotland to that done in Germany by Kant and Schleiermacher.... In both countries a reconstruction of Christian doctrine was in process, the keynote of which was the appeal to religious experience and to the ethical significance of dogma,
directly challenged the objective doctrine of atonement prevalent in Westminster Calvinism.

Their insistences on ethical inwardness, rather than the forensic externalities then so common, meant a breaking up of the old dogmatic temper of Scottish Calvinism, and were the first heralds of the progressive spirit in our theology in the Victorian era. 70

More than anyone else, Erskine and Campbell were responsible for developing an equivalent ethos in Scotland of what later became known in the Church of England as the Broad School (see ch. 8).

**7.1 Thomas Erskine**

Although Erskine lived to old age, almost all of his published writings appeared in a condensed period of mid-life (1820-1837), and stand as markers on the road he travelled from Calvinism to Universalism. They are: *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of the Revealed Religion* (1820); *Essay on Faith* (1822); *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel* (1828); *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (1830); *The Brazen Serpent* (1831); and the *Doctrine of Election* (1837). 71 According to Foster, Erskine’s theological development can be divided into three phases: from 1816 onwards (the publication of the pamphlet “Salvation”), Erskine was content to espouse a doctrine of penal substitution; with the publication of *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel* he began to teach that forgiveness did not demand a prior faith; later he came to regard Christ as the representative of humanity, thus re-stating the doctrine of substitution in terms of the incarnation and in a way that would lead to the inwardness of Christian truth, rather than to the historical forms in which that truth had been handed down from the past.” (Storr, op.cit., 356).

70 James Lindsay, “The Development of Scotch Theology”, *PTR* 4 (1906), 341-342. Of Erskine, Tulloch has written: “He led in the great reaction against mere formal orthodoxy, and for that part of the matter, formal rationalism, which set in with the opening third decade of the century. Those who called him a rationalist judged him from a wrong point of view. He was rational certainly in comparison with all who saw in Christianity a body of mere formal doctrines or observances, to be accepted on authority. But he was the very opposite of rationalistic in the sense in which rationalism had prevailed in Germany and England in the eighteenth century. This bastard form of reason had cut the heart out of all religion and reduced it to a caput mortuum. Erskine’s religion was all heart.” (op.cit., 138-139).

him to Universalism. Surprisingly, after 1837 Erskine did not publish again during his lifetime. Thus, by the age of 49 he had abandoned the Calvinism of his earlier years as well as his literary efforts of middle age and had arrived at a settled Universalist position. When The Spiritual Order (SO) was published posthumously in 1871 it marked Erskine’s belated return to serious theological writing and also his long overdue public notification of arrival at his theological terminus.

Appropriately, Needham asks, “how and why does a Calvinist, living in one of the most Calvinistic nations on earth, cease to be a Calvinist and end up as a classic Victorian theological Liberal?” The answer, it seems, is found in both the domestic and theological realms. Domestically, it appears that Erskine was powerfully influenced by his formative experiences of his family relationships. First, there was the father he never knew coupled with the compensatory influences of his mother. Writing to a friend in January 1867, Erskine exclaimed: “Who that comprehends the love of a parent can doubt that God is a Father, and that He is revealing Himself in every family through that relation?” However, Erskine did not view God exclusively in terms of paternity. Writing to Campbell shortly after his mother’s death he testified that “she [had] been ...in relation of mother, a most instructive type and witness of the love of God.”

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72 Ibid., 65f.
73 N R Needham states that the “first lucid indication of Erskine’s having accepted Universalism” was in a letter to Lord Rutherford (who he considered to be a non-Christian) dated 24th January 1839: “I cannot tell you how well I love you, Rutherford, and how much I have prized your steady kindness and fellowship. I think I could die to turn you to God, your true centre and rest. You will be forced to come to that centre some day, but it is losing much to come immediately.” (Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, His Life and Theology 1788-1837. Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology. Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990, 449; cf. Letters (1800-1840), 345). Two years prior to that there appeared The Doctrine of Election, the last of Erskine books to be published during his lifetime. Needham says that The Doctrine of Election “can be regarded as the public literary monument to his final rejection of Calvinism as a theologically viable interpretation of Christianity.” (op. cit., 417).
74 The third chapter of SO was published separately as a tract named The Purpose of God. For the reasons why Erskine so abruptly ceased to write, the reader is referred to Needham (op. cit., 445f.). Interesting, J R Fleming notes that the belated publication of SO and the later appearance of Erskine’s letters both contributed to a revival of Erskine’s influence subsequent to his death (op. cit., 253).
75 Needham, op. cit., 3.
76 “When one reflects on the importance of the Fatherhood of God in Erskine’s mature theology,” writes Needham, “it is striking to think that to all intents and purposes he never experienced the love and discipline of a human father.” (ibid., 17; cf. 40).
78 Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, From 1800 Till 1840. Edited by William Hanna. Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877, 238. Writing to his cousin three days earlier, Erskine wrote: “My beloved mother is dead. What a solemn event - to her, to us, to me! What a history it recalls, of kindness how unrequited, of offences so freely and fully given! There is nothing so like our relation to
In addition, there was also the influence of Erskine's maternal grandmother, Mrs. Graham, a devout Episcopalian who helped to raise him at her home in Airth Castle. In spite of her Jacobite influence, Erskine was still a Calvinist by early manhood even though he preferred the Anglican style of worship. Furthermore, when James, his venerated elder brother, died in 1816, Erskine recorded that the memory of him had been a blessed help in his relation to Jesus and his realisation of the character of God.

More particularly, there were also immediate theological reasons for Erskine's desertion of Calvinism. While appreciative of the strengths of Calvinism, they were evidently insufficient to keep him within the Calvinist ranks. From his letters we can discern why. Firstly, he disliked the excessive use of logic which he had experienced in Scottish, French and Swiss Calvinism, and genuinely believed the prominent use of logic would produce infidelity. Secondly, he disapproved of God as our relation to a mother. There is none who has borne so much from us; there is none whose forgiveness we have looked upon so much as our due.” (ibid., 237).


82 Contrary to the impression created by current assessments of nineteenth-century Calvinism, Erskine states on several occasions that all the most deeply devout men he had known were Calvinists. Writing to Bishop Ewing just two years prior to his death, Erskine wrote: “I am deeply thankful to the Calvinian atmosphere one has insensibly breathed from childhood...”, but, he continued, he regretted its “unscriptural excesses” (Letters (1840-1870), 321).

83 Erskine highlighted the problem to his friend Mrs. Montagu in regard to the recent visits of Cesar Malan to Scotland: “I daresay he has been a good deal disappointed with many things and persons that he has seen here. Religion in Scotland is too much a thing of science, and too little a thing of personal application and interest.” (Letters (1800-1840), 48). Cf. His assessment of Alexandre Rodolphe Vinet (1797-1847) - the Professor of Practical Theology at Lausanne as from 1837 (Letters (1800-1840), 327; Needham, op. cit., 448-449). For additional information on the European scene, see W T Ker's article, “Church Life in the Nineteenth Century - Geneva and Scotland”. BFER 26 (1877), 660-692.

84 Comparing Vinet, Erskine declares: “The sight of Vinet, and the reading of some of his books, gave me a hope for the Swiss and French Protestants which I scarcely had before. I am convinced that nothing but infidelity can be the consequence of holding that Calvinistic logic so prevalent through Scotland, and which is preached also, though in a more living way, through the French and Swiss Reformed Church.” (ibid.). He continues: “Men require something now which will commend itself to the conscience and the reason, and if that is not given them, they have only superstition and infidelity to choose between, and I think that they are showing that infidelity is their choice.”
Calvinism’s doctrinaire approach, which had also impacted Christianity at large. Particularly distasteful was the predominant emphasis on the power and justice of God which, he believed, had reduced God’s love to a euphemism for partiality. Thirdly, Erskine believed that in consequence of their belief in limited atonement (a misnomer even from a Calvinistic perspective), Calvinists possessed a self-confidence more akin to a presumption of God’s love than a genuine assurance of it.

The fluidity in Erskine’s beliefs can, then, be explained in part circumstantially. As an advocate by profession and a laird by status, he applied himself to an independent study of the Scriptures. Not being an elder of the Kirk,

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85 This is clear in his booklet *The Gifts of the Spirit* (1830). See N R Needham, *op. cit.*, 271f.. In his initially positive response to the charismatic claims of Mary Campbell of Roseneath, Erskine argued that the use of the *charismata* was preferable to a lifeless Christianity: “It is quite manifest beyond contradiction that the life of Christianity is at a very low ebb amongst us, and the reason is that men know God merely as an abstraction, or as a bundle of doctrines - they don’t know him as the *living* God, and the life-giving God. And it is this which produces such a repugnance to anything like an infringement of the laws of nature in the bulk of the world. They do not feel themselves at ease so near God - so near a living, moving, acting God.” (*The Gifts of the Spirit*. Greenock: RB Lusk, 1830, 20-21). Erskine, however, never exercised any of the *charismata* himself. Later he retracted his view (Needham, *op. cit.*, 278-279).

86 “Calvinism”, writes Erskine, “makes God and the thought of Him all in all, and makes the creature almost as nothing before Him. So it engenders a deep reverence, a profound humility and self-abasement, which are the true beginnings of all religion. It exalts God infinitely above the creature. In this, Calvinism is true and great, and I honour it. What I cannot accept is its conception of God as One in whompower is the paramount attribute, to which a loving righteousness is made quite subordinate, and its restriction of the love of God in a way which seems to me not righteousness, but partiality.” (*Letters (1840-1870)*, 369). Foster writes: “Deeply meditative by temperament he was repelled by, and soon began to reject, what he saw as a hard calvinistic creed, full of technical phrases and subtle distinctions, but inadequate because it failed to reveal the depth of God’s love as revealed in Christ.” (*op. cit.*, 20). As early as 1822, Erskine had written that “the holy love of God is the attribute most glorified in the atonement. This is the crown: this gives its character to the whole work.” (*The Essay on Faith*, 65). This emphasis was to emerge frequently throughout his writings: (i) The depth, breadth and revelation of God’s love (*The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, 31f., 70f., 85; *The Doctrine of Election*, 185; *Introductory Essay to Gambold’s Works*, xxii; *The Brazen Serpent*, 102, 117, 141, 283f.; *Letters (1840-1870)*, 389; *The Essay on Faith*, 48f., 82f.); (ii) the love of God in relation to the penalties of the Law (*The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, 4, 8; *The Brazen Serpent*, 40f., 49-50, 152; *Letters (1840-1870)*, 389; and (iii) the response to divine love (*The Brazen Serpent*, 69, 112; *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, 70f.; *The Essay on Faith*, 74f., 96, 114).

87 “The questions at issue, are nothing less than these - whether the true ground of a sinner’s confidence be in himself or in God. And whether the service to which God calls man, be the loving and willing service of the heart, or a mere external doing. And whether the true God, be really that God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them - or whether He be a God, who either loves the elect alone, or who is still imputing trespasses unto men, until they believe in Jesus.” (*Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend by a Lady with an Introductory Essay by Thomas Erskine Esq.*. Greenock: R B Lusk, 1830, xxii-xxxiii). Erskine’s problem here is most ironic, for revisionist Calvinists today concur with the nineteenth-century protest against limited atonement not because it breeds self-confidence, but precisely because it apparently hinders assurance and joy!

88 John B Logan describes him as “the sole influential Scottish lay theologian”. “Erskine had no formal theological training. He wrote out of his own careful study and reflection, in particular long
he possessed a freedom of expression which was alien to subscribers of the WCF. Without the constraints of confessional subscription his transition from “an initial evangelical Calvinism, through Irvingism, to a final, though far from easy going, Universalism” continued unhindered.

However, Erskine’s transition was made especially easy by the fact that he did not have to develop any new themes in order to become a Universalist, for ever since his days as a Calvinist, his hold on the familial tenets of the gospel had distinguished him from most of his Calvinistic contemporaries. Numbered among these tenets were an emphasis on first, the Fatherhood of God: (i) The Father as revealed in the Scriptures; (ii) the character of God as Father; (iii) God’s general fatherhood; (iv) Christ as the way to the Father; (v) invitation and persuasion to come to the Father; (vi) the Father’s purpose; (vii) The fatherliness of God and his consequent goodness; (viii) the Father’s role in salvation; (ix) The Father’s home. Secondly, sonship: (i) Man in his natural state; (ii) man and the Fall; meditation on the text and spirit of the Bible without critical or historical scholarship which when it developed and came to his notice, he criticised, as leaving the living heart of the matter out of account and using only one part of the intellect. He preferred spiritual to verbal inspiration of the Bible. (Letters, vol. II, pp. 209-16)” (op. cit., 23, 24).

89 SO, 92f.; Letters (1800-1840), 232; Letters (1840-1870).
92 Letters (1800-1840), 134, 136, 283; as recalled by Principal Shairp from a conversation with Erskine
94 Letters (1840-70), 54, 122, 124, 126, 179, 190, 216, 228, 235, 241, 250, 283.
96 Letters (1840-1870), 139; The Doctrine of Election, 60, 69, 72, 77f., 121, 182.
97 Letters (1800-40), 304; Letters (1840-70), 176-7.
98 The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, 13; The Brazen Serpent, 65; Letters (1800-1840), 141.
(iii) man and forgiveness;\(^{102}\) (iv) man as brother to Christ/son of the Father\(^{103}\) and, in passing, humanity as brethren.\(^{104}\) Thirdly, the process of entrance into sonship: (i) Ingrafting into the vine;\(^{105}\) (ii) participation in communion;\(^{106}\) (iii) participation in Christ's righteousness.\(^{107}\)

Most relevant is Erskine's position on adoption.\(^{108}\) The earliest we find him mentioning the doctrine is in his introductory essay to Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1824). There he provides the clearest evidence of a rich understanding of the doctrine. God's family is made up of those adopted in Christ. They possess an assurance that as they suffer with Christ so they shall also be glorified together with him. This they earnestly anticipate as they wait for the full manifestation of their privileges as the sons of God. He recognises, then, the eschatological tension of Paul's theology. Family members have already received their charter of adoption, which authorizes them to speak to God as Father, and yet they wait for the adoption, the redemption of their bodies. "There is", he says, "but

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\(^{102}\) *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, 4; *The Brazen Serpent*, 24f., 156.


\(^{104}\) *Letters (1800-1840)*, 74, 79, 238, 279, 325-326, 390; *Letters (1840-1870)*, 322, 375; *The Works of the Rev. John Gambold*, xxv; *The Saints Everlasting Rest by Richard Baxter*, xx. Whereas the Fatherhood of God is somewhat explicit, the concept of sonship is more implicit. Given the stress placed upon God's paternity, Erskine's reader are, for the most part, left to presume that men and women stand in a relational rather than a legal standing to God.

\(^{105}\) "Man's only hope lies in his reunion with God, in his being grafted on the true vine through the spirit of dependence." (The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, 15, 30). Foster writes: "Erskine believed that mankind share in an organic or spiritual life derived from Christ. Scottish Calvinists tended to think of Christ in an individualistic kind of way, but Erskine returned to the Johanine and Pauline concept of union with him." (op. cit., 128).

\(^{106}\) *The Doctrine of Election*, 103.

\(^{107}\) "An actual participation in his righteousness, not by imputation, but in substance and in reality, as is the participation of Jesus with the Father. This is the full sonship - the participation of the Divine nature, through union with the Son of God." (The Doctrine of Election, 252).

\(^{108}\) Like Calvin, Erskine does not deal with adoption in its own right. Hart correctly notes that "Erskine is not... a 'systematic' theologian in the technical sense. He proffers no comprehensive 'system' under which to subsume the various doctrines of the faith." He continues: "His writings are nonetheless wide-ranging in scope, and a coherent structure (if not a system as such) is certainly apparent from the vantage point of hindsight. Certain emphases recur and serve to give form and shape to his theology as a whole." (Hart, *op.cit.*, 18). We do find similar sentiments to adoption expressed earlier but with less precision and isolated from adoption itself. interestingly enough Erskine sounds most Calvinian in a letter to Thomas Chalmers dated as early as 5th Sept. 1818: "This constitutes the closeness of the union which subsists between Christ and His people; His work of love received by faith becomes the principle and root of spiritual life within them. This principle is not subject to the influence or condemnation of sin, it is the immortal tie which binds the Father of Spirits to all His family throughout the universe." (*Letters (1800-1840)*, 25).
one joy and one adoption; but they contain the principle of infinite expansion and enlargement.”\(^{109}\)

The next year (1825) Erskine wrote an introductory essay for the Collins edition of the *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*.\(^{110}\) Again, he expresses a relational understanding of the gospel but within the full range of its juridical elements.\(^{111}\) Once again he mentions adoption again but only the once, and indicates there that he regards the process as climactic in redemption:

> A restoration to spiritual health is the *ultimate object* of God in His dealings with the children of men. Whatever else God hath done with regard to men, has been subsidiary, and with a view to this; even the unspeakable work of Christ, and pardon freely offered through His cross, have been but means to a further end; and that end is, that the adopted children of the family of God might be conformed to the likeness of their elder brother, - that they might resemble Him in character, and thus enter into His joy.\(^{112}\)

Later, in a letter dated 11th November 1832 Erskine mentions in passing the Spirit of adoption.\(^{113}\) Later still, in *The Doctrine of Election*, he writes: “I may observe here, that it was not merely to prove his love, and his readiness to make a sacrifice, that God gave his Son to the world; but because he desired to make the world *sons of God*. The gift of the Son was the gift of *sonship*; the only-begotten Son is the Fountain of adoption.”\(^{114}\) However, with Erskine’s steady advance towards Universalism, the citations dried up.

The fact that we cannot build a comprehensive doctrine of adoption from Erskine’s earlier works suggests, therefore, that he could have, and should have, expanded his familial presentation of the gospel much further without resorting to Universalism. Had he done so he would have established a most beneficial pattern

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110 Curiously, Erskine makes not one reference to Rutherford or his theology. So obvious is this omission that at the end of the essay there are two additional pages on Rutherford, anonymously written (*Letters of the Rev. Samuel Rutherford*. With an Introductory Essay by Thomas Erskine, Esq.. 3rd ed.. Glasgow: William Collins, 1830, v-xxvi).

111 Ibid, x-xi.

112 Ibid., xii-xii; cf. Logan, *op.cit.*, 24. He also speaks in brief of some of the implications of adoption. He writes, for instance, of “the rights and immunities of God’s family [which] consist in possessing the favour of God, in approaching to him at all times as our Father, in enjoying what he enjoys, in rejoicing to see his will accomplished through the wide range of his dominions, and in being ourselves made instruments in accomplishing it.” (introductory essay to *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, xv; cf. xvi).

113 *Letters (1800-1840)*, 276.

114 *The Doctrine of Election*, 232. See also his comments on Rom. 8:12-25 (*ibid.,* 238-42). It is interesting here in that while he gives the AV translation of v. 15 which uses the term “adoption” his own scant comments are coined in terms of sonship. *Cf. SO* where he provides his own translation “sonship”.  

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for Calvinistic orthodoxy to follow. In actuality, however, he opted for the reactionary novelties of Victorian liberalism.

Turning to *SO*, we find there, more than in any other of Erskine’s books, his great concern to present a familial alternative to the traditional forensic approach to the gospel. Thus, the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of humanity are given a higher profile than hitherto.\(^{115}\) As a result, his traditional Calvinistic concepts of divine justice became increasingly overshadowed.\(^{116}\) However, the more boldly he emphasised the divine paternity the less defensive he became of it.\(^{117}\) Nonetheless,

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\(^{115}\) It would be wrong to think, however, that the notion of the children of God receives as comprehensive a treatment as the Fatherhood of God. “Nothing but sonship”, writes Trevor Hart, “is a full revelation of fatherhood.” (op. cit., 19). Rather, the doctrine of sonship completes the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. However, the fact that divine paternity is to the fore is evidence of a lingering Calvinistic approach to theology; that is to say, Erskine’s theology begins and ends theocentrically rather than anthropocentrically. Henry Henderson writes: “Up to the last day of his life Erskine never ceased to admire Calvinistic doctrine and to believe in it, at least in so far as it made God and the thought of Him all in all, while it made the creature almost less than nothing and vanity, thus engendering in the mind “a deep reverence, a profound humility and self-abasement which are the true beginnings of all religion.” His restoration of the long-lost conception of Divine Fatherhood to evangelical teaching was not achieved in the interests of maudlin sentimentality, nor was it Fatherhood in its weakest indulgence, but Fatherhood in its majesty and strength which received prominence in Erskine’s teaching.” (Henderson, op. cit., 56). However, Foster sees things otherwise. She asserts that by the end of Erskine’s life he “had a tendency to oversimplify things, and to try to reduce all aspects of truth to one. He now thought the whole gospel was contained in the idea of Sonship.” (op. cit., 33).

\(^{116}\) Foster, op. cit., 114 and 116. “In his early years”, writes Foster, “Erskine does not separate substitution from representation but uses them both together: nor does he ignore the old terminology connected with substitution and the category of law. God is not only a loving Father, but also a righteous Governor and just Judge. Erskine only gradually reached the position of seeing God as only love.” (op. cit., 99). From 1838 onwards, however, God’s attributes such as immutability, sovereignty, power or omnipotence are overshadowed in Erskine’s letters by God’s moral qualities of goodness, wisdom, love, mercy and truth. Christianity becomes the revelation of the character of God and a response of love to him as a person (op. cit., 231).

\(^{117}\) Although generally not defensive about the Fatherhood of God by the time of his writing of *SO*, nevertheless there are exceptions to this (see *SO* 62, 65, 66, 67, 68 and 189f.). Typically speaking, Erskine’s attacks on the predominance of the justice of God are found primarily in his earlier works. For example, in his introductory essay to *Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend* he complains that in man’s religion “there is absolutely no provision made for a love towards God” (xx). This is because he “considers God merely as a power that can inflict injuries, and bestow benefits. It does not consider him as the Fountain of living waters. It does not make God’s character to be a matter of any importance. It does not consider him as a Father.” (xx-xxi). In two letters dated March and 5th August 1858 respectively Erskine clearly expounds his notions of both the Fatherhood and justice of God (Letters (1840-1870), 205f. and 215). The points he made are as follows: (i) He did not believe in the forensic theory of the atonement. Such a theory “make[s] men think that salvation consists in the removal of a penalty instead of a deliverance from sin.” (207); (ii) Its premise is that “God’s chief relation to man is that of a judge”; (iii) It supposes that “God made men that He may afterwards judge them”. This view hinders progress in the moral or spiritual life (215); (iv) God only judges as a means of instruction; (v) Therefore it is better to view God as our Fatherly teacher rather than as our judge; (vi) The law then is our delight and not “an object of fear”; (vii) We may consequently have “true assurance of salvation… by seeing in the character of God that thorough fatherliness on which we can place a perfect reliance”; (viii) This confidence is not “laxity or indulgence” but “confidence in His purpose to make me and all men LIKE HIMSELF”(215). Erskine, writing in the same vein nearly nine years later, does not endeavour himself to the sceptical onlooker when he writes: “If you know the
his failure to prevent the regulating influence of the Fatherhood of God from running ahead into Universalism meant that the early promise of a recovery of adoption never materialised. Consequently, there is no doctrine of adoption in SO. It is not difficult to see why: if all humanity are the children of God wherein lies the need to be adopted? The fact that Erskine has nothing to say on this matter speaks volumes of the distance he had travelled beyond the bounds of Scripture.

In seeking to provide a theological introduction to the life of Christ it was natural for Erskine to begin with the work of the incarnate Christ. Christ came to earth because he alone could reveal his Father. In order to accomplish this work two things were requisite. First, the Son had to become incarnate so as to exemplify to humanity an utmost dependence on the Father. Secondly, humanity must already be in a filial relationship to God, having been "created in the Son": "The appearing of the Son of God in our flesh was the manifestation of his brotherhood towards us as a race, and thus it was a revelation that his Father is our Father." Erskine's position typifies, then, the early nineteenth-century paradigmatic shift in the theology of the atonement from the cross to the incarnation and from God's dealings with the elect to the human race and is, in principle, reminiscent of Calvin's doctrine of incarnational union.

Gorgias of Plato, you will understand me when I say that I learned the meaning of justification by faith from that dialogue, before I saw it in St. Paul." (ibid., 250).

118 SO was written as a response to Renan's Vie de Jesus. Disbelieving in the supernatural, Renan regarded theology as unreasonable (SO, 1, 7, 10f.). He therefore urged that any study of the life of Christ be conducted from an historical angle. For this reason he rejected the theological approach of David Strauss' Das Leben Jesu (1835). For Erskine's part he conceded the importance of the history of the life of Christ, but was adamant that a theological introduction is requisite in any historical study. This theological introduction Erskine sought to provide in his opening essay of SO. For a brief overview of Renan see Henry C Sheldon, Unbelief in the Nineteenth Century, 298-313.

119 "There can be no full and perfect revelation of Fatherhood but in and through Sonship, and thus the revelation of an eternal Son in the Divine Nature itself, - a Son in whom the whole spiritual family has its root and standing, - gives an assurance of the unchangeable fatherly relation of God to man which nothing else could have given." (SO, 38).

120 "I have said accompanied with a protest that ... he was not seeking his own glory but was revealing the Father - that he was dependent on the Father for all things - that he knew nothing and could do nothing of himself - that it was the Father dwelling in him who did the works - that he had not come of himself, but that the Father had sent him - and that no man could come to the Father except by the drawing of the Father: thus showing that his self-preaching was no self-exaltation but a real revelation of the Father, because holding Him forth as the Author and Mover of all that he, the Son, did." (SO, 5).

121 SO, 120.

122 SO, 211.

123 Hart writes that "Erskine's insistence upon the Fatherhood of God as central to a proper understanding of the Gospel... [was]... informed by the pride of place which he [gave] to the catholic doctrines of incarnation, trinity, and atonement." (op.cit., 19).
Although already filially related to God, humanity needs salvation because ever since the Fall the children of God have sinned against the status in which, and for which, they were originally created. However, whereas Calvin held that God's offspring have retained the *religionis semen* but lost the knowledge of God as *Father*, in a semi-Pelagian manner Erskine argues that the children of God are still subconsciously aware of the relationship in which they stand to God. While the knowledge of it has long lain dormant, they still possess a spiritual intelligence which enables them to receive, be awakened by, and concur with Christ's revelation of his Father: “These communications could never enter into us nor influence us, unless there were in our original constitution a capacity for apprehending them, through the possession of faculties and instincts corresponding to the relations to which they refer.”

Whereas Calvin would have agreed with Erskine that the Bible derives its importance from its projection of “the character of God, His relation to men, and His purpose towards them” and also that we find the Scriptures a blessing only “when our spirit actually meets God and we find that He is indeed a Father”, he would have insisted that God cannot be encountered in Scripture without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, unlike Erskine, he placed the apprehension of truth not in the constitution of man (in what Erskine called “a self-evidencing light in divine truth not resting on any authority whatever”), but in the prerogative of the Holy Spirit who illuminates darkened minds.

124 Erskine's proof is derived from the parable of the prodigal son: “The prodigal did not cease to be his father's son when he went into the far country, and nothing but the thought that he had still a father in the old-home-land could have brought him back.” (SO, 211).
125 SO, 30.
126 SO, 31. “If man is created for fellowship with God there must exist within him, notwithstanding all the ravages of sin, capacities which will recognise the light and life of the eternal truth when brought close to him. Without such capacities revelation would in fact be impossible. Where a Divine communication is bestowed, a fitness to receive it must exist, otherwise it could be of no use.” (SO, 80).
127 SO, 92. For Calvin, however, this encounter cannot occur without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
128 Letters (1840-1870), 145.
129 “I now know its truth,” says Erskine, “because I have been able to verify its exposition of God from what I have myself found in Him, and I can now understand it better, because I can compare its statements with the living original of which it is the copy;” (SO, 93; cf. Letters (1840-1870), 161). Thomas Chalmers picked up Erskine precisely on this point in one of his letters to him: “It is a very important modification that you bring forward in your letter on the subject of revelation and its authority. I fear that you have not expressed it clearly enough in your book, where you seem to say that the Bible is no revelation to a man unless his conscience goes along with it.” (Cited Foster, op.cit., 38-39). Thus, Henderson accuses Erskine of being a rationalistic sort of mystic: “With [Erskine], as with the mystics, inward experience is not everything, but it is the main thing”. It
In contrast, Erskine teaches that Christ came to sacrifice himself so as to provide the human race with an example of complete dependence on the Father, thereby awakening a sense of filial consciousness among humanity.\(^\text{130}\) To "teach men his own universal Fatherhood and their relation of sonship to Him, and of brotherhood to one another, [the Father] sent forth the eternal Son, the Fountain of sonship, that by his assumption of their nature under all its sinless conditions of weakness and suffering and death, he might claim them as his brethren and as his Father's children."\(^\text{131}\) Filial trust was the only principle which could produce such a sacrifice as was seen in the agonies of the cross.\(^\text{132}\)

In accepting the sacrifice offered by Christ as the organic head of the race, the Father sent the same filial impulse through all the members of Christ's body, thus reproducing in humanity his Son's filial trust.\(^\text{133}\) In this way, Christ's own vibrant relation of Sonship is communicated to the human race, thus replacing their dormant filial senses with such a bond of sonship as had not been known since the Fall.\(^\text{134}\)

Yet, if the death of Christ demonstrated his trust in the Father's righteous love,\(^\text{135}\) we may well ask wherein lies the righteous love of the Father in asking for the death of his Son just to prove his filial trust? and why should the Father's righteous love permit filial suffering derived from the knowledge of personal sin (amounting to "an untold amount of self-abhorrence" yet resulting in "a higher and deeper trust" of the Father), when other more exegetical theories of the atonement revolved around the beliefs that "the Christ of history reproduces himself in experience... [and] that the Christ of experience explains and confirms the reality of the Christ of history. Thus the debates about the inspiration of the scriptures running contemporaneously alongside Erskine's life become of little relevance." (Erskine of Linlathen, 67). "It is the truth of the revelation contained in the Bible which I must be assured of, and the assurance of its inspiration in the sense of verbal infallibility...is not necessary for this, and would even be prejudicial were it to become the ground of my faith and so to stand between me and the actual personal discernment of its truth." (SO, 92-93).

\(^\text{130}\) Although the Son is in view, Erskine writes that being "one with the Father, he [was] at once the revelation of God's paternal relation to us, and of His self-sacrificing love." (SO, 232). And, again, he writes:"The Father sacrifices self in giving up the Son - the Son in giving himself - and from him the whole spiritual creation, constituted in him, as its organic head, is supplied with that same spirit of self-sacrificing love, which can alone maintain order and harmony throughout." (SO, 233).

\(^\text{131}\) SO, 246. "This is the character of Christian faith; it is faith in God, who led His Son through death into new life; - through a death which, as due to sin, he by assuming our nature had incurred, into a life which he had taken hold of by filial trust" (SO, 252).

\(^\text{132}\) SO, 160-161.

\(^\text{133}\) SO, 244.

\(^\text{134}\) "As the Son is the Head of the spiritual creation, he of necessity communicates his own relation of Sonship to all its members; and as a common sonship is a common brotherhood, he also unites them all to each other in that bond. Thus love is the universal law, originating with the Father and received by the Son, that it may by him be propagated to the whole spiritual family." (SO, 244).

\(^\text{135}\) SO, 250.
teach that filial trust is engendered by the thought that the Father sent his Son to death precisely to deal with our knowledge and experience of personal sin.\textsuperscript{136}

Thanks to Christ’s self-sacrifice, his relation of Sonship can be communicated to the children of God and constitutes their righteousness before God. However, in contrast to Calvin, this communication involves no adoption whatsoever for the human race is already made up of the children of God!\textsuperscript{137} Adoption is, therefore, too strong a term to use for the communication of sonship and the awakening of filial responsiveness. The nearest he comes to expounding adoption is in his treatment of justification:

So long as we think of men as a mere mass of individuals, we shall find it difficult to form a definite idea of righteousness or justification. But when we think of them as members of a family of which God is the Father, the difficulty is removed; righteousness is then seen to be healthful order; filial trust in relation to the Father, extending itself in brotherly love to the rest of the family. If this be the true view of man’s condition, manifestly there can be no other righteousness, no other real morality, but this order. Manifestly also this order is not righteousness in consequence of its being judged or imputed as righteousness by God, but is so essentially, making itself felt by man who possesses it to be his right state, just as a dislocated joint at once feels its \textit{justification} or rectification when it is restored to its proper position. That is to say, the man does not need to reason thus: “God calls me to filial trust, and approves of it as my right state, and therefore, as I am exercising this trust, I may \textit{infer} that I am in my right state, that is, justified.” He does not need to reason thus, for his filial trust proves its own rightness by reducing the dislocation and giving him ease, thus consciously putting him in his right state...\textsuperscript{138}

Thus, whereas sin began as a distrust of God,\textsuperscript{139} filial trust serves as the sinner’s only justifying righteousness.\textsuperscript{140} Put conversely, “a sense of unforgiven sin is

\textsuperscript{136} SO, 254.
\textsuperscript{137} SO, 100. Erskine’s stress on the human race as family was intended to underline the unity of the human race which he believed to be fractured by the doctrine of election (Foster, \textit{op.cit.}, 197). This is supported by Erskine’s own words: “It is wholesome to know that we are loved for something not personal, but belonging to us as members of one family, of one race, children of one Father, redeemed by one Saviour, who is the common Head of all.” (Letters (1840-1870), 29).
\textsuperscript{138} SO, 237. He continues: “This is the justification that we need - the reduction of all our dislocations - the rightening in us of all that is wrong, delivering us from self-seeking, and filling us with love. If we see that filial trust in God is the only principle which can accomplish this great thing, we shall at once recognise that it has as much the stamp of God upon it, as the law of gravitation in the material world has.”
\textsuperscript{139} SO, 253. Sin is also called a “want of filial trust” or a “disbelief in love” (SO, 208).
\textsuperscript{140} If justification has been transformed in Erskine’s thought from God’s declaration of the sinner as righteous to man’s filial trust in the Father in whose nature forgiveness is a permanent fact, then the doctrine has become anthropocentric. Justification is dependant upon the fact that God does not condemn sin merely because that is what it deserved. God’s condemnation of sin is part and parcel of his deliverance of us from its grasp: “So long as I believe that God’s condemnation of my sin is not connected with this purpose, and that He punishes me merely \textit{because I deserve it}, it is impossible to trust Him; but when I understand that His condemnation contains within it an unchangeable purpose to draw me out of my sin, I can accept His condemnation and bless Him for it. It seems to me that the

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incompatible with the trust which constitutes filial goodness.\textsuperscript{141} Not surprisingly, Erskine says little of why Christ had to die the death of the cross. Apart from assuming the universality of the atonement and distinguishing the cross from the subjective faith or filial trust\textsuperscript{142} produced by the gospel,\textsuperscript{143} Erskine refers to it merely in the negative: Christ’s death (the objective aspect of the gospel) was neither substitutionary nor vicarious in the traditional sense of the word. Consistent with his moral or exemplarist view of the atonement, Erskine argues that Christ does nothing \textit{instead of} humanity; he only does something \textit{for} humanity - that is, exercise filial trust in the Father - so that humanity may have the power to do likewise:\textsuperscript{144} “If Jesus, being very man, tempted like as we are, subjected to all conditions of humanity, even to death, was enabled by the Eternal Spirit to offer himself in the self-sacrifice of filial confidence without spot of sin to his Father, there is certainly a great gospel in his being set forth to us \textit{as an example}, because it contains the assurance that God is as truly our Father as He is his Father, and that consequently we have the same right to trust our Father and the same capacity of trust as he had. He could not otherwise be righteously set forth as an example at all. The proposal would become a cruel mockery.”\textsuperscript{145}

As the revealer of the Father Christ is the object of faith, but in exercising filial trust in the midst of the self-sacrifice of the cross he becomes the model of filial trust.\textsuperscript{146} On the one hand, sinners are justified when they look to Christ’s sinless filial trust. On the other hand, they are sanctified when they model their own walk with the

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\textsuperscript{141}\textit{SO}, 242-243.

\textsuperscript{142} Faith and filial trust are tantamount to the same thing: “With St. Paul... faith means the spirit of filial trust, implying that God is essentially and necessarily the Father of every man, and thus the proper object of trust for every man, and works mean not actions produced by such a trust, but all efforts to obtain a ground of confidence in ourselves, even by the observance of institutions appointed by God Himself.” \textit{(SO}, 203-4).

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{SO}, 206-207.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{SO}, 154. In \textit{The Brazen Serpent} Erskine had earlier asked whether in fact God’s justice was censured by the view that Christ should die as a substitute for the sins of others \textit{(The Brazen Serpent}, 40f.; Foster, \textit{op.cit.}, 119).

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{SO}, 138.

\textsuperscript{146} “The Eternal Son”, says Erskine, “is the model of trust” \textit{(SO}, 136). When we gaze with faith upon the Saviour we see one who needed to demonstrate that filial trust particularly through the pain of obedient self-sacrifice.
Father on the trust Christ exercised at Calvary. Although Erskine is not always very clear on the distinction, he regards Christ’s filial trust when both exemplified to sinners and copied by them as their justification and sanctification, respectively.

Implicit in faith (filial trust) is assurance or “true natural religion”, which is “a supernatural revelation to the heart of every individual testifying there to what is righteous, and proving itself, by the response of conscience, to be of God.” In Erskine’s view, humanity could not draw near to God with assurance unless he were their Father. Were he preeminently their judge, the human race would seek confidence from a personal performance of obedience, because God’s impartial retributive justice would require the demands of the law to be met, thus sounding the deathknell to assurance. The law, however, is not redundant. The Father employs it to educate his children both communally and individually into righteousness, thus relieving them of its burden. Nevertheless, when the law is applied to them, they cast themselves upon the love that gave it, not as a guide to punishment, but as a training manual for their participation in the righteousness and blessedness of the Father. The very moment the law acts in this way, it becomes the sinner’s gospel and God the Judge becomes their Father.

Thus, by revealing God’s paternal character, Christ unveiled to his brethren their Father’s loving intention to educate them into a moral sympathy with himself and with each other. It is the means whereby they are individually equipped for life.
in a spiritual society: the participation in the Father’s own spirit, righteousness and blessedness. To attain this education the Father instructs his children through providence which constitutes his disciplinary process designed to draw out from them their filial capacities. At times this process includes chastisement. However, its only purpose is to educate the children of God by delivering them from sin. Erskine does not, then, rule out a probationary view of life. Nevertheless, it is the education of the human family which is to the fore. Thus Erskine’s belief in the reality of the fallen world combined with his understanding of the Father’s character (which attracts love from all his children) made inevitable his view that the education process continues beyond death until it is fully accomplished throughout the human race.

Thus, in Erskine’s Universalism there is an eradication rather than a development of adoption. The irony of all this is that as a Calvinist Erskine made little of the Fatherhood of God, but did at least mention adoption; but when he became a Universalist he stressed the divine paternity yet would allow no place for adoption! We can only surmise that this was probably due to his perception of adoption as a legal act, and therefore tainted with forensic overtones.

Adoption is forbidden by the very tone of Erskine’s theology. Symptomatic of his Universalism is his (quasi-) Pelagian confidence in the spiritual constitution of educating and improving character.” (Henderson, op. cit., 17; cf. Marian Foster, “Representation and Substitution”, 71).

153 SO, 55-56.
154 SO, 58.
155 “The purpose of God, whether He punishes the sinner or remits the punishment, is always the merciful one of delivering him from sin, not that of carrying out the principle of retribution.” (SO, 73). Or again, when writing of the place of the divine condemnation of sin in the Fragment “God’s purpose for us is righteousness”, Erskine surmises: “…when I understand that His condemnation contains within it an unchangeable purpose to draw me out of my sin, I can accept His condemnation and bless Him for it.” (SO, 242-243).
156 “We are tried”, says Erskine, “that we may be educated, not educated that we may be tried.” (SO, 59). “Are we placed here only to be tested and proved whether we will walk in God’s ways or in our own ways? Has God created us merely that He might see what we would do - how we would use the talents and opportunities given to us?” (SO, 57).
157 SO, 28. “He is our Father, and that His eternal purpose towards us is a purpose of infinite love, to draw us out of all our unworthiness into perfect filial trust and so into perfect participation of His own righteousness and blessedness.” (SO, 110).
158 “It is manifest that I am constrained to adopt the assurance that this purpose follows man out from his present life, through all stages of being that lie before him, unto its full accomplishment. And indeed unless we accept this assurance, we must give up the idea that the purpose of God in creating man was to educate him, for no otherwise can it be maintained.” (SO, 69-70).
man. His belief that humanity's "inner light" attests the objective authority of the Holy Scriptures leads him to downgrade the importance of exegesis. The Scriptures merely confirm what humanity already recognizes, namely, that God is their Father, the realisation of which in turn strengthens humanity's faith in the divine origin of Scripture. The result of this line of reasoning is that the authority of truth no longer rests with the Bible, but in the personal assurance of its discernment: the inward facts of spiritual consciousness and the outward facts of life, arrived at, we may add, without the aid of the Holy Spirit! Hence, reliant on Christian experience, Erskine makes no serious attempt to prove from Scripture his universalistic assumptions.

This all contrasts markedly with Calvin. Since fallen humanity cannot attain to the knowledge of the Father merely by searching creation, the Scriptures are given to retain for subsequent generations the record of Christ's revelation of his Father. Thus, possessing a higher doctrine of Scripture Calvin sought to exegete it on its own terms. Given this, it is little wonder that he understood sonship to be "communicated" via adoption.

Erskine, by contrast, was evidently not troubled by New Testament references to adoption. Not even in his treatment of Romans (chs. 1-9) does he mention the motif. Throughout, his want of close exegetical scrutiny leaves his assertions so loosely tied to the Scriptures that he quotes them on only a few occasions. In particular, two things stand out in his translation of Romans 8:14-15. First, *vōθεστας* is translated as "sonship" and not adoption. Not surprisingly, then, Erskine does not go on to develop his thoughts in terms of adoption. Secondly, the use of *v'ioθησια* in verse 23 receives no mention. On chapter nine the picture is similar. Although he quotes the passage far more frequently, it does not lead to any specific consideration of adoption (9:4).

159 "In the Bible [God] is always the righteous Father, whose purpose is to educate men into conformity with His own will, through a knowledge of himself." (SO, 98). This is so even when God "is represented as choosing particular people, that in them he might exhibit the universal principles of His dealing with men."

160 SO, 84.

161 SO, 100-230.

162 What is especially interesting about this is that earlier, in The Doctrine of Election, Erskine had quoted Romans 8:15 straight from the Authorized Version where *vōθεστας* is rendered as "adoption" and not "sonship". Nevertheless, as his flight to Universalism was by then all but complete, it is no surprise to find his scant comments coined in terms of sonship rather than adoption.

163 For a discussion of the reasons in favour of the translation of *vōθεστας* as "adoption as sons" rather than merely "sonship" see Scott, op.cit., 13f.
Furthermore, whereas earlier, Erskine had referred to Christ as the “Fountain of adoption”, in SO he changes the label to the more general phrase, the “Fountain of sonship”.\textsuperscript{164} Thus, it would seem that Erskine’s problem was not his failure to notice Paul’s portrayal of adoption, but his refusal to allow it. It seems then that such is the spiritual constitution of humankind, that it not only has the capacity to attest Scripture but, according to Erskine’s practice, to contradict it as the occasion demands!

It may be countered that Erskine was not endeavoursing to give an outline of adoption. That is exactly our point, however. Given his early awareness of the importance of adoption in Scripture, he could have, and should have, refused the slide to Universalism by working within a stronger exegetical and hermeneutical framework. In particular, his ignorance of Calvin’s exegesis and theology of adoption substantially devalue his criticisms of Calvinism.\textsuperscript{165}

It has to be said, then, that Universalism cannot guarantee any more than a truncated Calvinism a biblical emphasis upon adoption. For all Erskine’s protestations against the severer expressions of the Calvinism of his day, he failed to provide for the recovery of the \textit{gratuita adoptio}. On the contrary, whereas Calvinism required an urgent familial re-orientation, Erskine’s Universalistic formulation of familial theology was such that he constructed a theology which proved to be the very antithesis of adoption. The following assessment of Universalism is amply demonstrated in Erskine’s theology:

\begin{quote}
If all men are already, as men, God’s children, and have always been so, it needs no adoption to make them so; if universal Fatherhood is a fact, and not a fiction, and by consequence if there be universal Sonship naturally belonging to all men, there is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{164} Cf. \textit{The Doctrine of Election}, 232 and SO, 232.

\textsuperscript{165} Care is needed here for in the nineteenth century, authors did not go in for the lengthy citation of sources. Nevertheless, as Henderson writes: “Owing to weak eyesight he was not a man as widely read as he might have been, but the authors he had read were of the best, and these he had mastered. Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, he read through continuously. He read the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues. While he was a lad... he seems to have come under the influence of John Foster’s Essays” (Henderson, \textit{op. cit.}, 41. Cf the comments by Principal Shairp (\textit{Letters (1840–1870)}, 367). Yet, as Needham correctly remarks: “Erskine’s eyesight, it is true failed early in life, and this had a crippling effect on his capacity for reading. He himself confessed to Principal Shairp that this was the chief reason for his not being a learned or scholarly man. He was thrown back into himself, his own experiences, his own reflections, his relationships with others. And yet this cannot satisfactorily explain Erskine’s slim knowledge of theological literature; for why, in spite of his poor eyesight, was he such a devoted student of Shakespeare and Homer, later of Plato? Erskine, I think, cherished an inner preference for literary rather than theological study. It put him more in touch with the range of human feeling and experience, an area in which, as a good aesthete and Romantic, he felt more at home than he did in the severer realms of dogmatic divinity.” (\textit{op. cit.}, 47).
and there can be, so far as we can understand it, no such thing as Adoption. Adoption is, _per se_, a denial of such universality.\textsuperscript{166}

Thus, while Erskine reflected Calvin's stress on incarnational union, he provides no counterpart for the Calvinian relationship between pneumatological union and adoption. Thus, the similarities between the reformer and the laird quickly tail off, leaving Erskine's theology a far cry from the Pauline and Calvinian theologies of adoption.

### 7.2 John McLeod Campbell

Twelve years Erskine's junior, it is a matter of some discussion as to how far McLeod Campbell was influenced by him.\textsuperscript{167} What is certain, is that early on a deep and lasting bond of friendship developed between them; one which was born of mutual necessity and sustained by a similarity of outlook.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{166} James Matthew, "The Doctrine of Sonship and the Sonship of Believers". _TRFCCQ_ 2 (1886), 25.

\textsuperscript{167} Overall the consensus favours independence of thought. This is certainly what Campbell claimed shortly before his death: "That historical independence which we mark when two minds working apart from and without any interchange of thought, arrive at the same conclusions, is always a striking fact when it occurs; and it did occur as to Scott [a colleague of Campbell's and deposed the same week] and myself; and also to Mr. Erskine and me, and I believe too as to Mr. Erskine and Scott." (Cited in _Letters (1800 - 1840)_ , 130). For statements concurring with Campbell's claim see: J McIntyre, "John McLeod Campbell - Heretic and Saint", _RSCHS_, vol. 16 (1963), 55; Leanne van Dyk, "John McLeod Campbell's Doctrine of the Atonement: A Revision and Expansion of the Reformed Tradition" (Princeton Theological Seminary: Ph.D. dissertation), 1992, 41f. (cf. 13); J H Leckie, "The Teaching of John McLeod Campbell", _The Expositor (Exp.)_, 8th series, 25 (1923), 373; Donald Leonard Faris, "The Nature of Theological Inquiry as Raised by the Conflict of the Teaching of McLeod Campbell and Westminster Theology", (University of Edinburgh: Ph.D. thesis), 1967, 223 (cf. 243ff.). For a thorough and fair summary of the evidence see G M Tuttle, _So Rich a Soil: John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement_. Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1986, 66-69. He concludes that Campbell was neither a pupil in Erskine's school of theology, nor at work total independently of him, but rather that "they celebrated a deep running consonance of thought and feeling." (ibid., 68). While Bewkes shares the same view, he also notes that Erskine's later writings had no influence on Campbell. On the contrary, "in Erskine's later life, Campbell by way of his friendship and greater ability was a corrective factor of real service to Erskine." (_Legacy of a Christian Mind, op.cit.,_ , 6f.). However, according to Duncan Finlayson "Thomas Erskine's writings proved critical for the time in the sense that others, whose names became better known, freely admitted that they began their own thinking in new ways under the influence of his insight not least, because of the freshness of his presentation of theological ideas" (D Finlayson, "Aspects of the Life and Influence of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, 1788-1870", _RSCHS_, 20 (1980), 33) Drummond and Bulloch are more explicit: "Like F D Maurice, he [McLeod Campbell] was deeply indebted to Erskine" (_The Scottish Church 1688-1843_, 208). For a more theological substantiation of this view see Kinnear (_op.cit.,_ 103-104).

Campbell is known principally for two things: his deposition from the Church of Scotland and his authorship of The Nature of the Atonement (NA). To go into the details of his deposition would cause too great a digression and is not called for here. Enough to say that early on the morning of the 25th May 1831 Campbell was ejected from the Church of Scotland ministry by an Assembly vote of 119 to 6. In Erskine’s opinion “the Church of Scotland had stoned her best prophet”. From then on, Campbell remained in a ministerial wilderness until after the publication of NA in 1856.

NA is Campbell’s magnum opus and, as the product of twenty-five years of reflection outwith the constraints of confessional subscription, represents his matured thought. By the time of its publication Campbell had long ceased to be a young minister struggling to express his new theological findings. Rather, NA contains the


171 Campbell’s deposition was not solely due to the machinations of the evangelical party, as might be thought. Ultimately his endeavour to avoid denominational factionalism left him with insufficient support at the Assembly (Leckie, “John M’Leod Campbell’s ‘The Nature of the Atonement’”, 199; van Dyk, op.cit., 32-33).


173 Campbell’s return from the ministerial wilderness occurred when, in 1868, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by his alma mater, Glasgow University. The General Assembly of 1831, his return to Rhu, the loyalty of his parish, his lonely ministry in Blackfriars Street, Glasgow, for 25 years and finally his elevation to the status of honoured theologian, have all contributed to the esteem in which Campbell is held (for a summary of the wilderness years see Van Dyk, op.cit., 35ff.). Precise theological analysis of Campbell’s work has often been hindered, however, by the romanticism surrounding the events of his life. While no one can doubt either Campbell’s sincere godliness or the paucity of his treatment at the hands of the Assembly, there is need for more objective treatments of Campbell’s theology. In what follows we have used J McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement and its relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life. Introduced by E P Dickie. 4th ed. London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1959.

174 Hart writes that, “in this his more developed work Campbell does not make any radically new departures, but develops his earlier thoughts, and elucidates them with particular polemical intent” (Trevor A Hart, “Anselm of Canterbury and John McLeod Campbell: Where Opposites Meet?” EQ 62.
theology of one who, “more than any other in the Church of Scotland, with the possible exception of his friend Erskine, brought about that radical revision of orthodox Calvinism which marked the course of the 19th century.”

Campbell’s importance lies in his protest against the predominance of the juridical categories of contemporary Calvinistic discourse and the almost exclusive preoccupation with the retrospective approach to atonement theology which was then prevalent. While there have been numerous analyses of Campbell’s “protest of Grace”, never before has the crucial factor of adoption been sufficiently considered in the assessment of Campbell’s challenge to the Reformed tradition. From what we know of the fortunes of adoption prior to the nineteenth century, it is clear that what Calvinism needed above all was a rigorous exposition of adoption as the apex of Reformed soteriology, set within the prominent framework of its cognate themes: the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Christ and the sonship of believers. The success of Campbell’s protest ought to be judged, then, by the extent to which he recaptured these themes for contemporary Calvinism.

Van Dyk argues that there is substantial continuity in the thought of Campbell and Calvin (namely, the presuppositional, retrospective and prospective aspects of atonement), leading us to assume that Campbell’s protest was successful. Certainly, similarities exist, but these do not prove anything more than that Campbell was in the mainstream of Christianity. What evidence there is suggests that Campbell sought to expound a Christian view of atonement rather than one that was distinctly Reformed. Consistent with this, Campbell states that the nature of the atonement revolves around the question “what is Christianity?”, to which he responds, it is the knowledge of God as our Father and humankind as our brethren. We intend to

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176 McIntyre writes that, “in reaction or in revolt, if you like, [Campbell] tried to show his people that religion was primarily a personal relationship.” (“John McLeod Campbell - Heretic and Saint”, 54). To omit this emphasis is to lower humankind’s appreciation of salvation. Gerrish writes: “In a forthright comment, Campbell lays down the central thought which guided his revision of the Calvinist heritage: low conceptions of salvation have been possible only when man’s root relation to God as father has been left out of account and God has been thought of only as sovereign Lord and righteous judge.” (*Tradition and the Modern World*, 81).
177 *Op. cit.*, 210-243. In contrast Faris sees the continuity between Campbell and Calvin in terms of the incarnation, union with Christ and Christ as the object of faith (*op. cit.*, 265-270).
178 *NA*, 369. Notice how Gerrish says that, Campbell’s “entire theological achievement was a systematic reinterpretation of Christian theology through the regulative idea of divine Fatherhood” (italics inserted) (*Tradition and the Modern World*, 98). Compatible with this, James Goodloe argues
argue, therefore, that the similarities existing between Campbell and Calvin pertain more to choice generalities than to the particular internal dynamics of their thought, and that these generalities could in part be as much due to his Presbyterian upbringing as to his theological reflection on Calvin’s theology.

The lynch-pin of our argument is that van Dyk omits a major and underlying discontinuity between Campbell and Calvin; namely, Campbell’s methodological reliance upon Christian consciousness. It was this that determined his approach to Scripture and historical theology alike. Although Campbell had sought to place the Bible prior to the WCF ever since his days in the parish of Row, he was himself guilty of pre-empting the authority of Scripture by bestowing on Christian experience a determinative role implicitly denied it in Scripture (Acts 17:11).

Campbell’s reliance on Christian consciousness is important for it sets him in the context of the Romantic ethos of the era in which he lived and worked. As Bewkes puts it: “There is much ground for asserting that Campbell in Great Britain was doing for religion what Schleiermacher had done in Germany.” Bewkes notes, however, that Schleiermacher and Campbell differed in their understanding of Christian consciousness. Whereas Schleiermacher limited God’s revelatory action to feeling apart from cognition, thus boycotting reason, Campbell’s regard for the felt realities of existence were inseparable from the ideational elements interfused with feeling. Thus what was important for Campbell was the reasonableness of Christian belief.

Nevertheless, the problem with Campbell’s reading of the Bible through the lense of Christian consciousness is that its message becomes subject to what the reader is able to receive. Thus, instead of rigorously and faithfully employing the

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179 She does go into Campbell’s approach to Scripture, but does not demarcate it as a major source of discontinuity between the Reformer and the Romantic (op. cit., 62). Although Faris is slightly more balanced on the continuity between Calvin and Campbell he likewise overlooks the marked discontinuity in their approach to Scripture (op. cit., 264-265).

180 Bewkes, op. cit., 148.

181 “Such an approach to the Bible”, writes Goodloe, “runs the risk of seeming to find things that are not there or failing to see things that are there.” (ibid., 66). Goodloe puts his finger on Campbell’s approach when he writes: “Campbell’s understanding of Christian experience led to his theory of atonement. In the beginning of his ministry, maybe, he was convinced that he was simply expositing the Bible. Now he sees clearly that he works by analysis of the Christian experience and consciousness, particularly what is required for transformation, then turns to the Bible for illustration of what he has determined to be the case.” (ibid., 61). This is clear from Tuttle’s citing of Campbell: “The hardest knot of all is still to unloose, the ninth of Romans. But I do not doubt that if the
analogia fidei, as was typical in Reformed theology and praxis, Campbell allows the reader to determine whether the truths of Scripture are harmonious with what can be received.\footnote{According to Michael Jinkins, Campbell had at least started off his ministry believing that the Scriptures were their own interpreter (Jinkins, John McLeod Campbell, 4).}

Campbell’s problem with the analogia fidei was that its application fails to raise the reader of Scripture to the knowledge of the living God.\footnote{“The mere exercise of intelligence in comparing passages and collating texts” are insufficient “to raise us to the knowledge of the living God.” (Thoughts on Revelation with Special Reference to the Present Time. Cambridge and London: MacMillan and Co., 1862, 126). Campbell makes two further points in relation to authority: (a) that a belief in the authority of revelation is no guarantee of security from error and (b) that a shift had taken place away from the quotation of Scripture. Thus, Campbell complained: “They take the Scriptures up to sift and prove their teaching, prepared to find much of that teaching merely human, and to be dealt with accordingly.” However, whatever the practice then prevalent, Reformed theology had always officially put a premium on the role of the Holy Spirit in the handling of Scripture; a factor which Campbell is barely cognizant of (Memorials, vol. 2, 29-30).} The problem, however, was of his own making, being directly attributable to the distinct lack of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit in his theology.\footnote{Although he frequently refers in NA to such things as the spirit of sonship, he appears to have had in mind an ethos rather than the ministry of the Holy Spirit.} Naturally then Scripture fails to give the reader access to the knowledge of God if read without the guiding and illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, by substituting the analogia fidei with a novel reliance on Christian experience, Campbell consciously downplayed scriptural exegesis, thus making somewhat suspect his “fresh study of the New Testament”.\footnote{Leckie, “John McLeod Campbell’s ‘The Nature of the Atonement’”, 202. See also Tuttle, op.cit., 26; Kinneear, op.cit., 112. Campbell’s criticism of the biblical critics of his age could well be levelled against his own use of Scripture: “What I am jealous of is, not the conclusions of fair criticism, but certain assumptions as to what is antecedently believable and unbelievable, which hinder fair criticism, and tend to make it a process of stretching the Scriptures on a Procrustean bed” (Memorials, vol. 2, 31).}

All this is borne out by his references to adoption. Our reading of NA reveals that Campbell mentions adoption on only twenty-one occasions.\footnote{NA, 27-28 (x3), 73, 92, 106, 107, 111, 113, 183, 207, 213, 214, 347-348 (x4), 351, 358, 360-361 (x2).} Of these, nine are mere citations of Paul’s phrase, “the receiving of adoption” (Gal. 4:4).\footnote{NA, 27-28 (x3), 73, 92, 107, 183, 207, 214.} Not once does he seek to exegete this phrase, the text, or the context. Moreover, he overlooks the application of the analogia fidei by failing to compare the meaning of Galatians 4:4 with any other Pauline use of adoption. The prima facie evidence strongly

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  \item Apostle’s words ever come to convey to my mind just what he intended, they will be then conveying what I shall be able to receive, and shall see to be in harmony with those of his words which I now feel that I understand.” (op.cit., 16 (italics inserted)).
  \item 182 According to Michael Jinkins, Campbell had at least started off his ministry believing that the Scriptures were their own interpreter (Jinkins, John McLeod Campbell, 4).
  \item 183 “The mere exercise of intelligence in comparing passages and collating texts” are insufficient “to raise us to the knowledge of the living God.” (Thoughts on Revelation with Special Reference to the Present Time. Cambridge and London: MacMillan and Co., 1862, 126). Campbell makes two further points in relation to authority: (a) that a belief in the authority of revelation is no guarantee of security from error and (b) that a shift had taken place away from the quotation of Scripture. Thus, Campbell complained: “They take the Scriptures up to sift and prove their teaching, prepared to find much of that teaching merely human, and to be dealt with accordingly.” However, whatever the practice then prevalent, Reformed theology had always officially put a premium on the role of the Holy Spirit in the handling of Scripture; a factor which Campbell is barely cognizant of (Memorials, vol. 2, 29-30).
  \item 184 Although he frequently refers in NA to such things as the spirit of sonship, he appears to have had in mind an ethos rather than the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
  \item 185 Leckie, “John McLeod Campbell’s ‘The Nature of the Atonement’”, 202. See also Tuttle, op.cit., 26; Kinneear, op.cit., 112. Campbell’s criticism of the biblical critics of his age could well be levelled against his own use of Scripture: “What I am jealous of is, not the conclusions of fair criticism, but certain assumptions as to what is antecedently believable and unbelievable, which hinder fair criticism, and tend to make it a process of stretching the Scriptures on a Procrustean bed” (Memorials, vol. 2, 31).
  \item 186 NA, 27-28 (x3), 73, 92, 106, 107, 111, 113, 183, 207, 213, 214, 347-348 (x4), 351, 358, 360-361 (x2).
  \item 187 NA, 27-28 (x3), 73, 92, 107, 183, 207, 214.
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suggests, then, that Campbell’s references lack the depth and breadth of the Calvinian and Westminsterial concepts which he was intent on rejecting.

A similar methodological approach is discerned in Campbell’s appropriation of historical theology. While it may be argued that Campbell was no more of an independent thinker than Calvin, the difference between the two is that the reformer’s independence was regulated by the exegesis of Scripture and not by imagination. In contrast to Calvin, Campbell’s uneven knowledge of the contours of historical theology isolated him from many of the riches of the church’s pre- and post-Reformation heritage and made him immune to much of the pull of historical consensus.

While Campbell was unacquainted with the Fathers, there is some evidence of familiarity with Reformation thought. Even here, however, his use of Protestant theology is most limited in spite of his earlier defence before the courts of the church. Nevertheless, he does quote Luther as one who he regarded as a kindred spirit.

While great claims have been made as to Campbell’s prowess in the field of historical theology there is little evidence to support such claims. Without any proof MacGregor states that, “Campbell’s sources were, ... for the most part far removed from eighteenth century Scottish theology. It seems plain that he was very much better read in the Fathers of the early Church than were the vast majority of his judges. But he was also better informed than many of them about the original sources of Reformation theology.” (“The Row Heresy”, 289; cf. 291). On the contrary, there is no evidence to suggest that Campbell was at all read in the Fathers. He was then as party to the “theological limitations” and mere “perfunctory acquaintance” of the times as his accusers (contra Faris, op.cit., 262-263). Nevertheless there is no doubt that Campbell had a widespread thirst for knowledge as details of his personal history indicates. (Bewkes, op.cit., 17-18). Campbell himself admitted in a letter dated 12th March 1856, that, “as to the ‘teaching of the Church’, in the large sense of the words, I cannot doubt that such an acquaintance with the Fathers as some enjoy would have enabled me to engrat my book on the past with some advantages. But the end which I had in view was so purely by manifestation of the truth to commend myself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God that, even had I had the necessary qualification in respect of reading, it would have interfered with the simplicity of my aim to have availed myself of it.” (Memorials, vol. 1, op.cit., 273-274; cf. NA, xxiv-xxv). Tuttle rightly notes that: “The conclusion is... inescapable that patristic sources played no conscious part in the development of Campbell’s thought.” (op.cit., 74). The fact that the nature of Christ’s work was not a matter of scientific investigation in the early church does not concern us here. We are merely intent on demonstrating that Campbell’s general scholarly prowess has been exaggerated.

Although Tuttle says that Campbell found in Luther’s “doctrine of justification by faith ... the right substructure on which to found an adequate view of the atonement” (op.cit., 72-73), Campbell was no authority on Luther. As Gerrish notes: “His Nature of the Atonement gives no evidence that he ever read anything by Luther other than the Commentary on Galatians. He simply assumes that Luther taught the universality of God’s saving will and that this must have lent his preaching a freedom which the Scottish divines, who agreed with Calvin, could not have. Had he dipped into Luther’s great work against Erasmus On the Bondage of the Will (1525), he would have discovered there just those predestinarian troubles that he lays at the door of the Calvinists.” (Tradition and the Modern World, 91).
Both did battle with legalistic piety,\textsuperscript{190} using as their chief weapon the doctrine of justification by faith: “It was Campbell’s belief that what he himself held on the nature of the atonement was exactly what Luther had taught on justification by faith: that the just man - the man who is “right towards God” - is the one who lives out of the confidence of sons (\textit{ex fide})”\textsuperscript{191}.

Thus, Campbell looked upon Luther with warmer feelings than upon Calvin.\textsuperscript{192} Although he claimed to have read the latter,\textsuperscript{193} he is only mentioned twice in \textit{NA!}\textsuperscript{194} Given that his main polemical purpose was to dismantle the Calvinistic theory of atonement, his neglect of Calvin is at best “highly significant”,\textsuperscript{195} and at worst an incongruity which substantially undermines his critique of Calvinism. Whatever the reason for this silence, we join Gerrish in “wondering why [he] found

\textsuperscript{190} Gerrish, \textit{Tradition and the Modern World}, 75. Writing of Campbell’s defence at the Assembly of 1831, Gerrish writes: “It is not surprising that he found himself falling readily into Lutheran language as he made his protestation. His thoughts repeatedly turned around the opposition of the law and the gospel. He sensed as Luther had done, that he had the ‘natural heart’ against him.” (ibid., 77). Tuttle writes: “Luther’s emphasis on the love of God as the ultimate source of the atonement in Christ, and his understanding of the believer’s appropriation of Christ, entirely suited Campbell. They augmented his thinking at Row as he sought to deal with pastoral questions. They were reviewed again twenty-five years later as helpful background for a statement on the nature of the atonement. Thus far Campbell recognized Luther as his teacher. The next steps were his own.”

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 90-91.

\textsuperscript{192} Bewkes, \textit{op. cit.}, 58.

\textsuperscript{193} Memorials, Vol. 1., 54; vol. 2, 19 and 222. Writing to his sister as early as 6th March 1829 he denied that there was much that was new in his theology: “When I go back to the writings of Luther and Calvin, I find it not great”(italics inserted) (\textit{ibid.}, vol. 1, 64). For other evidence to the same effect see \textit{Thoughts on Revelation}, 105-106.

\textsuperscript{194} Once in a circumlocution and once in a citation (\textit{NA}, 50 and 408). It is significant that although Torrance refers to Calvin in his introduction he is silent as to the fact that Campbell makes no substantive reference to the reformer. As for the references themselves, they confirm Gerrish’s calculations (\textit{Tradition and the Modern World}, 92; cf. van Dyk, \textit{op. cit.}, 199). Goodloe merely notes that Campbell skips over Calvin, but does not make anything of it (“John McLeod Campbell: The Extent and Nature of the Atonement”, 54).

\textsuperscript{195} Van Dyk, \textit{op. cit.}, 64. She continues: “The question arises whether he was operating with the assumption that Calvin’s atonement theology is identical with Calvinism and so passed over it for reasons of economy or if he avoided Calvin for some other reason. Because Calvin was motivated by the desire to redirect people’s attention away from the Calvinism of Scotland to a new conception of the atonement, it is perhaps not surprising that he did not examine Calvin’s teaching themselves but focused instead on the Calvinism of his day he wished to refute. The irony of this feature of Campbell’s book is that his proposed atonement theology bears striking and important similarities to Calvin’s theology and thus, perhaps unwittingly, Campbell re-established in his book a line of continuity from Calvin that had been lost in centuries of Calvinism after Calvin” (ibid., 64-65; cf. Daniel P Thimell, “Grace, Law and the Doctrine of God in the Theologies of St. Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John McLeod Campbell: A Comparative Study”, (Aberdeen: Ph.D. thesis), 1992, 335; \textit{contra} Faris, \textit{op. cit.}, cf. 264 and 278). By no means would all go so far as Van Dyk in her discernment of continuity between Campbell and Calvin. For an outline of the various views on Campbell’s relationship to the Reformed tradition see Kinnear (\textit{op. cit.}, 71ff.).
nothing marvelous in Calvin's teaching on [justification by faith alone], and, we may add, on adoption. Our perplexity is exacerbated by the remembrance that Calvin derived his doctrine of justification principally from Luther, but, contrary to the German reformer, strengthened it by working through its prospective element: the adoptive sonship to which justification points. So it is ironic that when Campbell does criticise Luther it is for the very reason that he did not give a true place to the life of sonship. This he would have found remedied by Calvin, had he found it convenient to look.

The ignoring of Calvin does, then, affect the way in which we view his critique of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, particularly as we are uncertain of the extent to which Campbell was acquainted with their thought. Although he recognised their gifts and theological stature, Leckie states that he "had practically completed and formulated his doctrine, and was on the eve of actually writing his book, before he set himself to study the Calvinistic doctrines"!

All in all, Campbell's curious silence on Calvin, his rejection of Westminster Calvinism and his dependence on Luther's Commentary on Galatians, raise the question as to whether NA is really a Reformed text on the atonement at all. Van Dyk anticipates this criticism by drawing on the diverse breadth of the Reformed tradition as capable of housing Campbell's theological shift away from nineteenth-century Calvinism. Even allowing for the disparate nature of the Reformed tradition van Dyk's thesis remains unconvincing. Of the three strands she highlights, Campbell is silent in regard to the Calvinian brand, and opposed to the Calvinistic (scholastic) and Federalist strands (following Bullinger).

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196 Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern World, 91. Gerrish goes on to say that "The almost total neglect of Calvin in Campbell's study of the atonement is all the more remarkable when we recall that, at the time of his trial for heresy, he did remember to quote Calvin's definition of faith in the Geneva Catechism." (Ibid, 94).
197 NA, 357.
198 NA, 51.
200 For germane comments from Luther on the Fatherhood of God, children (or sons) of God and adoption in his commentary on Galatians, see the Introduction.
201 Op.cit., 200ff. "To claim that a given theologian of the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century deviates from the original genius of Calvin implies a mistaken view of the univocal Reformed tradition and obscures the diversity which existed at the very beginnings of the Reformed tradition." (op.cit., 201-202).
What is obvious is that Campbell was an eclectic theologian in his use of Scripture and historical theology.\textsuperscript{202} He did not seek to expound the thought of others so much as to extract suggestions from them for the construction of a theological schema that harmonised with his own personal Christian consciousness. This is illustrated by his approach to adoption. Instead of reappraising the Reformed doctrine, Campbell preferred to abandon it because he regarded it as too bound up with the classic Protestant doctrine of imputation. Writing of the "earlier Calvinists", Campbell acknowledges that

while that legalism which was in their views of the work of Christ, hindered, as we have seen, their perceptions of the relation between atonement and the law of the spirit of life that is in Christ, viz. sonship, still, the purpose of God that we should be the sons of God, was recognised as taught in the Scriptures, and adoption was both added to justification in the system formed, and also connected with the atonement as a part of Christ's work had purchased for those for whom He had given Himself.\textsuperscript{203}

The problem, as Campbell perceived it, was that although adoption is recognized in "men's systems" the relationship to atonement is artificial rather than natural.\textsuperscript{204} It is worth quoting Campbell at length:

The adoption of us as sons, as superadded to justification by faith, no element of sonship being present in the faith that justifies us, nor exercise of fatherliness contemplated as an element in the divine acceptance of us, the adoption itself a boon bestowed upon us in connexion with the imputation of Christ's merits to us, - this is a manner of sonship as to which it is obvious that the confidence with which we draw near to Him expecting to be acknowledged as such, is no direct trust in a Father's heart at all, no trust in any feeling in God of which we are personally the objects as His offspring, but is in reality a trust in the judicial grounds on which the title and place of sons is granted to us.

I know that it is held that, when in connexion with the faith that justifies God bestows on us the adoption of sons, He gives us also the spirit of sonship, that we may have the spiritual reality as well as the name and standing. But the spirit of sonship is the spirit of truth, the Son himself is the truth - "I am the way, the truth, and the life." That the Son should say, "I am the way" - "no man cometh unto the Father but by me," teaches us that sonship alone deals with fatherliness as fatherliness; that we must come to God as sons, or not come at all.\textsuperscript{205}

\textsuperscript{202} Moreover, there is the evidence of what Campbell called his 'three great Row companions' - Henry Martin, David Brainerd and Henry Dorney (Memorials, vol. 1, 269. Cf. Memorials, vol. 2, 316-317). While each of them was noted for their spiritual prowess and missionary zeal and consequently "for the feeling side of the faith, Campbell was very much influenced by [their] writings"(So Rich a Soil, 14), none of them made great contributions to historical theology. According to Tuttle, "he acknowledged that for a considerable period he owed more to them than to any others: said he, they 'shared with my Bible the whole of my reading.' These sources strengthened his own inward witness to kinship with God by the spirit and helped him to contemplate the biblical experience of 'union with Christ'."

\textsuperscript{203} NA, 111.

\textsuperscript{204} NA, 113.

\textsuperscript{205} NA, 348; cf. 73, 107, 207.
However, had Campbell been familiar or open particularly with the strength of the Calvinian connection between adoption and union with Christ he would have not have dismissed the Reformed doctrine of adoption so freely. While he appears most Calvinian in his attempt to lay out a full-orbed revelation of God in personal terms,\textsuperscript{206} the way in which he does so indicates a marked methodological discontinuity with Reformed theology based on a false dichotomy between the faith of atonement “which merely meets divine justice, either absolute, or rectorial” and that “through which we have the adoption of sons.”\textsuperscript{207} Calvin does not recognize this dichotomy or the the divergent approach which moulds the substance of Campbell’s presuppositional, retrospective and prospective understanding of atonement.

Contrary to the reformers, Campbell opted to study the nature of the atonement (what is it of itself?) rather than its reference (for whom was it made?) or its object (what was it intended to accomplish?).\textsuperscript{208} The atonement is a revelation of the fatherly heart of God.\textsuperscript{209} This, Campbell argues has been the \textit{ultimate} ground of faith throughout the history of redemption.\textsuperscript{210} Hence, God is glorified when the atonement is regarded as originating in his paternal love and issuing in a life of sonship.

\textit{Presuppositionally}, van Dyk argues that “the guiding principle common to both Calvin and Campbell with respect to atonement theology is the emphasis on the love of God as the divine motivation for the atonement and as the overarching divine disposition toward humanity through the events of the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{211} While, this is so, van Dyk acknowledges herself that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[206] \textit{NA}, 113.
\item[207] \textit{NA}, 106.
\item[208] \textit{NA}, 1. While the Reformers focused particularly on its object, and were divided as to its reference. In discussing its nature, Campbell acknowledged that his treatment of atonement could not be considered in isolation from its object: The remission of sins and the gift of eternal life.
\item[209] Not until well on does Campbell make this clear: “The great and root-distinction of the view of the atonement presented in these pages is the relation in which our redemption is regarded as standing to the fatherliness of God. In that fatherliness has the atonement been now represented as originating. By that fatherliness has its end been represented to have been determined. To that fatherliness has the demand for the elements of expiation found in it to be traced.” (\textit{NA}, 338).
\item[210] Alternatively, Campbell writes: “It is in the hope of awakening that response [from the depths of humanity] into a distinct consciousness that I have proceeded in treating our relationship to God as the Father of our spirits, as the ultimate truth, in the light of which we are to see the scheme of our redemption, the Father sending the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” (\textit{NA}, 346).
\end{footnotes}
the love of God is not uniformly to the fore in Calvin’s corpus.\textsuperscript{212} This is partially because Calvin gives a far higher profile to the juridical aspects of soteriology than Campbell, notwithstanding the reformer’s foremost emphasis on the love of God.

Thus, believing like Calvin in the general or creative Fatherhood of God, Campbell regards the nature of the atonement as determined by the fact that God is “the Father of our spirits” and humanity is his offspring.\textsuperscript{213} Humanity’s filial status is their “high birthright” and “privilege of existence”\textsuperscript{214}. This “knowledge of God as the Father of our spirits” constituted “the first and highest knowledge for man.” When the Fall occurred it resulted in a devastating alienation from God.\textsuperscript{215} Although God remained the Father of spirits, humankind became orphan spirits, yearned after by God on the one hand,\textsuperscript{216} and crying out for their long lost Father on the other.\textsuperscript{217} They were, therefore, not just sub-consciously aware of him, but actually bereft of their Father.

Although Campbell taught like Calvin, a relational concept of the Fall,\textsuperscript{218} their understandings of its effects ultimately diverge. While reminiscent of the reformer’s belief in humanity’s retention of the sensus divinitatis, Campbell argued that although an orphan spirit, humanity continues to believe in God. Whereas Calvin’s concept of the sensus divinitatis merely taught that humankind can recognize God, but not as Father, Campbell more positively asserts, however, that humankind can recognize

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{212} In comparison to his commentaries, Calvin’s organisation of his atonement theology in the Institutes obscures the love of God (\textit{ibid.}, 213).
  \item \textsuperscript{213} The biblical terms “God’s offspring” and “the Father of spirits” (Acts 17: and Heb. 12:9) appear in \textit{NA} on innumerable occasions (for example, \textit{NA} 346 and 379) and sum up the Bible’s view of anthropology and theology proper.
  \item \textsuperscript{214} \textit{NA}, 388.
  \item \textsuperscript{215} “What remained ...of the privilege of existence [was]... small indeed in comparison with that which was lost.” (\textit{NA}, 388).
  \item \textsuperscript{216} \textit{NA}, 100.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} \textit{NA}, 215.
  \item \textsuperscript{218} “We have here to do with PERSONS, - the Father of spirits and His offspring. \textit{These are to each other more than all things and all circumstances.} We know that the desire of the Father’s heart is towards his offspring, - that it goes forth to them directly, - that it is not a simple mercy pitying their misery, - that it seeks to possess them as dear children. We know that to be restored to Him, and to possess Him as their Father, is to these alienated children themselves not merely a great thing, but every thing.” (\textit{NA}, 212-213).
\end{itemize}
God as Father but not know his heart of love towards them. Although estranged from him, they remain his offspring and he remains their Father.

The retention of the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God has important implications for humanity’s restoration. “In assuming... a relation of men to God as the Father of spirits, antecedent to, and to be regarded as underlying their relation to Him as their moral governor, [he had], in like manner, been calculating on a response from the depth of humanity.” This is because the faith that there is a God “has a root in us deeper than all inferential argument, a root in relation to which all inferential argument is but so to speak, complemental.” Thus, although Campbell does not use the term religionis semen, there is something of the concept in his thought.

As God remains the Father of spirits subsequent to the Fall, it follows that the atonement is as much an evidence of the love of the Father as of the Son. Consequently, the Son was sent to earth to reveal the Father’s heart to his rebellious children, so bridging the gulf of alienation between the Father and his offspring. Although this emphasis was not new, Campbell was aware that to speak of an atonement as due to the fatherly heart of God was foreign to contemporary habits of mind. Contrary to the impression given, however, neither Calvin nor Westminster Calvinism had ever denied that the atonement originated in the Father’s love. To speak of the atonement as making God gracious was an impression created by

219 Campbell talks of Christ coming to reveal the heart of the Father which had been destroyed by the Fall, and to whom its revelation will be salvation (NA, 236). See Thimell, op.cit., 361.
220 Any apparent scriptural evidence to the contrary must be seen in the light of humanity’s fallenness whereby they have chosen to believe the devil’s lie. Such texts as John 8: 44 and 1 John 3: 10 should not then blind us to the true nature of the gospel: “the revelation of the interest of the Father of our spirits in us as His offspring.” (NA, 360).
221 NA, 346.
222 So integral is paternity to the character of God that the faith that there is a God and the faith that God is our Father is to Campbell one and the same (NA, 345).
223 “The necessity for the atonement”, says Campbell, “was moral and spiritual, arising out of our relation to God as the Father of spirits” (NA, 186-187). Tuttle is right to urge us to “Observe how Campbell’s argument that God’s love is best expressed by the parent figure, the New Testament mixing attention upon the character of God as Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father. It is against a loving Father that we have sinned; and to such we are reconciled. This is the pivotal point of Campbell’s whole discussion of the atonement.” (op.cit., 79-81).
224 NA, 340. It is clear from this quotation that Campbell’s gospel is not ‘Father-monistic’. This is confirmed a few pages later: “Fatherliness in God originat[es] our salvation: the Son of God accomplish[es] that salvation by the revelation of the Father; the life of sonship quickened in us, the salvation contemplated,” (NA, 344. Yet again the Holy Spirit is only referred to by implication).
226 NA, 183.
nineteenth-century Calvinism, and suggests that Campbell read Reformed theology from experience rather than from its confessions.

However, Campbell conceded to high Calvinism the necessity of atonement on the grounds that the justice of God required an atoning for sin. Similarly, he concurred with the moderate Calvinistic proponents of the moral theory of the atonement that the love and goodness of the moral ruler and governor of the universe, demanded an atonement in order that salvation might be procured in a way consistent with the universe's moral being. In weaving his way between the penal (objective) and moral (subjective) theories of atonement, he sought to demonstrate above all that Christ's atonement actually saves. For this to be so, the atonement must originate from the harmonious and costly love of the Father and the Son, which "gives the atonement its great power over the heart of man."

In reference to the atonement, the incarnation is presupposed. Although Calvinian and Westminsterian views presupposed the same, Campbell complained that historically the faith of the incarnation had usually been conjoined with the faith of the atonement. To rectify this, Campbell taught that the incarnation must be seen in its own light as the focal event of redemptive history. It is "to be regarded", Campbell insisted, "as the primary and highest fact in the history of God's relation to man, in the light of which God's interest in man and purpose for man [can] alone be seen".

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227 Kinnear substantiates this in his criticism of J B Torrance (op. cit., 81 fn. 46).
228 "An atonement to make God gracious, to move him to compassion, to turn his heart toward those from whom sin had alienated his love, it would indeed, be difficult to believe in; for, if it were needed it would be impossible. To awaken to the sense of the need of such an atonement, would certainly be to awaken to utter and absolute despair. But the Scriptures do not speak of such an atonement; for they do not represent the love of God to man as the effect, and the atonement of Christ as the cause, but, - just the contrary - they represent the love of God as the cause, and the atonement as the effect." (NA, 20). Drawing on Luther's commentary on Galatians, Campbell writes that, "in Christ we see that God is not a cruel extractor or a judge, but a most favourable, loving and merciful Father, who to the end He might bless us, that is to say, deliver us from the law, sin, death, and all other evils, and might endue us with grace, righteousness and everlasting life, spared not His own Son, but gave Him for us all." (cited NA, 44).
229 NA, 29. For the theological relationship between Campbell and moderate Calvinism see Faris, op. cit., 343ff..
230 NA, 24-25.
231 NA, xxv.
232 The substantial focus on the incarnation inevitably brought to life the discussion of the relationship between the incarnation and the atonement: "The great question which has divided men as to these fundamental doctrines of the Faith has been the relation in which they stand to each other - which was to be regarded as primary, which secondary? - was an atonement the great necessity in reference to man's salvation, out of which the necessity for the incarnation arose, because a divine Saviour alone could make an adequate atonement for sin? - or, is the incarnation to be regarded as the
Understandably, then, in rejecting the traditional penal approach of Owen and Edwards, Campbell took up Luther's rather than Calvin's emphasis on the incarnate life of Christ. By looking to Christ's earthly life inquirers are kept from "climbing up into heaven" for the benefit of "the curious searching of the divine majesty". Ironically, Calvin would have agreed with this anti-speculative approach, for the alternative by-passes the Mediator, leaving the inquirer, in Campbell's words, "overwhelmed of his glory". In the incarnate Christ is seen the personal revelation of the Father's heart of love towards his offspring as brought within reach of his offspring. Such a revelation brings to light humanity's sin and and its need of atoning. The atonement required is fourfold, in which Christ mediates both retrospectively and prospectively in Godward as well as humanward directions between his Father and his offspring.

Retrospectively, Christ first deals with humankind on the part of God. In walking perfectly on earth in filial love and obedience, Christ confidently declared to humanity that, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This declaration involved Christ in the self-sacrifice of 'living contact' with fallen humanity, whereby the misery of their state bore down on his spirit. The sorrow he knew, however, perfected primary and highest fact in the history of God's relation to man, in the light of which God's interest in man and purpose for man can alone be truly seen? - and is the atonement to be contemplated as taking place in order to the fulfilment of the divine purpose for man which the incarnation reveals." Campbell preferred the latter view. In order to comprehend the atonement, Campbell took it "to the light of the incarnation". His aim was not to dismiss the atonement. Rather, the atonement is the development of the incarnation and makes both historical realities indissoluble. Pointing to Luther he writes: "Begin thou there where Christ began, viz. in the womb of the virgin in the manger, and at his mother's breasts, &c. For to this end He came down, was born, was conversant among men, suffered, was crucified, and died, that by all means He might set forth Himself plainly before our eyes, and fasten the eyes of our hearts upon Himself; that thereby He may keep us from climbing up into Heaven, and from the curious searching of the divine majesty." (NA, 43. See Tuttle, op.cit., 83-84; Graham, “John M'Leod Campbell and the Atonement”, 416-417; Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern World, 84-85; J B Torrance, “The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology”, 305). To ascertain whether such critiques are valid the reader is referred to WCF ch.VIII (“Of Christ the Mediator”).

233 NA, 42-43.
234 In support of his point Campbell reels off a batch of texts (primarily taken from the Gospels, especially John's Gospel) (NA, 43f.).
235 NA, 236.
236 "Our redemption has two aspects - distinct, while inseperably related. It is the history of spirits, God's offspring, alienated from Him to whom the light of life has come in the revelation of their own evil state, and of the holy love of the Father in what that love has felt regarding them in their alienation." (NA, 405).
238 NA, 129f..
239 NA, 130.
his declaration by fulfilling the Father's purpose that in Christ's self-sacrifice eternal love should meet the enmity of the carnal mind. Contrary to Calvin, however, Campbell refused to allow that Christ's suffering were penal.\(^\text{240}\) He wept as a divine expression of what sin means and because in him divine love suffered from humanity's sin.\(^\text{241}\) In rejecting a penal view of atonement, Campbell took on a belief in divine passibility not held by Calvin.\(^\text{242}\)

The nearest that Campbell comes to a penal view of atonement is in his explanation of Christ's retrospective dealing with God on the part of humankind.\(^\text{243}\) Christ mediates between divine anger and human sin, not as part of a penal transaction but by perfectly confessing humanity's sin.\(^\text{244}\) Christ's intercession is therefore founded on love not law. It is moral or spiritual, not penal:\(^\text{245}\) "This confession... must have been a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgement of God on the sin of man."\(^\text{246}\) In his perfect confession of humanity's sin (that is, his perfect repentance, sorrow and contrition), Christ absorbs the wrath of God.\(^\text{247}\) He does not suffer punishment for it. In doing so, he actualizes a moral or spiritual expiation of sin.\(^\text{248}\) Campbell finds no place, then, for the Calvinistic concept of dual imputation. Central to atonement is the paternal heart of God, not a judicial process. Whereas the thought of penal substitution terrifies, evoked by the knowledge of divine grief vicarious confession purifies. Conscious of the Father's loving heart, Christ was incited to confess vicariously humanity's sin with such sincere repentance that divine

\(^{240}\) NA, 132-133.

\(^{241}\) NA, 134.

\(^{242}\) Cf. Kinnear, op.cit., 77.

\(^{243}\) "Here... we feel was the place for outcoming of wrath upon the Mediator, and penal affliction, if such there had been, - and, as such there has not been, that here is the place in which we should find that dealing of the Mediator with the divine wrath against sin which has had the result which men have referred to His assumed bearing of the punishment of sin;" (NA, 134-135).

\(^{244}\) Any repentance humanity can offer is imperfect. Hence, the necessity of Christ's perfect repentance.

\(^{245}\) "We cannot conceive of the Son of God as enduring a penal infliction in the very act of honouring his Father." (NA, 134).

\(^{246}\) NA, 135-136. In making vicarious confession "the filial spirit that was in [his] confession, and which necessarily took into account what our being rebellious children was to the Father's heart, constituted the perfection of [his] expiation." (NA, 183).

\(^{247}\) NA, 137. Campbell had derived the possibility of a moral mediation from the work of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards had outlined two alternative ways whereby the Mediator could intercede before God: Either by enduring for sinners an equivalent punishment; or presenting to his Father an adequate sorrow and repentance. Whereas Edwards opted for the penal alternative, Campbell argues that Edwards should have regarded both as equally possible in securing the vindication of divine justice, but states that the moral option is "higher and more excellent" and "of necessity present in Christ's dealing with the Father on our behalf." (NA, 137-138).
justice was satisfied. Campbell argues that this is a morally higher doctrine, by which we presume him to mean that it is also a different doctrine. If this is so, it raises the question as to what Campbell himself would think of the spectre of revisionist Calvinists nowadays strenuously seeking to retain as much continuity as possible between his theology and the Reformed tradition.

Bearing the burden of humanity's filial spirits to the Father, Christ vicariously confesses humanity's sin, thereby expiating it. Christ's expiatory confession forms the basis of his ongoing intercession before God. Expiation and intercession together combine to provide a wholistic response of Christ's mind in mediation with the mind of the Father. Intercession, however, does not change the Father's mind. It was the Father who initiated it by sending his Son, determining its nature and justifying his confidence before him. For their part, humanity are assured that in Christ paternal mercy has come near to them, and that their brother is in the Father's bosom mediating for them. Inspired by this, humanity are induced to respond in their spirits by faith. In Campbell's emphasis on expiation and intercession van Dyk sees much continuity with Calvin. However, an immediate inquiry into the nature of this mediation reveals marked discontinuity between the two. In Campbell mediation takes place on the basis of vicarious confession, while in Calvin it takes place on the basis of his substitutionary death.

It is when we come to the prospective aspect of atonement, however, that Campbell's protest is most challenging and useful to Reformed theology. Basing his thoughts on Galatians 4:4, Campbell strongly argues that sinners are "under the law" (retrospective), but can "receive the adoption" (prospective). Thus, whereas

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248 NA, 139.
249 NA, 145.
250 NA, 147.
251 NA, 147-148.
252 NA, 149.
253 NA, xliii.
254 Whereas J K Mozley wrote that "Not the least important feature of Dr. M'Leod Campbell's theory is the stress he lays and the use he makes of what he calls the 'prospective aspect of the atonement'", our position is that the atonement's prospective aspect is the most important aspect of Campbell's theology and the very reason his protest ought to be studied. (The Doctrine of the Atonement. London: Duckworth & Co., 1915, 192). Thus, while Kinnear says that "the theory of vicarious penitence was Campbell's great contribution to the theology of his day", we suggest that this may have been so in terms of what influenced subsequent theologians (op.cit., 112). However, our thesis is that had Campbell's readers been more alert to the riches of the Reformed heritage they would have considered his emphasis on the prospective aspect of the atonement as his greatest contribution.
255 See particularly NA, 27-28; cf. 92, 183.
most theories focus on the retrospective, the apostles relate the necessity of atonement particularly to the latter. In rectifying this, the familial is given precedence over the juridical. Thus, whether intentional or not, Campbell challenged Calvinists to return to Calvin’s doctrinal prioritisation, yet without appropriating the specifics of the Reformer’s doctrine. Both Campbell and Calvin held, then, that the prospective aspect takes account of the scriptural connection between the making and practical end of atonement; that is, between Christ’s sufferings and the results they procured: “My conviction is, that the pardon of sin is seen in its true harmony with the glory of God, only when the work of Christ, through which we have ‘the remission of sins are past,’ is contemplated in its direct relation to ‘the gift of eternal life.'” However, while Campbell and Calvin both allow the prospective to interpret the retrospective, they do so indifferent ways and in varying degrees.

In dealing with humankind on the part of God, Christ witnessed for the Father to humanity. In Johannine terminology, this is expressed in terms of Christ witnessing as a light to the world, thus condemning its darkness. Christ made his soul

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256 Goodloe writes: “Some theories of the atonement stop at this point, or at least concentrate upon this aspect of the atonement, as if the forgiveness of sin made up the whole of salvation. But for Campbell it is only the first half.” (“John McLeod Campbell: Redeeming the Past by Reproducing the Atonement”, 187-188).

257 “Whether conceived of as securing, in virtue of a covenanted arrangement, the salvation of an election from among men, or as furnishing, in reference to all men, a ground on which God may extend mercy to them, the work of Christ has equally been regarded as what would not have been but with a prospective reference. But on neither of these views is the justification of God’s acceptance of the propitiation itself, bound up with the question of the results contemplated.” (NA, 152). Whereas in orthodox Calvinism “the penal affliction is complete in itself as a substituted punishment; the righteousness wrought out is complete in itself as conferring a title to eternal blessedness, irrespective of results to be accomplished in those in the covenant of grace.” Conversely, in moderate Calvinism the ground upon which justification by faith is rested is complete in itself “irrespective of any effect which is anticipated from the faith of it.” (Ibid.).

258 “In his own language”, writes J B Torrance, “the filial is prior to the judicial; NOT the judicial prior to the filial.” (“The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology”, SJT, 311); cf. Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern world, 81.

259 NA, 153.

260 NA, 154. Explaining further what the gift of eternal life is, Campbell writes: “The perfect righteousness of the Son of God in humanity is itself the gift of God to us in Christ - to be ours as Christ is ours, - to be partaken in as He is partaken in, - to be our life as He is our life” (ibid.).

261 “For the prospective ends of Christ’s work have to do with life in him - that is, with the gift of sonship, which sheds its light back on the Father’s acceptance of the Christ’s offering.” (Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern World, 88). Tuttle does not go so far when he writes merely that Campbell “placed the prospective aspect of Christ’s work alongside the retrospective as reflecting something of the nature of the atonement” (So Rich a Soil, 138 (italics inserted)), and neither does Graham in writing that the “Retrospective and prospective Atonement are two sides of the one work of God in a man’s heart” (“John McLeod Campbell and the Atonement”, ExpT., 418).

262 NA, 162.
an offering for sin so as to vindicate the Father's name and to condemn humanity's sin. Conscious of the hostility of the world's darkness, he was nevertheless joyfully and peacefully cheered by the knowledge that he was the light of the world.

By looking and listening to Christ, humankind learns, in words reminiscent of the opening sentence of Calvin's *Institutes*, that "apart from Christ we know not our God, and apart from Christ we know not ourselves." Campbell urges, "as the Son who reveals the Father, that we may know the Father's heart against which we have sinned, that we may see how sin, in making us godless, has made us as orphans, and understand that the grace of God, which is at once the remission of past sin, and the gift of eternal life, restores to our orphan spirits their Father and to the Father of spirits His lost children."

Thus, the life of Christ witnesses that the Father and humankind are in Christ. This does not mean to say that all humanity will be saved for the onus is on men and women to believe. Only then will the encounter with God in Christ be realised: "In the experience of this communion in our nature and as our brother, did our Lord look forward to our partaking in it as what would be our salvation." Nevertheless, although he is adamant that the gospel should not stop short of communion with Christ, his distinction between what Calvin regarded as the incarnational and mystical elements of union is by no means so clear and therefore lacks the rich profundity of Calvin's doctrine.

Union with Christ was important to Campbell for two reasons. On the one hand he sought to rectify the high Calvinistic reliance on the legal doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This he regarded as a legal fiction whereby they sought to explain juridically what Christ made possible by his incarnate life. However, while it is true to say that contemporary Calvinism paid too little heed to

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263 "He vindicates the name of the Father, and condemns our sin as rebellious children, by all that we see the Father to be in Him through His following God as a dear child walking in love." (NA, 167).
264 NA, 164.
265 NA, 167.
266 NA, 171. "We are called to hear the Son that we may know the Father through knowing the Son in whom He is well pleased, and so may know what is the Father's desire as to ourselves, and what He has given to us in the Son, that that desire of His heart for us may be fulfilled in us." (NA, 169).
267 NA, 167.
268 The communion he has in mind is "the light that shines to us in the communion of the Son with the Father in humanity" (NA, 173).
union with Christ, our study has shown from Calvin that union with Christ and dual imputation are not incompatible. On the other hand, he sought to refute the moderate Calvinist espousal of an exemplarist theory of atonement, because it gave insufficient organic content to the biblical connection between the vine and the branches.  

Because the branches of a tree have all the nature and beauty of the original stem, they cannot be regarded as individual, independent and self-reliant. As the stem drew life from the ground, so in turn the branches draw life from the stem. The branches are then reproductions of the stem.

Thus, whereas Calvin was less clear on the relationship of mystical and experiential union, Campbell is more fundamentally ambiguous as to the relationship between incarnational and mystical union. Attempting to view the incarnation in its own light prevented him from putting sufficient store by the need for mystical union with Christ. Indeed, wherein lies the necessity of mystical union if all humanity are in Christ anyway? Lacking Calvin’s clear emphasis on mystical union, it is unsurprising that Campbell says so little of adoption, and what he does say is hardly substantive. He merely replaces what he wrongly regards as a legal fiction, with what looks very much like a moral fiction.

Christ’s witness for the Father is confirmed and enhanced by his dealing with God on behalf of humanity as personified perfection in humanity. He approaches his Father in order to confess humanity’s sin and to present his own righteousness to the Father, conscious that he can come into his presence knowing that he is loved and well pleasing to him. On this basis he appeals for the remission of sins and eternal life. The very kernel of Campbell’s moral or spiritual view of atonement is the right and necessary relationship between Christ’s expiatory confession and the

269 "The relation of our participation in the atonement to the atonement is radically different from what the words ‘following an example’ suggest." (NA, 330).
270 Put theologically, “The atonement... through faith reproduces its own elements in us, we being raised to the fellowship of that to which Christ descended in working out our salvation.” (NA, 324).
271 Hence, Campbell expands on the theme of intercession which, we have seen, is characteristic of the Godward movement of Christ’s retrospective work. By so doing, Campbell acknowledges the oneness of Christ’s atoning work: “We could not formerly speak freely of that intercession for sinners which the prophet has conjoined with His bearing of their sins, because that intercession could not be conceived of as stopping short of the prayer for our participation in eternal life, to which the expiatory confession of our sins, and prayer for the pardon of our sins necessarily led forward, and in connexion with which alone they could have existed.” (NA, 174).
272 NA, 177.
273 NA, 184. “It is in the dealing of the Son with the Father on our behalf, thus in all its aspects before us, that the full light of the atonement shines to us”. (NA, 175-176).
remission of sins, Christ’s righteousness and the gift of eternal life, and between
God’s delight in that righteousness in humanity and the Father’s acceptance of it as
the righteousness of humankind. Thus, all that the Son offered to the Father was
accepted with the prospective objective that it should be reproduced in humanity. As
sonship is attained through the reproduction of the life of Christ, Campbell has little
need to dwell on adoption. From the moment that the rebellious offspring return to
their Father’s bosom, sonship is reproduced in them so enabling them to cry, “Abba,
Father”.

The strength of Campbell’s stress on the atonement’s prospective aspect
paves the way for his analysis of its two great benefits: sonship and brotherhood.
Although Campbell pays lipservice to the fact that sonship is attained by adoption,
only in one passage containing two references does he pause to explain the doctrine
via positiva. Adoption is the product and substance of grace resulting from the
“outcoming” of divine fatherliness, and is received logically posterior to
reconciliation with the Father. “The invitation to be reconciled to God is the
invitation to return and enter into their Father’s house, into their Father’s heart.” This
is only possible because the blood of Christ has prevailed over filial spirits and
revealed to them both the Father’s heart and the way to it through the Son. The blood
of Christ, says Campbell, has then direct reference to the reception of adoption.

Contrary to one reading of Calvin, then, Campbell’s doctrine of adoption
refers not to a legal process (the adoptive act) coupled with familial implications (the
adoptive state), but to a quickening of sonship. Through the revelation of the
fatherliness that is in God believers are enabled to approach their Father God in
Christ’s life of sonship and in accordance with his desire, to speak with confidence to
him as to a Father. Thus, Campbell distinguishes between a legal sonship based on
the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and a quickened sonship accompanied by a
filial confidence of knowing the Father’s heart. Thus, the sons of God have the
liberty to call God “Father” not because of a legal process of adoption, but because
having seen the Father’s loving heart they cannot help but call upon him.

274 “[His offspring] must see His grace as that outcoming of fatherlines, which it is, - they must see its
provisions for them as what belong to the adoption of sons which He contemplates for them.” (NA, 213).
275 NA, 351.
Adoption is, then, the drawing of orphan and alienated offspring into a sonship which is built on two pillars: the faith of sonship in humanity as revealed in Christ, and the faith of fatherliness revealed to be in God.276 In order to hold this view of adoption, however, Campbell discards the traditional doctrine of total depravity: "Not for his own sake but for our sakes did the Son of God reveal the hidden capacity of good that is in man by putting forth in humanity the power of the law of the Spirit of His own life - the life of Sonship."277 Yet just because Christ reveals humanity's good in his life of sonship does not mean to say that humankind has to accept a life of sonship. Ultimately the branches can prevent the sap of the vine from passing into them. That is, humankind can either welcome or reject a life of sonship.278 As semi-Pelagian as this is, Campbell insists that humankind has done nothing to cause the drawing of the Father. Humankind only yields to his overtures.279

Although he does not say so, we take it that by Christ's putting forth the power of the Spirit of his own life, Campbell refers to his equivalent of the spirit of adoption whereby the branches become possessed by the life of the vine and are thereby enabled to grow. As sons they can call God their Father, confess their sins to him, continually grow in trust of him and freedom before him.280 The life of sonship enjoyed in Christ leads them then to "riches, unsearchable infinite riches, because it, and it alone, enjoys the Father as the Father, making us heirs of God, - and joint heirs with Jesus Christ."281

The view taken of sonship effects the other great benefit of atonement, namely, brotherhood. Again there is symmetry in Campbell's reasoning. "If... the gospel does not reveal God to me as my Father, neither does it reveal men to me as

276 NA, 172. "I must often recur to this because, in truth, my hope of helping any out of the perplexities and confusions which I feel to prevail on the subjects of justification and sanctification, is simply the hope of helping them to see the contradiction between coming to God in the spirit of sonship, with the confidence which the faith of the Father's heart sustains, and coming to God with a legal confidence as righteous in His sight, because clothed with a legal righteousness, or at least accepted on the ground of such a righteousness." (ibid.).
277 NA, 168. A similar denial of total depravity is found a little earlier where he writes "of the righteousness of Christ as the revelation of the capacity of righteousness that was in humanity, a capacity that remained to man although hidden under sin;" (NA, 160).
278 NA, 363.
279 NA, 364.
280 NA, 355-56.
281 NA, 169.
my brethren.” Just as the Father is loved with the whole being only once he is known, so humanity are loved as brethren only once they are known. Thus, the life of love in Christ is sonship towards God as well as brotherhood towards humankind. The Christian’s life is therefore to mirror Christ’s self-sacrifice in his devotedness to both God and humankind.

While a number of the contours of Campbell’s ingenious theological protestation resemble Calvin, we would expect this for they both attempt to express mainstream Christianity. A closer examination of Campbell’s theology reveals, however, that although his protest was most timely, the internal dynamics of his thought are over-reactionary and largely discontinuous with the Reformed tradition.

Despite his reputation as a biblical theologian, his overriding of biblical theology weakens the scriptural basis of his protest. While his familial emphasis in “the history of our redemption” captures much of the scriptural atmosphere, his dependence on Christian consciousness was more characteristic of Romanticism than the biblical, hermeneutical and exegetical theology of Calvin or the Westminster Standards. Thus, whereas Calvin’s appreciation of the continuity of the covenant of grace led him to expound both Old and New Testaments as well as their inter-relationship, Campbell’s interests lay primarily with the New Testament.

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282 NA, 368.
283 Tuttle, op. cit., 14.
284 Campbell’s Romanticism is illustrated in his reflection on Renan’s thought in which he urged upon his eldest son that “[Renan’s] great appeal demands from us, not knowledge of greek or of history, but capacity of recognising moral beauty and harmony. And here I felt”, Campbell continued, “as one asked to meet him, and weigh his arguments, on ground on which I was somewhat at home, - though, I know, not so much as I ought to be, - but at least far more at home than on the ground of greek or historical criticism.” (Memorials, vol. 2, 73). In the same letter he confirms his belief that in coming to the Scriptures nothing is to be compared with “a quickness to see and recognize God’s mind” (no, not greek or “any other subsidiary learning”). This he described as “a mental key to the meaning of Scripture even as a subject of critical study.” Dickie goes so far as to label Campbell “a mystic” (NA, xviii). Thus, as staunch a defender of Campbell’s approach as Leckie writes that “it is of all great theological works, perhaps, the least academic.” (“John McLeod Campbell - The Development of his Thought (II)”, Exp., 109. Leckie goes on: “Most theologians perhaps read too much and think too little; but it was in the main by patient and brooding thought continued throughout many years of strenuous toil and service that this man constructed stone by stone his stately building.” (Ibid.). See also “John M’Leod Campbell’s ‘The Nature of the Atonement’, ExpT., 200).
285 For Campbell, while “the Scriptures provide the requisite material for theological formulation [but]... within the Bible the New Testament has a prior importance.” (Tuttle, op.cit., 78). In particular, he was partial to the use of the Johannine corpus because it is “about the very highest evidence of revelation” (Memorials, vol. 2, 74). Cf. Leckie, “The Teaching of John McLeod Campbell”, Exp., 380. Campbell probably prefered the Johannine writings for two reasons: (i) The Johannine emphasis on the Word becoming flesh helped to sharpen his focus on the incarnation; (ii) the pervasive relational terminology of the Johannine corpora aided him in his emphasis on the prospective aspect
then, however, he was prone to use the Scriptures typologically at best and as an exemplar of how to do theology at worst.

Thus, the unfavourable comparison of Campbell’s approach to Scripture with Calvin’s establishes the basic differences in the quality of their theologies. Campbell, for instance, is particularly weak in relating humanity to Christ. As Moberly rightly notes, Campbell failed to see the impossibility of relating the atonement in its personal relation to us apart from a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, Campbell wholly lacks, or rather his exposition of atonement wholly lacks, any reference to that outpouring of the Spirit of holiness, the very Spirit of the Incarnate and the Crucified, which is our personal identification with Him, and therefore is alone the realization of the atonement within ourselves. It is one more instance, after all, of the impossible effort to expound the relation of Calvary to ourselves, otherwise than in and through the exposition of Pentecost.

In similar vein, he straightforwardly continues:

Exposition of Pentecost involves further the Church and the Sacraments. It involves them both, of course, as spiritually rather than mechanically conceived. They are the methods of spiritual reality, not substitutes for it. But they are methods of divine appointment, and certainly not humanly dispensable. Had he been born and bred within the range of all that (as it were) instinctive conception and consciousness, in relation to sacramental communion, which characterizes the best and deepest tradition of the Catholic Church; had it been to him Christ’s own method for the personal identification, in Spirit, of His mystical Body the Church, and of all her members, with their very atoning sacrifice of Calvary; he could hardly, in expounding the rationale of atonement, have ignored so completely the relevance of all this side of Christian experience.... His doctrine of atonement requires no reference to the Eucharist at all.

Thus, it is in the light of the absence of an appropriate focus on the ministry of the Spirit that Bewkes’ lauding of Campbell “as a significant pioneering modern” who concerned himself with the pressing theological need to restate the internal character of religion, ought to be considered.

For all Campbell’s impression then that no doctrine should be preached when not explicitly and demonstrably present in Scripture, there are two particular

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286 One notable example of this was Campbell’s use of the story of Phinehas (NA, 119f.).
doctrines that he perpetrates on the basis of his Christian consciousness that for the very same reason are unacceptable.

First, there is his emphasis on Christ's vicarious repentance. No less a New Testament scholar than A B Bruce noted that,

the theory has been treated by critics of all schools as the eccentricity of a devout author, who, dissatisfied with the traditional theory, has substituted in its place another, involving not only greater difficulty, but even something very like absurdity. 289

Campbell's theory is, says Bruce, the play of Hamlet without the Hamlet. Similarly, H R Mackintosh, while admiring Campbell, wrote that a spiritual principle such as the theory of vicarious repentance, "to which the New Testament contains not even a faint allusion is, one feels, a good deal more likely to be wrong than right." 290

Secondly, there is adoption by quickening or reproduction. Contrary to Calvin, Campbell's exposition of adoption is predominantly via negativa. This is fatal to Campbell's protest in two ways. His lip-service to adoption, as based exclusively on Galatians 4:4, depreciates the Pauline doctrine. Consequently, Campbell failed to provide Calvinism with a fresh realisation of the importance of adoption. His stress on the prospectivity of atonement is too dismissive of the earlier attempts within the tradition to balance the legal and familial aspects of atonement through as was the case with the Calvin and the Westminster commissioners. 291

Thus, there is a marked divergence between Campbell's theology and that of the tradition. As divergent as are the internal dynamics of Campbell's theory, if Calvinists had only focused sufficiently on the prospective elements of their own heritage, then early revisionist Calvinists such as Campbell may never have had any

291 Goodloe is correct, when he writes that, "in his description of the atonement, Campbell shifts away from the legal and forensic metaphors of older theologies to use personal categories to speak of God, Christ, humanity, and their relations. Indeed, he understands the atonement to have nothing to do with external legal arrangements and everything to do with internal transformation." ("John McLeod Campbell: The Extent and Nature of the Atonement", 53).
basis for objection. That Campbell did see reason for protestation causes us to ask whether the Calvinistic response would have been better served by a constructive restatement of the Reformed faith in terms of its own understanding of scriptural prospectivity, than by an outright rejection of all that Campbell stood for. Could not their belief that his theory of atonement expressed a lopsided emphasis on its familial implications have alerted orthodox Calvinists to their own inordinate focus on the retrospective aspect of the atonement? History teaches that they failed to see beyond the fallacies of the vicarious repentance of Christ. Thus, they confirmed the validity of Campbell’s complaint. If only there had been a more perceptive analysis of Campbell’s work, orthodox Calvinists could have gone some way to alleviate romantic demands for due expression of the subjective or “feeling” side of faith, while maintaining concurrently an allegiance to the objective aspects of the Reformed faith. In so doing they could have used Campbell’s protest as the occasion to for a return to the balance of Calvin’s theology.

In summary, Erskine and Campbell made a valid protest for paternity. Their attempt, however, was ultimately flawed, being marred by the temper of the period. As Tulloch points out, for

all their personal humility and insight into the perplexities of the religious mind [they] were essentially dogmatic in their turn of thought.... They would have all to stand on the same level as themselves, and they did not hesitate to judge Christianity of others from their own point of view. They not only had the true light, but all those who opposed them, or who were unable to see the truth as they saw it, were in darkness.... They did not, in short, rise above the dogmatic temper of the time, while they sought to enrich its dogmatic thought.

In their hurried flight from Calvinistic orthodoxy they left behind some of the indispensable theological riches of the Reformed tradition, most ironically adoption. We might be mistaken for thinking that an exposition of the biblical doctrine, informed by the exhuming of some of the rich insights lying hidden in the tradition, would have proved most compatible with their protest, and obviously helpful to it. Yet for convenience sake Erskine chose to ignore adoption despite his early allusions to the doctrine. Campbell, by contrast, paid lipservice to it, but only to the extent that

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292 This point is made in the title and content of Douglas Kelly’s article: “Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards”, op. cit.

it served his doctrine of atonement. Consequent upon their circumvention of the Pauline doctrine, it has been fairly claimed that

their treatment of the Fatherhood was not sufficiently profound or comprehensive to save and support all that was true in preceding theology. The marks and limitations of a counter-statement are on their teaching.... But they have at least brought the Fatherhood of God, for British theology and religion, into the position to which the New Testament and the nature of things entitle it.294

While Calvinistic orthodoxy had both a right to react negatively and a case for doing so, insufficient attention was given to the motivation for the growing protest for paternity.

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294 Lidgett, op.cit., 145.
Chapter Eight

The Politicization of Adoption

The more I think of it, the more I am disposed to regret that the subject of adoption, or the sonship of believers, has been so little made of in our Reformation theology. It seems to me to be the appropriate crown of Calvinism, and its best safeguard at the same time against by far the most formidable line of attack to which in these days it is exposed.

R S Candlish, The Fatherhood of God.

The true and complete answer to the Broad Church doctrine of Universal Fatherhood, is the full and faithful working out of the Scriptural teaching as to the sonship of believers in Christ, and the embodying of that as a portion hitherto lacking in the organic system of evangelical truth.

J S Candlish, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen".

With hindsight it is possible to aggrandize the initial influence of Erskine and McLeod Campbell. Despite the rapid succession of books from Erskine's quill and the notable impact of Campbell's deposition from the Church of Scotland, theirs was a slowly percolating influence that only gradually took hold of the minds of their peers in the broader Anglo-Scottish context. It did so amid the ever-changing atmosphere of the ongoing ideological and social changes of the nineteenth-century, of which five may be discerned.

First, a new picture of the natural world had begun to emerge from developments in the geological and biological sciences. These were concerned with the origin of earth, the fixity of species and the uniqueness of man. Particularly influential was Herbert Spencer's "synthetic philosophy" of the 1850s, followed at the end of the decade by Darwin's Origin of Species (1859). Although initially and inevitably met with alarm, gradual acceptance of evolutionary theory culminating in Darwinism challenged basic Christian doctrines such as Scripture, God, man, sin, the Fall and providence. Indeed, across the Atlantic the great Northern Presbyterian theologian,

1 We gain a hint of this from H R Mackintosh's 1920s assessment of the progress of the theory of the vicarious repentance: "The view that Christ atoned for human sin by offering a vicarious repentance to God in our name has existed as a recognised form of theory for close upon sixty years, but it may be questioned whether it was so widely spread as now." (Some Aspects of Christian Belief, 79).
Charles Hodge, was to answer his own question “What is Darwinism?” with the charge of Atheism. Involved in the new Atheism was a reversal of the traditional Calvinistic understanding of the moral descent of man. The new estimate of human nature, understood in terms of an evolutionary ascendency, was nevertheless accompanied by a fresh recognition of the elements that had originally made human nature great.

Such fundamental challenges to historic doctrine, once tolerated, inevitably led, secondly, to a new weariness with the trigger-happy debates of previous generations. The confident hermeneutical assertions of the past now appeared inordinately bold and timebound. Thus there developed distrust with metaphysical systems, the Westminster system of faith included. Chiefly influential in this process was Schleiermacher (as we have mentioned earlier), later Ritschl, his fellow German, and then also the American Horace Bushnell (1802-1876).

Although Schleiermacher was the Father of liberal theology, it was the Ritschlian theology of *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1870-1874), which gave rise to the label ‘liberal theology’. Although Ritschl rejected Schleiermacher’s mystical emphasis on God-consciousness in favour of a return to the New Testament’s revelation of Jesus (via the Reformers), there may nevertheless be discerned a methodological continuity in Schleiermacher’s and Ritschl’s undertaking of theology from below. Thus, for all the centrality of Ritschl’s emphasis on justification, he substantially reduced the classic Protestant doctrine to the vaguest possible forensic terms, thereby helping to breakdown the traditional doctrinal metaphysics while promoting all the while a moral and ethical understanding of the doctrine.

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4 C Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1874, 177. By this Hodge meant that the theory was atheistic in tendency, because it ejected the personal work of the deity (ibid., 115, 177).


6 Barth notes that for Ritschl justification meant forgiveness; that is, the divine act of lifting the consciousness of guilt (sin and punishment). The doctrine remains forensic only in the general sense that “the intercourse between God and man, terminated by sin, is resumed by God.” (Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl* (being the translation of eleven chapters of Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert). New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, 395). Gone then is the idea of imputation so essential to the reformers’ doctrine of justification (cf. *EDT* S.v. “Ritschl, Albrecht” by R V Pierard).

7 “Now theology, especially within the Evangelical confessions, has laid very unequal emphasis on these two principal characterisics of Christianity. It makes everything which concerns the redemptive character of Christianity an object of the most solicitous reflection. Accordingly it finds the central point of all Christian knowledge and practice in redemption through Christ, while injustice is done to the ethical interpretation of Christianity through the idea of the Kingdom of God. But Christianity, so to speak, resembles not a single centre, but an ellipse which is determined by two foci.” (Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine*. 338
Meanwhile Bushnell, the Father of American theological liberalism, was recasting orthodox Christianity in the States. With hindsight the direction of his thought is clear. Whereas his volume *God in Christ* (1849) questioned the adequacies of language to capture religious experience, *Nature and the Supernatural* (1858) suggested that all things, whether natural or supernatural, shared a common spiritual character. *Vicarious Sacrifice* (1866) concluded that the death of Christ was intended primarily as an example for the human race in self-giving. At the time, however, Bushnell’s teaching nevertheless sounded traditional enough to provide a welcome alternative to American revivalism. Nonetheless, his theology helped significantly to prepare the ground for the acceptance of Schleiermacher’s romantic view of life.8

Together, in welcoming the principle of free inquiry, Ritschl and Bushnell followed Schleiermacher in distinguishing themselves from the orthodox advocates of an absolute authority of Scripture, tradition, the creeds, the church and the papacy.9 Hand in hand with free inquiry went a shift of interest from the doctrinal to the historical. Accordingly, with the publication of the fragment “The Object of Jesus and His Disciples” by the deistic rationalist Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768),10 there began the quest for the historical Jesus. This eventually resulted in a succession of volumes about his life by David Strauss (1808-1874) Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-1892), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) and later still Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965).

The interest in the historical Jesus was part of a wider movement away from the previously scholastic inquiry into Christology, which being from above, was more propositional and legal in its cast. As Sell writes:

... whereas theology was once regarded as a rationalistic science in which the language of the law court reigned supreme, now the personality of Christ and his actual mind are the starting points of theological enquiry. Theology had been scholastic rather than vital; but Strauss, however wayward in other respects, had, with his *Leben Jesu* (1835-6), driven men back to Christ.11

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9 Kent, “Christian Theology in the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries”, op.cit., 489.
10 NIDCC. S.v. “Reimarus, Herman Samuel (1694-1768)” by Clyde Curry Smith.

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Whatever reservations conservative theologians have had about the emergence of a more biblically-critical approach to Scripture,\(^\text{12}\) to date insufficient attention has been paid to the underlying motivation behind the quest for the historical Jesus. The problem with classic Protestant theology lay not in its emphasis on the legal character of the gospel but in its failure to supplement the legal elements of New Testament theology with its patently obvious gracious emphasis on the relational or familial.\(^\text{13}\) Accordingly, it is truly understandable why, in an effort to offset the jaded preoccupation with Christ the doctrinal proposition, there developed a fresh interest in Christ the person. Notwithstanding, the new focus could not guarantee a clearer consensual discovery of the person and mediatorial work of the Christ. Far from it. The spreading reticence to accept the supernatural facets of the life and ministry of the God-man served to form an unnecessary antithesis between the facts concerning Christ and the life to which they give expression. To emphasise the life of Christ without the facts rendered the accounts of the Saviour susceptible to arbitrary and autonomous portrayal.\(^\text{14}\) Reflecting on Strauss’ seminal importance J C O’Neill comments indicatively:

His *Life of Jesus* spawned hundreds of Lives of Jesus for popular consumption (he even wrote one himself), so that his work more decisively affected the authority of the Bible at a popular level than that of anyone else in the nineteenth century, for to write a *Life of Jesus* rather than a commentary on the sacred Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is to treat Jesus as one more hero whose life will be of interest to the reading public.\(^\text{15}\)

Certainly, in Scotland Robert Rainy’s impression was that the new atmosphere was “more calm, more catholic, more considerate, more human”. Perhaps, not surprisingly then, by 1872 A M Fairbaim could write of the challenge to the old orthodoxy that,

> the cultured intellect of to-day has lost the one-sidedness, the dogmatism, the firm faith in broad systems built on narrow premises which characterised the theological mind of the seventeenth century. Our modes of thought, the method of our

\(^\text{12}\) In Scotland the influence of biblical criticism was not limited to the Kirk. Ironically, the work of two Old Testament professors of the Free Church of Scotland - A B Davidson and William Robertson Smith – also proved significant. See MacLeod, *The Second Disruption*, 40-47.

\(^\text{13}\) Sell traces the tension between the classical conservatism and the emerging liberalism especially through the eyes of Robert Watts (1820-1895), Professor of Theology at the Presbyterian College Belfast (1866-1895), and Andrew M Fairbairn (1838-1912), eventually first principal of Mansfield College, Oxford. *Ibid.*, 520ff..

\(^\text{14}\) In the early twentieth century J Gresham Machen was to give classic expression to this tension in his defence of orthodox Christianity in *Christianity and Liberalism*. First published 1923. Reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Scriptural and doctrinal studies, the tendencies begotten by the progress and discoveries of science, have effected changes both in the matter and form of our doctrinal beliefs.\textsuperscript{16}

What gradually replaced the dogmatism was a new orthodoxy in which deference to natural science, a commitment to the historical criticism of the Bible and a weariness with creedal and confessional statements began to hold sway.\textsuperscript{17}

Hand in hand with this distaste for the dogmatic spirit and the looser confessional commitment it fostered, there developed, \textit{thirdly} (and ironically), a new preference for apologetics. Although the defence of the faith would appear compatible with the old dogmatic spirit, the new apologetic was epitomised in Scotland by John Tulloch's anti-dogmatic approach to the reasoning out of the Christian faith. Increasingly apologetics rested not on appeals to miracles, prophecy and the absolute necessity of the atoning death of Christ, but on a recast understanding of the teaching and personality of the Jesus of the Gospels. The new perspective viewed the Gospels as fluid, passing and literary rather than rigid, fixed and scientific and was therefore ill-suited to maintain the confidence of traditional apologetics. As Kent puts it, "orthodox theology had lost its grip on culture, which in its turn was getting a grip on the gospels."\textsuperscript{18}

Linked to the necessity of apologetics and arising from the growth of the British empire was, \textit{fourthly}, a new awareness of comparative religion and the relative position in world-history. Imperial expansion not only underlined the duty of mission, but also its possibility. Yet with limited initial success, Christians at home wondered about the extent of God's purposes for humankind. Liberals interpreted the disappointment of mission as further evidence that the world's great religions were culture-bound.\textsuperscript{19} Thus the classic Evangelical exclusivist insistence on the verity of Christian doctrine came under fresh scrutiny. Meanwhile, the broadened awareness of religious life outwith Christendom made in-house debates on secondary issues look pedantic.

This was demonstrated, \textit{fifthly}, by the new advocacy of Arminian decisionism in evangelism. Imported during the first campaign of the American revivalists,
Moody and Sankey, decisionism challenged the Calvinistic teaching that “decisions for Christ” could only be made on the basis of a prior monergistic regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. That evangelical belief survived the epochal impact of the new ideas at all is, paradoxically, attributable to the revival in which Moody and Sankey figured.

For all these factors, however, as important for the spreading influence of Erskine and McLeod Campbell was the forging of influential and enduring friendships such as developed between Erskine and the emerging Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), and which was to be of significance for the work Robert Candlish during the 1860s. From this contact can be traced the origins of the later orthodox Calvinist reaction to the Broad School influence, a reaction that produced both Candlish’s distinctive contribution to discussions of the Fatherhood of God and the fallout it engendered, the details of which are documented in what follows.

At sixteen Maurice witnessed his mother’s and sisters’ traumatic abandonment of the faith of his Unitarian father for Calvinistic orthodoxy and the Anglican Communion. Hurt by the domestic tension, Maurice confided in a friend of Erskine’s, which eventually resulted in a first encounter with the laird. The reading of Erskine’s volume The Brazen Serpent “produced”, Maurice was to testify, “a very important effect upon his mind.” Writing to his sister shortly after he exclaimed:

I cannot... give up Mr Erskine, one of whose books has been unspeakably comfortable to me... The peculiarities of his system may be true or not, but I am certain a light has fallen through him on the Scriptures, which I hope I shall never lose, and the chief tendancy I feel he has awaked in my mind is to search them more and more.

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21 Ibid., 230.
23 When Maurice complained to the lady of “being destined to a few short years of misery here, as an earnest of and preparation for that more enduring state of wretchedness and woe...” (Maurice (Ed.), The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, vol. 1, 43), the woman objected that, “such a view [was] not supported by the letter or the spirit of that revelation which alone can be admitted as evidence in the case.”
25 Maurice (ed.), Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, vol. 1, 121. Writing of this time 39 years later he remembered that in pondering “what a Gospel to mankind must be” he had been “helped much in finding an answer to this question by... Mr Erskine’s books - I did not then know him personally - and by the sermons of Mr. Campbell. The English Church I thought was the witness for that universal redemption which the Scotch Presbyterians had declared to be incompatible with their Confessions.” (Ibid., 183).
Not until September 1847 did the two men eventually meet at Linlathen, by which time Maurice was already an author of some repute. A year and a half later we read of Maurice describing Erskine as "the best man I think I ever knew." Such private regard received formal recognition in his dedication of his book *The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament* (1853). Writing to Erskine about the tribute he confessed:

I have longed to do what I have done for many years, when an occasion should offer. I wished to tell others how much I believe they, as well as I, owe to your books; how they seem to me to mark a crisis in the theological movements of this time.

It seems then that Vidler is right to say that "we have ample evidence that [Maurice] was influenced by Erskine more decisively and more constructively than by any of his contemporaries". It was this influence that formed the bridge between the Broad School in England and its Scottish sympathisers. The friendship facilitated a two-way channel of theological interchange that was to give increased and broader momentum to the rejection of the ecclesiastical status quo.

As one of the most innovative of Victorian theologians, Maurice later exercised an influence comparable to that of Coleridge. Coleridge, being a major theological mind of the early nineteenth century, stood, as we saw in the last chapter, "at the starting point of various lines of thought that were followed, and more carefully marked out, by a number of Christian thinkers whose minds he set in motion." In particular, his influence was driven by his engagement with biblical criticism. To him has been attributed the transformation of nineteenth-century

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26 However, in the same year as his publication of *The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament* and also of his *Theological Essays* (1853) he was expelled from King's College. The reason for this was his attack on the doctrine of eternal punishment in his *Theological Essays*. Later he returned to professorial work as Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge ("Maurice, Frederick Denison (1805-1872)", *op. cit.*). 434
27 Ibid, 533. It was during this visit he also met McLeod Campbell.
28 F Maurice (ed.), *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, vol. 2, 150.
33 Among those influenced by Coleridge, Stephen Prickett more generally includes Maurice himself, John Sterling, Julius and Augustus Hare, F C Robertson, F J A Hort, George MacDonald, and, "more cautiously, and with obligatory public reservations, members of the Oxford Movement like Keble and Newman; and, more surprisingly, men of totally different backgrounds and traditions, from Mill to
Evangelicalism. Like Maurice, Coleridge had deserted Unitarianism for the Church of England.  
Although according to Vidler's claim Maurice was "never a narrow theologian", either in the subjects he pursued or in the theological positions he occupied, Maurice personally objected to being categorised as a Broad School theologian. John Kent may well have some sympathies with Maurice here. He describes him as one of a small group that included Bushnell and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who, although keen to stress religious experience, were nevertheless neither strictly liberal nor strictly orthodox. Whether this be true or not, we know that Maurice's objections went unheard. Broad School theologians gladly adopted him as one of their own.

Whereas the Oxford Movement (1833-1845/51) was generally made up of High School Anglicans, and the Low School of Evangelicals, the Broad School
attracted liberal Anglicans and reflected the romantic rejection of dogmatism.

According to Altholz,

To an extent this represented a continuation of eighteenth century latitudinarianism. However, it was transformed by elements of evangelical pietism, of Coleridgian mysticism, and of German philosophy and historical research; and it was more affirmatively liberal in theology and more conscious of a social mission. 41

Robert Rainy captures the ethos of the Broad School:

the new school had no quarrel with the primary characteristic of the Reformation Theology; in so far, namely, as men individually are called to Christ, are summoned to recognise in Him the Revelation of God, credible for each, the way of access to God, and of life in God, directly propounded to each. All this might take on a new colour in the hands of the new school, but was far from being repudiated. Much otherwise it was, however, with the next outstanding feature of the older theology. This was the prominence of the juridical element, the regulative influence of Law..., and of Rectitude as the guardian of Law. In this form, according to the Reformation Theology, the original relation to God and man is seized and exhibited. In a steadfast harmony with this the operations of grace are conceived to proceed. By means of the unchanging standard hence arising the work of salvation is measured and revealed. And on this strong foundation - a foundation in God’s nature and man’s - the worth and worthiness of the blessings of redemption are conceived to be secured. This juridical element, this regulative influence of Law, and of justice maintaining Law, is the dogma building-element in the most characteristic parts of the Reformation Theology, its anthropology and soteriology. In saying this I do not imply that the element named is the only one - nor that it is the most momentous and central one - nor that it is the chief fount of influence and motive. But it is the cementing element; that by which elements are made conceivable. By means of it dogmatic precision and definite relations between one dogmatic position and another are introduced and fixed. It was sure to be attacked therefore: First, because the dismissal of it was the readiest way of relaxing doctrinal coherence and precision; Secondly, because this juridical conception has dark and solemn aspects on the state of men here and hereafter, which the new school thought inconsistent with the character of God, and with the necessities of the human heart. At the same time also the Scripture teaching which proclaims the juridical element in the relations of God to men had to be explained away. This, therefore, was the point to which the relaxing and broadening tendency of the time energetically attached itself. The polemic was carried on by various men of great energy and devotedness. They were persuaded that in this way only room could be made for the due place and influence of what they regarded as the vital christian verities, especially the Fatherhood of God and the filial character and privileges of men. The attack was directed against the Reformed theology, as the foe in presence; but the questions raised had a far wider sweep; for the object in view was the expulsion of juridical ideas, which were embodied in one form or other not merely in the Reformed Theology, but in the teaching of the whole Church of Christ, with the exception of the earlier school of Alexandria. Among these men Maurice stood conspicuous by many admirable qualities. 42

41 Altholz, op.cit., 100. By the mid-nineteenth century the Tractarian movement had changed the Anglican landscape by altering the configuration of High, Low and Broad Churchism - terms that each originated in the eighteenth century (ibid., 33f.; The Church of England c.1689-c.1833, op.cit., 30). As Altholz makes clear, whereas the Lattitudinarians were originally connected with the Low Church, by the mid-nineteenth century it was the emergence of the Broad Church movement that continued the Latitudinarian tradition of Anglicanism (Martin Fitzpatrick, “Latitudinarianism at the Parting of the Ways” in The Church of England c.1689-c.1833, op.cit., 225).

Not all greeted this new mood with enthusiasm, nor those shaping it. Attitudes were generally divided across national and denominational boundaries, and among those known as Federationists on the one hand and members of the Broad School on the other. While the former were primarily occupied with truth, the latter were taken up with ecclesiastical Utilitarianism.43 Sadly, there was absent a mediating party that could have recognised the romantic concerns while rectifying the execution of them through the application of rigorous exegetical and hermeneutical methods.

In the prevailing polarisation the choice was clear-cut: transition or stagnation. If Erskine, McLeod Campbell and, to a lesser extent, Irving, were to the fore in Scotland in shaping the transition to the new mood, Robert S Candlish (1806-1873) - the recognised leader of the Free Church of Scotland subsequent to the death of Thomas Chalmers (1847) - sought to remind his denomination (and conservatives beyond it) that if maintenance of creedal orthodoxy was tantamount to stagnation, then “stagnation” was what was needed to counter the rising theological revolution. Ironically, however, Candlish’s method of defending orthodox doctrine was not to lack its own brand of innovation, which factor contributed significantly to the distraction of his fellow Westminster Calvinists from the main intention of his work.

8.1 Robert S Candlish

In the spring of 1864 Candlish delivered the first series of Cunningham lectures at New College, Edinburgh. The lectureship had been established in memory of the theological stalwart and orthodox Calvinist William Cunningham D.D. (1805-61).44

43 These terms are derived from Greene’s article (ibid., 306).
44 Charles Hodge of Princeton (1797-1878) regarded him “as the greatest Calvinistic divine of our new time”. It has also been said that “he... was the greatest systematic theologian that Scotland has ever produced.” (James MacGregor, “Dr William Cunningham”. BFER, 20 (1871), 753). John Macleod describes him as “the most eminent of the group of evangelical divines of his age”, and “one of the foremost theologians of the Reformed school in the widest sense” and cites Hugh Martin as having “bracketed his name... with that of Thomas Halyburton as one of the two greatest divines that their country have ever produced.” (Scottish Theology. Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943, 269). Cf. Jean Watson’s opinion in Life of Robert Smith Candlish, D.D., Minister of St. George’s Free Church, and Principal of the New College, Edinburgh. Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1882, 25). More recently Donald Macleod has suggested that if Scottish churchmen were ever to opt for the theology of the Reformation over the Enlightenment then “people will once again take seriously Cunningham’s claim to be considered Scotland’s greatest theologian” (DSCHT. S.v. “Cunningham, William”).
Although their friendship had not been without its difficulties, it was particularly appropriate that Candlish should deliver the first series. After all he had been Cunningham's colleague for thirty years, and on his death was appointed his successor as Principal of New College. "In the public mind they were associated as the two ablest churchmen who came to the front in the Ten Years' Conflict in the Church of Scotland which ended in the Disruption of 1843."

Candlish took the opportunity afforded by the lectureship to address the key issue of God's Fatherhood. By putting a conservative spin on the subject he hoped to counter the growing Broad School influence countrywide. The theme of God's Fatherhood had formed a significant part of Candlish's interest in the familial aspects of the Gospel throughout much of his life. Concerned to reflect the biblical primacy of the theocentric over the anthropocentric, Candlish believed the nature of sonship and brotherhood to be seen clearly only in the light of divine Fatherhood. In the preface to his *Discourses Bearing upon the Sonship & Brotherhood of Believers and other kindred subjects*, he writes: "All that I mean my title to indicate is, that I have selected

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41 The two men had been estranged for a period due to the College Controversy (1853-55). However, the breach was healed as is evident from the tribute offered by Candlish on the Lord's day after Cunningham's death (see William Wilson, *Memorials of Robert Smith Candlish, D.D., Minister of St. George's Free Church, and Principal of the New College, Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1880, 529; cf. 482-497 and 514-515 and J P Lee, "Dr R S Candlish as Preacher and Theologian", (University of Edinburgh: PhD thesis), 1953, 52-53).

42 Watson refers to Cunningham's biography as supporting the view that the two men had become acquainted about 1834 (op. cit., 23; *DSCHT*. S.v. "Candlish, Robert Smith" by J R Wolfe, 134; "The death of Dr. Candlish", *The United Presbyterian Magazine* 17 (1873), 528). For first hand comparisons of the two men see William Knight's volume, *Some Nineteenth Century Scotsmen: Being Personal Recollections*. Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1903, 103 and 105-106.


44 The conditions of the Lectureship state that, "the Lecturer shall be at liberty to choose his own subject within the range of Apologetical, Doctrinal, Controversial, Exegetical, Pastoral, or Historical Theology, including what bears on missions, home and foreign, subject to the consent of the Council". The whole purpose of the lectureship was the "advancing [of] the Theological Literature of Scotland" (Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God* (FG), ix).

45 Lee notes that Candlish's "teaching on the Fatherhood of God infiltrates most of his sermons and expositions." (op.cit., 142) However, his interest in the Fatherhood of God was not isolated from a concern for related themes such as sonship, adoption, the new birth, and the consequent brotherhood of believers. "It appears true that his main interest in the Fatherhood of God as it is associated with the sonship of believers, was early born" (ibid. Italics inserted).

46 For this reason Lee labels the Fatherhood of God as Candlish's "own special theological interest" (ibid., 142). For evidence of this, see Candlish's Cunningham Lectures, his commentary on the first epistle of John (recently republished as *A Commentary on 1 John*. A Geneva Series Commentary. Reprinted from the 3rd ed. 1877. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), and his volume of sermons entitled *Discourses bearing upon the Sonship and Brotherhood of Believers and other kindred subjects* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1872). Macleod writes that, "instead of taking the line of historical review of a subject which had been thrashed out in the region of polemics, the lecturer took a doctrine or cluster of doctrines in which it was possible for him to do what was more..."
such as seem to me to bear more or less directly on what has always been a favourite line of thought with me, and what has formed the main topic in my writings; - especially in my Lectures on the Fatherhood of God and on the First Epistle of John."

In addition to the possible domestic factors that moulded Candlish's thematic choice there were also theological influences that impacted on him. First, there were his ecclesiastical responsibilities. He felt keenly the responsibility of keeping the Free Church anchored to its theological moorings during what proved to be an era of tumultuous revolutionary upheaval in biblical studies and confessional theology:

It seems apparent that Candlish was under some sense of mission when he delivered his lectures on the Fatherhood of God. The old theology of the Westminster confession had been under attack. One of its most vital points was in danger. If it were allowed that God is the Father of all men, if the very doctrine of the divine fatherhood were to form the ground and argument for the atonement, then the old Calvinism of limited atonement would be rendered untenable. He perceived that before long the entire scheme of the Westminster theology would collapse. 52

Thus, by providing an orthodox Calvinist interpretation of the Fatherhood of God Candlish sought to counter the universalistic sentiments gaining currency at that time.

It was not unnatural then that Candlish should engage Maurice. A decade earlier Candlish had written a substantial reply to Maurice's Theological Essays and must have felt considerably more informed about his theology than about either Erskine's or McLeod Campbell's.53 Indeed, although Maurice is not mentioned by name,54 Hugh

less pioneer work; for the subject of Adoption had not received anything like the full treatment that Justification had." (Scottish Theology, 273).

51 Candlish, Discourses, vi.
52 Lee, op. cit., 244.
53 It was a work described by Rainy as "everywhere suggestive of fresh thoughts and outlooks; but it could hardly admit of much calm elaboration of any special contributions to the dogmatic treatment." See Wilson, op.cit., 613-614; Tulloch, op.cit., 280-281. Wilson records that in February 1854 Candlish had delivered a lecture in London to the YMCA. During the lecture Candlish stated that, "he had read with admiration some of the previous writings of Mr. Maurice, but felt that the views taught in his Theological Essays were likely to exercise an influence adverse to what he believed to be the essential truths of the gospel." (op.cit., 488). In the same lecture he explained that his Examination of Mr. Maurice's Theological Essays (London, James Nisbet and Co., 1854) was on the verge of publication. In the preface Candlish makes the disclaimer that he was not "an English theologian, [or] familiar with England's academic habits and modes of thought." By the time of the Cunningham Lectures, however, Candlish could no longer claim such ignorance. Indeed it was his very insight into the prevailing theological climate that provided one of the grounds for his choice of theme. Incidentally, Candlish's general dislike for English theology was reciprocated by an English dislike of Candlish (I L B, "Dr. Candlish", CP 5 (1881), 187).
54 See, for example, the preface to the first edition of The Fatherhood of God, xvi; preface to the third edition, ibid., xxix-xxx. Maybe Candlish's silence is due to his hearing of Maurice's response to a public critique that Candlish had given preparatory to the publication of his reply Maurice's Theological Essays. To an acquaintance, Maurice wrote: "Have you heard that Dr. Candlish came up from Scotland to lecture against me at Exeter Hall, and cut up the Essays in presence of a vast assembly...on Tuesday night? He was much applauded; I suppose not one in a hundred of the audience had heard of the book, and not one in fifty of the author, till this Champion of the Free Church proclaimed my crimes. He is certainly not a
Martin reckoned that Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures were the second instalment of his critique of Maurice’s theology. They certainly indicate contemporary perceptions of Maurice’s stature comparative to Campbell’s. This, however, is unsurprising for by the 1860s Maurice, the unofficial head of the Broad School in England, was well on the way to becoming “the father of modern English theology”. That said, Candlish mentions Maurice by name only at the end of the supplementary volume of his tome The Fatherhood of God and then only by the school that went under Maurice’s name. Nevertheless it is clear that Maurice was never far from Candlish’s mind. As McKinlay writes:

The Broad School of Theology, as represented by men like F.D.Maurice, attacked the Reformed Theology, especially that theology in its juridical aspect. For Maurice and the Broad School, God was regarded as a loving and paternal Father of all men. That God was a righteous Judge, that God dealt with His creatures in a judicial manner, was something that was heartily repudiated by Maurice and his followers. Such an attitude, if correct, and if permitted to go unchallenged, might easily have dealt a crippling blow to the cause of Reformed Theology. At this point, Dr. Candlish entered the arena on behalf of the Reformed Theology.

Candlish’s interest was moulded, secondly, by his reading. We know, for example, that his emphasis on the oneness of Christ’s eternal sonship came from his knowledge of the Methodist Richard Treffry’s volume An Inquiry into the Doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ as a student and probationer. Through this volume Candlish learned of A Dissertation on the Eternal Sonship of

judicious man, though I cannot but be thankful that attention should be called to the subjects I have treated of, even amidst clappings and ‘hears.” (The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice Chiefly Told in His Letters. vol. 2. 4th ed., Edited by F Maurice. London: Macmillan and Co., 1885, 237).

Candlish, Martin wrote, “had the penetration to reduce the controversy between [the Broad] school and the orthodox Evangelical Churches to these, its real issues: First, Does God govern his intelligent creation by true and proper objective Moral Law? Second, Is his administration sovereign, including probation and penalty proper, or is it merely disciplinary and paternal? In compelling a statement of the lists in this form, Dr Candlish has done incalculable service to the cause of truth; while, in declining all skirmish for mere outposts in detail, he has forced the tide of battle straight to the adverse citadel, and pulled out, we believe, irreplaceably, its twofold foundation. We gratefully recognise the first half of this service as accomplished by his “Examination of Maurice’s Theological Essays.” The achievement of the second we as gladly hail in the volume now before us.” (H Martin, “Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures”, BFER, 14 (1865), 720-721). We are reliant on Lee for Martin’s authorship of this article (“Dr. R.S. Candlish as Preacher and Theologian”, 151-152).

Although NA had been published eight years previously, it had initially fallen flat from the presses and did not go to a second edition until 1867 (Kinnear, op. cit., 70. See D F Wright’s list of NA editions). For an example of Campbell’s critical sympathies with the Broad School see his Memorials, vol. 2, 255; cf. 273.


Christ written by his fellow Calvinistic Presbyterian, James Kidd. Apart from Treffry and Kidd, however, there is little evidence of the direct impact of other authors, despite McKinlay's confident claim that Irenaeus, Calvin and George Hill were the main influences on his thought.

It is by no means certain whether there is warrant to assert this. Even McKinlay seems uncertain. On the one hand, he acknowledges that "it is not always clear whether Candlish has gone direct to Irenaeus himself, or whether his knowledge of Irenaeus' theology comes to him via Calvin and/or Treffry." On the other hand, he claims that Calvin's theology is "woven into the very fabric of Candlish's writings", but exaggerates in stating that the reformer is often quoted in his works. This is not the case. In his lectures, Candlish cites Calvin more than either Erskine or Campbell, but seems not to have been as conversant with the reformer as McKinlay suggests. What resemblances there are could have been as much due to his Presbyterian background and education as to his reading of the reformer.

Throughout both his commentary on 1 John and his Cunningham Lectures (including the supplementary volume of the fifth edition) Candlish alludes to about forty authors/theologians. He refers to Calvin on only three occasions: twice in a quotation and once in a tenuous rebuttal of the accusation of novelty in his views.

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60 McKinlay does justice to Candlish when he observes that: "In seeking to ascertain the major influences in Candlish's theological writings, we are immediately confronted with the problem that Candlish doesn't say very much about the men and books that exercised the greatest influence in his thinking. Even allowing for the fact that Candlish was writing approximately a hundred years ago when footnotes and bibliographies were not standard apparatus in theological works, his references to writers and theological works are meagre in the extreme. Of course, it must also be remembered that most of Candlish's writings of a theological nature were expository studies where it is not nearly so important to document one's sources in the same way as one would in a more technical theological treatise. Anyhow, Candlish does not provide us with many clues as to the sources of his theological thought, though he does mention a few names and a few books which appear to have influenced him a great deal." (op.cit., 21-22).

61 Ibid., 23.

62 Ibid.

63 Pre-Reformation: Ante-Nicene divines, Athanasius, and Irenaeus (FG, 127, xii and 129); Justin Martyr and the Athanasian Creed (The Fatherhood of God (Supplementary volume), 152 and 57. From henceforth FG (suppl. vol.)). Post Reformation: John Stock, Morgan, John Ebrard, Friederich Lücke, Nathaniel Hardy, Matthew Poole, John Howe (A Commentary on 1 John, vii, viii and ix); Turretine, James Kidd, Grinfield, Alexander, Thomas Crawford, "a critical writer", Thomas Hall, Alford (FG, 158 and 160, 5 and 37fn., 69, 82, 98 and 186, 111, 276); Bull, Pearson and Horsley, Hamilton, Priestley, Waterland, William Cunningham, author of BFER article, Dorner, Hooker, Delitschz, Bengel, Hermann Witsius, Griffith, Combe, Locke, Filmer and the school of Maurice (FG (suppl. vol.), 54, 55 and 57, 25, 55, 57, 60, 162, 148, 151, 153, 168, 171, 175, 183); Thomas Goodwin, Schleiermacher, Treffry, John Owen (FG, xviii., xiv, 38, xxxiii and FG (suppl. vol.), 48 and 144, 149-150, 151, 17-18).

64 Both references are found in FG (suppl. vol.), 58 and 155-156.
Even then Candlish fails to read Calvin correctly despite his claim that he "never advanced any statement without being satisfied in [his] own mind that it was really in accordance with the opinions [he] had received from the teaching of the soundest divines". While accurately noting "that in his Institutes Calvin does not formally discuss the subject of adoption", he wrongly states that "Calvin makes no reference whatever to sonship as forming any part of his constitution or any element in his standing".

Candlish's reading provided him with significant reasons for choosing the Fatherhood of God as his theme for the Cunningham Lectures. He realised that a constructive approach to the Bible's familial models would both highlight its absence from the creeds of history, while simultaneously rebutting the Broad School excesses. "[W]hen the opponents sought to overthrow the Evangelical theology by their manner of asserting a Divine Fatherhood," states Rainy, "Candlish had a counterposition, often expounded in his preaching, with which he felt strong to meet them. For the thought of the Fatherhood and Sonship was as dear to him as to Maurice, only he conceived it could be more Scripturally apprehended and more fruitfully applied." Consequently, the reader of The Fatherhood of God is conscious not only of Candlish's rebuffing of the current theological ethos, but also of his realisation of the neglect of the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of believers throughout historical theology. It is in this context that he makes some of the most perceptive comments to date concerning the church's neglect of adoption. In doing so, he demonstrated an awareness of the contours of historical theology that far outstripped that found in either Erskine or Campbell.

65 FG (suppl. vol.), 143. He then continues: "And though I did not care to encumber my book with an array of authoritative extracts, - which, being often incidental and indirect, might have required explanations to bring out their bearings, - I indicated in my preface the sort of backing which I claimed from the general consent of Christian authorship." In a similar manner in his commentary he writes: "I do not quote authors, or discuss their different views and opinions. I attempt no minute analysis of texts, nor any elaborate verbal and grammatical construing of them. My object is a wider and broader one. It is to bring out the general scope and tenor of the Apostle's teaching, as simply and clearly as I can." (A Commentary on 1 John, ix) In spite of these allowances for Candlish's approach, one common to nineteenth-century inquiry, it is clear that had he noticed the place of adoption in Calvin he would have drawn upon him far more substantially in his defence.

66 FG (suppl. vol.), 156; cf. Martin, "Candlish's Cunningham Lectures", 725. This was a notion that was to become embedded in Reformed thought, as we shall see in the next chapter. In spite of this Lee reckons that Candlish was "much like Calvin" (op. cit., 50 and 64).

67 Ibid. He continues: "there is no hint of anything like a filial relation, or of anything beyond intelligence and freedom, combined with holiness and righteousness, in a position of probation under authority and law.... And in the second place, whenever he speaks of redemption, Calvin brings in the idea of sonship; and he invariably connects it with the sonship of Christ".

68 Ibid., 615-616. What Rainy says here of Maurice may equally be said of Erskine and McLeod Campbell.
Beginning with the early Fathers, Candlish complains that the Fatherhood of God and sonship of believers were "lines of theological inquiry on which they scarcely at all entered".  

One might almost say that it has fared somewhat ill with the truth as regards God's fatherhood and his people's sonship at both eras - both in the primitive Church and in the Church of the Reformation. It may, perhaps, in some respects, have had more justice done to it at the former era than at the latter; although the patristic literature shows too plainly how the controversies about the supreme divinity of the Son tended to draw men's minds away from the sonship of his disciples.

As regards the theology of the Reformation Candlish observes that, "the subject of adoption, or the sonship of Christ's disciples, did not... occupy the place and receive the prominence to which it is on scriptural grounds entitled." While ultimately unjustifiable, the reformers' omission was understandable:

The reformers had enough to vindicate 'the article of a standing or falling church' - justification by faith alone; to recover it out of the chaos of Popish error and superstition; and to reassert it in its right connection with the doctrine of the absolute Divine sovereignty which Augustine had so well established. Their hands were full.

As we have seen earlier the same could have been said in part at least about the Puritans. Thus, although Candlish opposed the prevalent urge for confessional revision he refused to regard the WCF as a closed canon. Contrary to the familiar caricature of Westminster Calvinists, his loyalty to Scripture demanded that he keep an open mind as to the continuing validity of the seventeenth-century theology:

I do not call for any revision of our creeds, confessions, and catechisms. By all means let them stand untouched; as monuments of vast erudition and mental power of other days, and as safeguards of truth and bulwarks against error for ages yet to come. But it is no disparagement to these symbols to say of them that they do not exhaust the whole volume of revelation. For that is simply saying that the compilers were uninspired men, and that "the riches of Christ are unsearchable." Take our books for instance, our Confession and Catechisms. I never have had any scruple to affirm that their statements on the subject of adoption are by no means satisfactory. No doubt all that they say is true; but it amounts to very little. The answer in the Shorter Catechism is really, in substance, scarcely anything more than that adoption is adoption. In the other documents, the matter is handled more fully, and some of the privileges of the children of God are enumerated. Still even in them the whole matter is left in the last degree vague and indefinite. And no information whatever is given, nor is any opinion expressed, as to how the relation of sonship is constituted, or as to what its precise nature is, viewed in the light of the incarnation.

He further explains:

The creeds and confessions of the Protestant and Reformed Churches, as well as the theological systems of their colleges, are for the most part defective in what they say on the subject. In some it is not even noticed; in others it is made a part of justification,

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69 FG, 192
70 Ibid. We are dependent upon Candlish's astute observations for much of the understanding of the neglect of adoption.
71 FG, 194.
or a mere appendix to it; in none I believe, does it receive sufficiently full and distinct
treatment. Hence perhaps it is that the doctrine of the fatherhood has been so little
understood and so much abused in recent days. 72

In fact, Candlish realised more than anybody else that the Reformed had
become their own enemies:

If... the only mode of dealing with Christ, and with those whom Christ answers for in
judgement, ...is prominently brought forward and insisted upon, - there may
undoubtedly be some risk of its degenerating into barren and dogmatic orthodoxy. It
would be a curious and interesting speculation to inquire whether we may not thus, to
some extent at least, account for the lapse of the theology of the Reformation in the
schools and colleges of the Continent, as well as among ourselves, first into rigid and
frigid scholastic systematising, and then into rationalism. 73

Thus, he sought to balance the juridical and familial aspects of the Gospel with a view
to developing Reformed theology. 74 In Rainy's words: “His faith in the work was, not
that the Reformation doctrines exhaust the Scripture teaching, but that, as great
instalments of it, they enlighten and encourage yet further search.” 75 Setting out to
delicately redraw the theological map, he was simultaneously determined to preserve
its ancient landmarks: 76

I consider that we have the fullest liberty to sink new shafts in this mine, which they
evidently had not explored, if only we take care that our diggings shall do no damage
to any of the far more important mines which they did explore, and explored so
thoroughly well and so well. 77

A third reason for his choice of the Fatherhood of God was his recent
completion of his commentary on 1 John. 78 His study of the Johannine emphasis on the

72 FG, 193. Candlish's comments are interesting in that they demonstrate the frequent lack of
discrimination among critics of Westminster Calvinism. Too often they tar all subscribers to the
Confession with the same brush. Such generalisations do not stand up to scrutiny. The true Calvinist,
such as Candlish, will always test confessional statements by the teaching of Scripture. They will read
the WCF through Scripture not the Scriptures through the WCF. Compare, for example, Candlish's attitude
with that exhibited in the proceedings against McLeod Campbell. During the proceedings the young
minister was told: “You may just as well tell us of vitrified forts, or anything else in natural history, as
tell us about Geneva Confessions, or Wirtemberg [sic] Confessions, or any other Confession than the
Westminster Confession, to which all of us have subscribed in the most solemn manner.” (cited by
Tuttle, op. cit., 49).

73 FG, 166-167.

74 As Martin sympathetically observed: “In the voluminous writings of Jonathan Edwards, there is neither
treatise, chapter, sermon, nor section, on adoption; and who can fail to regret that the questions raised by
Dr. Candlish have not been handled by that greatest of metaphysical divines? The works of John Howe
are equally destitute of reference to the subject; and what a charm the most charming of discursive
theologians would have thrown around its manifold delightful aspects! Owen, who has a justly renowned
volume on Justification, devotes sixteen pages to adoption.” (Candlish's Cunningham Lectures", 727).
75 Wilson, op.cit., 609.

76 “I have endeavoured to lend some help in the way of, as it were, breaking new ground” (FG, 195).
77 FG, 195.

78 In his preface to the first edition to A Commentary on 1 John Candlish writes: “[I]n my Lectures on the
Fatherhood of God I had previously referred to these discourses of mine on this Epistle, as being
completed and ready for publication.” (A Commentary on 1 John, vii). In the footnote on the same page,
Fatherhood of God proved preparatory to the delivery of the Cunningham Lectures, and indicates that unlike Erskine and Campbell, he took seriously an exegetical approach to the subject. The purpose of exegesis so far as the lectures were concerned was to elucidate practical truths. The lectures were “to bring out the import and bearing of the Scriptural doctrine respecting the Fatherhood of God, as an influential element in Christian experience.”

Not surprisingly, then, Candlish refers to adoption on as many as sixty-three occasions, well exceeding both Erskine and Campbell. A perusal of these texts, however, immediately reveals Candlish’s typically nineteenth-century approach. By omitting to cite the full range of adoption texts he largely overlooks the redemptive-historical movement of Paul’s thought. Instead, like Campbell, his thoughts revolve around Galatians 4:4, apart from which he only mentions Romans 8:15-16. A further analysis of the citations reveals that Candlish mentions adoption most frequently in relation to historical theology and soteriology (ordo salutis). From these references to adoption it is possible to highlight the three salient features of his doctrine of adoption.

(i) Adoption: The Elevation to an Unknown but Higher Status of sonship

To counteract the universalistic emphases of the Broad School Candlish denied the creative or general Fatherhood of God. Not surprisingly then he also denied a general sonship attributable to man’s creation in the image of God. McKinlay lists three reasons why Candlish took this stance. First, he insisted that original sonship

he writes that the lectures on 1 John “were all finished before the delivery of the Cunningham Lectures on the Fatherhood of God in February and March 1864. And I referred to them, as thus finished, when the Cunningham Lectures were published, about a year after.” (see FG, 156, 182 and 185).

"In the second edition of his commentary he writes: “It is fair to say that, in revising these lectures, I have not lost sight of my teaching as to the Fatherhood of God, on which, as I have explained in the Preface to my former edition, the study of this Epistle had a material influence.” (R S Candlish, A Commentary on 1 John, vi).

80 FG, 1.
81 FG, xx, xxiv, xxv (x3), xxvi, xxxi, xxxiv (x4), xxxv, 90, 91 (x2), 122 (x3), 146 (x3), 149, 151, 153, 155 (x5), 156 (x2), 158 (x4), 160 (x4), 162 (x2), 163 (x2), 164 (x4), 167, 168, 175, 184 (x2), 186 (x2), 192, 195, 197 (x2), 217 (x2), 225 (x2), 231.
82 Only twice are his references to adoption explicitly redemptive historical. See FG, xx and 225 (x1).
83 For either direct quotations of or references to Gal. 4:4 see FG, xxvi, 90, 91 (x2), 122 (x3), 175, 225 (x1). For his use of Rom. 8: 15-16 see FG, 184 (x2), 217 (x2).
84 See FG, xxiv (x4), xxv, 158 (x4), 160 (x4), 192, 195, 197 (x2).
85 See FG, 146 (x3), 149, 151, 153, 155 (x5), 156 (x2), 158 (x4), 160 (x4), 162 (x2), 163 (x2), 164 (x4), 167, 168.
had never been taught as part of the doctrine of the holy Catholic Church. Secondly, he believed that such a doctrine was not only not found in the Scriptures but was contrary to its teaching. Thirdly, he felt that a concession of an original Fatherhood and sonship was destructive of Evangelical truth.

In a manner anticipating our contemporary discussions of religious language, Candlish argued that prior to the incarnation the only possible conception of a Fatherhood/sonship relation between God and humankind must have been analogically derived from the corresponding relation in society. Such human relations serve as theologically applied figures of speech that were intended to signify nothing more than the creative agency of God. As secondary language of Scripture the terms Father and son were not intended to convey a permanent personal relationship between the Creator and humankind. Thus Candlish refused to define them any further. The onus for further definition lay with those asserting an actual and assured original paternal/filial relationship between God and his intelligent creatures.

In Candlish's opinion divine Fatherhood must be something definite, real and lasting with certain specific reciprocal obligations. It is not just a divine feeling of

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87 Candlish was supported in this position by other conservative theologians, especially by those of his own denomination. Hugh Martin, for instance, argued that the orthodox creeds and confessions do not speak of man as having lost his filial relation to God and neither does Scripture. In fact, to combine God's moral government with Fatherhood is impossible without the "special sovereign arrangement" of the gospel ("Candlish's Cunningham Lectures", 732-733 and 746). See also J Matthew, "The doctrine of sonship and the sonship of believers", 18-19. George McClelland, who otherwise lacked sympathy for Candlish's lectures, wrote: "The first aim of the Lectures is to make out, that no creature is a son of God in a real sense by mere creation; and the argument to this affect seems entirely successful, and constitutes the only unexceptionable part of the Work." (Examination of the Statements in the Lectures on "The Fatherhood of God," regarding the Human Nature of Christ, and the Sonship of His People. Edinburgh: Lorimer & Gillies, 1865, 12).

88 At the outset Candlish claims that he addresses the issue by a simple appeal to Scripture (FG, 2), yet curiously he begins with philosophical and analogical reasoning. See lecture 1 (FG, 1-31).

89 FG, 64-65.

90 "It is... incumbent on those who assert it as a natural and original relation, and who insist upon it as their all in all to do so. For the most part, however, they decline the task. They are more inclined to deal in somewhat vague generalities; losing sight, as it seems to me, of an important distinction which in view of the ambiguity of language, ought to be carefully observed." (FG, 4). Hugh Martin, Candlish's fellow Free Churchman, concurred ("Candlish's Cunningham Lectures", 737). Lee, however, disagrees: "Although Candlish fails to define the term 'fatherhood' at the beginning of his Cunningham Lectures, it would seem that he was obliged to do so. Because of this there is a lack of precision in his doctrine of fatherhood. He nowhere says exactly what he means by the term." ("Dr R S Candlish as Preacher and Theologian", 243). Candlish's contemporary and another fellow Free Churchman - the famous John Kennedy of Dingwall (1819-84) - shared this conviction, although he sympathized with Candlish's case (Man's Relations to God, 19). Perhaps the nearest Candlish comes to defining the divine Fatherhood is in his Discourses Bearing upon the Sonship & Brotherhood of Believers (op.cit., 9) where he states that divine Fatherhood has its "true prototype and original model or pattern of the fatherly relation and the fatherly affection" in the Son; but more of that later.
fatherliness, and cannot simply mean origination. Thus, when Paul quotes the Athenian poets that humankind is God’s offspring (Acts 17:28-29), Candlish insists that the apostle does not have a personal relationship in view. He is merely using the poet’s phrase to state that humankind has a common origin from God. By the same token, when the Lucan genealogy (3:38) unfolds retrospectively from Christ through Adam to God, all that is meant is that Adam was literally “of God” (τοῦ Ἀδαμ τοῦ θεοῦ). Origination cannot then be equated with Fatherhood without reducing the term to a mere “euphonious synonym, or figurative personification, for causation”. Accordingly Candlish insisted that although there is a vague popular or poetical sense in which angels and humankind are referred to as God’s children, no authentic relation of sonship to God either ex gratia or ex necessitate is in view.

To say then that divine Fatherhood can be defined as origination not only reduces paternity to a figure of speech it also conflicts with the divine rule or government that is more obviously implied in creation. The Creator’s absolute and sovereign rule naturally places humankind in a juridical or forensic relationship to God. As the constraints of justice conflict with paternity, God cannot simultaneously be a Father to humanity:

It introduces, necessarily, the idea of some sort of intermediate relative position, modifying and qualifying the Creator’s sovereignty and the creature’s subjection; as if the Creator owed something to the creature beyond strict legal justice; and as if the creature had some right to claim, irrespective of mere legal justice, which he might assert, if not against, yet at least upon, the Creator.

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91 FG, 3 and 15.
92 “There is”, Candlish concludes, “no assertion here of any personal relation of fatherhood and sonship. It is merely an argument for community of nature as regards intelligence.” (FG, 67).
93 FG, 16. See also 17. One book reviewer sarcastically wrote of Candlish’s exegesis of the Lucan genealogy: “There is no idea here ‘but that of descent’! True: but it is genealogical descent, or, in other words, it is that descent that involves fatherhood on the one hand, and childship on the other. It is not the “descent” of a balloon that is referred to, or of a stone that has been cast into the air, or of water into a cataract. It is genealogical descent, pure and simple; or that kind of descent that is realised in the eventuation of essential childship as the complement and consummation of essential fatherhood. The expression may not indicate ‘permanent’ bliss conferred and enjoyed, and thus the relationship may not involve all that Dr. Candlish has chosen to associate with it in his thoughts; but it is none the less, for all that, a real relationship of childship on the one hand, and of fatherhood on the other.” (ER, third series, 4 (1865), 56).
94 FG, 21.
95 If “Fatherhood” refers merely to origination, “it cannot, in my judgement, be too strongly asserted, that among the primary and original elements of our relational conception of God, there is absolutely no trace of anything peculiar in the constitution and conditional of his rational, as distinct from his other creatures, beyond the bare fact of intelligent responsibility.” (FG, 17).
96 FG, 12-13.
97 FG, 18.
A "paternal government" would prove fatal to the Creator's prerogative. If the Creator Father and his government paternal, the judgement bestowed on Adam for his failure of probation in Eden evacuates "Fatherhood" of all meaning apart from a general benevolence manifested in such virtues as goodness, kindness, pity and sympathy. If divine Fatherhood consists of pure fatherly love then probation and retribution cannot be possible. "In this dilemma", Candlish explains, "lies the mischief of the view which I oppose."

In spite of Adam's failure of his probation, all was not lost. God still drew near to fallen humankind in a way indicative of that original intention, and of his willingness to welcome him on his return. However, such moves pertain to divine government. Only on completion of a successful probation would God have made and owned Adam as his son by adoption. Thus, when he fell God dealt with him as a rebellious subject and not as a fallen son. He stood before the bar of divine justice and not before his deeply disappointed Father.

The earthly analogy is insufficient then to reveal divine Fatherhood. It is too unstable a basis for such a revelation. In any case, the human possession of the imago Dei indicates that human paternity does not reveal the divine relation.

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100 The relation of fatherhood in God... cannot have its rise in creation, and cannot have its place in that rule or government which is consequent upon creation. Let there be no confounding of things separate and distinct. Government by law and judgement is one thing; fatherhood is something altogether different (FG, 18-19). For an expansion of this see FG, 29 and Discourses, 14.

101 "The question is much more precise and definite. It is about the existence of a certain positively real and actual relation of fatherhood and sonship between the Creator and his intelligent creatures; such a relation as, like all real and actual relations, implies this at least, that in virtue of it certain specific reciprocal obligations of a peculiar nature are incumbent on the parties embraced in it, - having certain specific reciprocal rights, privileges, and endearments associated with them. It is not a divine feeling that may be called fatherly, - as it might be equally well named from some other kindly human analogy, - that we are in search of; but a real and actual divine fatherhood. We want not merely one who, in his other relations, acts as far as possible a fatherly part towards us; but one who is in fact our father." (FG, 15).

102 FG, 24. To substantiate his point Candlish draws on the distinction in Jewish law between a parent and a magistrate (FG, 25-27).

103 FG, 28.

104 FG, 28. This does not square with what Candlish's says elsewhere of redemption in Christ. "There is the offended Father himself providing that the irreversible sentence of law and justice lying upon his rebellious children shall have fitting and sufficient execution upon the head of his own well-beloved Son, who is willing to take their place; so that they may come forth free; no longer under condemnation; but righteous in his righteousness, and sons in his Sonship." (Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians expounded in a series of Discourses, Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1875, 25. Italics inserted). Given that these lectures on Ephesians were delivered from 1863-1869 means that either Candlish changed his mind or contradicted himself (ibid., v).

105 Lee attributes Candlish's concept of man's original relation to God on his abstract notion of the imago Dei in which man is conceived of as merely one capable of intelligence and will (op.cit., 170). A little later Lee discerningly comments: "One would imagine that, having published two volumes on Genesis, Candlish would speak at some length of man being made in the image of God. There is however a
paternity typifies the human relation. Therefore, to define Fatherhood we must look elsewhere than to analogy. In fact we must look exclusively to Christ, for it is the eternal and ontological relation of Fatherhood and Sonship within the Godhead that serves as the real origin, root, ground, archetype, prototype and model of the relationship between God and his creatures. Of that relation Candlish writes:

Here there is no analogy; or, if there is, it is all the other way. It is not analogical reasoning from the human to the divine, but from the divine to the human. There is presented before our eyes the actual working out, in human nature and human experience, of the only relation of fatherhood and sonship which God would have us to realise as possible between himself and us. He would be our father, not as we are the fathers of our children, but as he is the father of his Son Jesus Christ.

This genuine Father/Son relation was not revealed until the incarnation. In Christ God expressly revealed his Fatherhood in a way that divine wisdom had hitherto kept veiled. Thus only with Christ’s advent did it become possible for believing Jews and Gentiles to receive the adoption as sons. Prior to that the status of subject was all that was possible. The significance of adoption is then that it brings the sons of God out from under divine judgement into a permanent filial relation within the family of God.

The problem with Candlish’s refreshingly high estimate of adoption is that, consistent with the development of later Calvinism, it rules out the explicit redemptive-historical context in which both Paul sets his understanding of the doctrine, as was well understood by Calvin. Failing to draw on the reformer’s rich understanding, there is absent from Candlish’s exposition the eschatological tension felt by the Old Testament saints as they awaited the realisation of adoption in Christ (Rom. 9:4 and Gal. 4:4-5). For all his good intentions, he wrongly curtails his understanding of the adoptive state to New Testament believers. His expositional attempt to show then that the revelation of divine Fatherhood was an act of grace rather than creation is, in contrast to Calvin,
often strained, truncated, and overly geared to the dismantling of the Broad School view of divine Fatherhood and human sonship. As his protégé Robert Rainy observed:

I am inclined to think that Dr. Candlish’s treatment of the original condition of man assumed too much of the character of a simple polemic against Sonship and in favour of subjectship. Perhaps if he had combined his main assertion with a more sympathetic weighing of the texts and facts which have suggested to most minds the impression of a goodness we may well call fatherly, he might have strengthened and enriched his theory. He admits “anticipation” of the coming Sonship, as an element or aspect of the original state, and perhaps a thought lies there which might have been advantageously developed.111

(ii) Adoption: The Entrance into the Son’s Relation to the Father

Having established that no paternal/filial relation was constituted by creation, Candlish turns to the “sonship that alone is worthy of that exalted name... the one Eternal Sonship of Christ Himself”.112 Begotten by the Father, the Son enjoys a relation to him that is “natural, necessary and eternal”. It is not, therefore, “constituted by any creative act, or any sovereign volition or fiat of will”.113 Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit, who “is eternally and intimately concerned” with the relation, “develops” the relationship on the stage of the created universe as “evermore a conscious, consenting party” to it.114 In this development the incarnation is of fundamental importance because through it the Holy Spirit brings the eternal Father/Son relation within the range of human cognisance and experience.115 The incarnation serves then as “the clearest, brightest, most gracious and glorious exhibition that has ever been given, or may I not add, that ever can be given, of the divine fatherhood.”116

Thus, Candlish employs the Broad School emphasis on the incarnation in order to defeat its universalistic deductions.117 The incarnation (assumptio carnis)

111 Cited in Wilson, op.cit., 620. Similarly, Lee writes: “In making sonship the crowning principle of salvation Candlish builds such a polemic for adoption that he cannot bring himself to acknowledge that any personal and intimate relation was involved in God’s making man in His own image.” (op.cit., 245).
112 McKinlay, op.cit., 42. Rainy described the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son as the “high source” from which Dr. Candlish “deduced his whole chain of thought” (cited Wilson, op.cit., 621).
113 FG, 37.
114 FG, 37 and 39. Here Candlish points his readers to Kidd and Treffry for fuller treatments of the inter-Trinitarian relationships (FG, 38).
115 FG, 39-40.
116 Ibid.
117 McKinlay regards his approach as a departure from federal theology. Although he is in danger of overstating his case when he says that “the Federal Scheme of Theology had precious little to say about the Incarnation, and even less to say about the relation of the Incarnation to the Atonement”, he is more to the point in observing that, “at best Federal Theology regarded the Incarnation as instrumental - as a necessary means whereby Christ could come and die for the elect whom the Father had chosen before the
demonstrates the fact that the eternal relation between the Father and the Son can be communicated to, and shared in, by intelligent creatures, but is not necessarily. Θεονομίας Christ is the Son of God in respect to both his natures and also to the same degree as he was in heaven, for his Sonship is a relation that belongs to his person and not to either of his natures. "There are not two sonships belonging to him, but only one; not two fatherhoods of God towards him, but only one." Thus, if adoption refers to entrance into the Sonship of Christ, participation in Christ's eternal relation to the Father must be implied. At this juncture Candlish's thought is reminiscent of Calvin's emphasis on incarnational union, for it is the incarnation, he argues, that makes possible the communication of Christ's relation (but not his divine nature).

There is more to the significance of the incarnation. Not only did the natural Son bring his eternal relation to the Father within human cognisance, at the same
time he also became a subject.\textsuperscript{122} The incarnation demonstrates a union of the two relations in Christ almost more wondrous than the union of his two natures: "In virtue of the one nature, he is the Son; in virtue of the other nature, he is a subject and a servant. And being one person, combining in himself both natures, he is at once both son and subject; - both son and servant."\textsuperscript{123}

To assume human subjectship, Christ had to identify himself with us in our fallen, guilty, corrupt and condemned subjectship to God.\textsuperscript{124} Possessed of Adam's pre-Fall human nature,\textsuperscript{125} he placed himself under the law of an authority outraged by its violation. Thus the mystery of the incarnation lies in the co-existence of Christ's Sonship alongside his criminalised and condemned human subjectship, the resolution of which is provided by the fact that Christ divested his subjectship of its condemnation through his obedience unto death, so satisfying God's outraged authority.

This unity of relations in Christ's person is evident from his work. Although an orthodox Calvinist, Candlish exemplified an interest in the life of Christ as significant as McLeod Campbell's:

They could not but observe in their Master's whole demeanour, in his everyday conduct, in all his sayings and doings, a very peculiar style of godliness; - new, unprecedented; giving evidence of a singularly close, intimate, warm, endearing sort of connection between God and him; showing him to be on terms of most confidential fellowship with God. They could not but know - he told them - that this sprang from his knowing God to be his Father, and feeling himself to be God's son; that it was what this fatherhood and sonship meant and implied. But this very manner of living with God, as they were constantly instructed, it was their duty to aim at and realise. And they were instructed, with a view to it, to call God their Father.\textsuperscript{126}

In short, Christ used his subjectship to reveal by lip and by life his Sonship to his Father. Although the incarnation left his filial status unmodified, Christ nevertheless

\textsuperscript{122} FG, 51-54. With something of an untamed imagination and not the slightest trace of scriptural proof, Candlish reflects upon the Son's taking the form of a servant by reference to the unfallen angels. Their joy as sons (see later) becomes complete as they ponder the wonder of the eternal Son becoming a servant as they also are servants. In anticipation of criticism Candlish asks, "is this altogether a wild and unwarranted speculation? I do not think so." He then offered his sole proof text for his surmising, namely 1 Pet. 1:12 - a text which speaks of the angels' curiosity in regard to divine things, but not their curiosity as sons. While the angels, in Candlish's understanding, would have observed Christ in both his eternal relation to the Father as Son and in his post-incarnate relation as Son and Subject, they would have observed these relations meeting in the person of Christ as both "apart and distinct"; and in the same way as the two natures meet in the one person without confusion.

\textsuperscript{123} FG, 50.

\textsuperscript{124} FG, 55.

\textsuperscript{125} For Candlish's reasons for holding that Christ took Adam's pre-Fall human nature see FG, 56. It ought to be remembered that although Candlish does not mention him by name, he had been a younger contemporary of Edward Irving who was deposed from the Church of Scotland on the grounds that Christ took Adam's fallen nature.

\textsuperscript{126} FG, 116.
differed in his address to his Father. Sometimes he would speak to his Father according to his past consciousness within the Godhead and sometimes according to his present awareness among fallen humanity.\(^{127}\) What was new, was the possibility that his relation to the Father could be shared with others.\(^{128}\) Indeed in conversion believers actually participate in the unmodified relation of Sonship that Christ has always with his Father within the Godhead.

Not until the work of redemption is complete does Christ reveal the highest and fullest significance of the identity of relation between his Sonship and theirs (Gal. 4:4).

In order to his making us partakers of His relation to God as the Son, he must make himself partaker of our relation to God as subjects under the law. And not only so. He must redeem us from the guilt and condemnation which, in that relation, we have incurred, and under which we lie helpless. That he has not done till his life on earth is ended. ...it is only on the cross that he can say — "it is finished." It is only "by his resurrection from the dead," as Paul elsewhere says (Rom. 1: 4), that he is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness." And it is only then, - then, and not before, - that he is in a position to make the entire benefit and blessedness of his sonship available in behalf of his disciples, as admitted to be sharers with him in it. Until then, he is justified in not fully or in express terms bringing out all that is implied in his sonship being the model of theirs, - its being, in fact, up to the measure of their new capacity and his redeeming grace, truly and actually communicated to them.\(^{129}\)

Only then is Christ unashamed to call his people "brethren" (Heb. 2:11).\(^{130}\) "Brethren" signifies "not a mere nominal title of courtesy, but a real and actual participation with him in his relation to the Father, and in its fruits, so far as the nature he shares with us allows." (cf. Ps. 22; Jn. 20:17). Once the reserve is gone, he welcomes his disciples into his own combined relation of sonship and subjectship with the words: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

\(^{127}\) Christ uses the title "father" with discrimination. He never uses it of humankind in general, only of his disciples (FG, 102-104). Most of all he uses it of his own Sonship by speaking of "my Father" or "the Father". See Matthew 11: 25-26; 26: 39, 42 (FG, 105. Candlish notes that Christ avoids the appellation "our Father" except in the pattern prayer (FG, 117-119).

\(^{128}\) FG, 112. If it is wondered what the difference is between an unmodified Sonship and a new mode of filial life, Candlish says that the incarnation affects the expression of the relation but not the relation per se. In making the point Candlish contrasted Christ's appeals to his father in Matt.11:25-26 and 26: 39, 42, concluding that "The Father is the same to him, and he is the same to the Father, on both occasions alike. The relation of fatherhood and sonship is the same. But he who sustains the relation of sonship has undergone a change of state." (FG, 106).

\(^{129}\) FG, 122-123.

\(^{130}\) "He was not able to bring out his identifying of them with himself in his sonship, until he proved his identifying of himself with them in their subjectship to be really, for them, complete redemption from its curse." (FG, 126).
There are but two caveats to this identity of relation. On the one hand, believers may have the same place in the Father's heart but their experience of him is recent compared with that of the firstborn. There is a difference then in the circumstances of the origination of the relation (Jn 17:23-24). On the other hand, the firstborn has a greater knowledge of the Father and therefore a greater propensity to realise his Sonship. Candlish insists, however, that these differences are circumstantial rather than essential. Although the Father's love towards the divine redeemer is a more profound degree, it is nevertheless of the same kind as that bestowed on redeemed sinners, simply because they share the same relation with the Son.

(iii) Adoption: A Higher Blessing than any other Soteriological Benefit.

Candlish's references to adoption are very largely focused on the adoptive act rather than the adoptive state. What he says of the latter is very much couched in generalities drawn from his primary emphasis on the former. In his penultimate lecture he takes up the specifics of the adoptive act and begins with the premise that the process of entrance into sonship must accord with the nature and character of the state. Such a process must overcome the two obstacles set in the path of fallen and

131 “Perhaps no two sons in a family ever equally realise their sonship. Both of them may be dutiful, loyal, loving. But there may be in the one a knowledge of their common father, an insight into his heart, an apprehension of his counsels, a sympathy with his pursuits, to which - at least in equal measure or degree - the other does not, and cannot attain. Still, both are sons.” (FG, 113-114).

132 Real care is needed here. “They do not share in the nature of Christ’s sonship”, writes Lee, “but only in his filial position.” (op.cit., 188). McKinlay is therefore imprecise when he writes of the “doctrine of the identity of sonships” (op.cit., 77 (similarly 79, 80 and 83); cf. the incompatibility of this quote with the citations from The Fatherhood of God on 78. In this he was intentionally at odds with modern speculations' and apparently in contradiction of the early Fathers. Not concerned with contradicting modern speculators, Candlish argued that the ante-Nicene Fathers were so concerned to maintain the sonship of Christ as eternal and therefore peculiar to himself, that they isolated Christ's Sonship too much, thereby exaggerating the difference between his sonship and that of his believing disciples (FG, 128). Conversely, in sympathy with Candlish's would-be critics Lee states: “In... equating the believer’s sonship with Christ’s sonship Candlish was aiming extremely high. It seems evident that such a position calls into question the absolute uniqueness of the sonship of Christ in contradistinction to that of men. Any position which fails to allow for the singularity of His sonship must be found inadequate.” (op.cit., 247). They wrongly argued that the differences were essential. Candlish did acknowledge, however, that in spite of their reaction to the Arian controversy the ante-Nicene divines did hold that the filial relation of believers to God is closely connected to that of Christ's and that it could be reckoned substantially the same. As proof Candlish cited out of Treffry Irenaeus' words: “For this cause is the Word man, and he who is the Son of God was made Son of man, that man, receiving the Word and accepting adoption, might become the Son of God.” Had Candlish known he also could have quoted from Origen whose understanding of Jn 20:17 was similar, if not identical, to his own (see Widdicombe, op.cit., 93-94, 114).

133 FG, 135. In short: “According to what the relation itself is, so must the mode of entrance into it be.” (FG, 136).
guilty subjects: the one natural (referring to inward nature) and the other relational (referring to external standing).

To possess a nature appropriate to their status, the sons of God have to be spiritually begotten in a manner parallel to the begetting of Christ. Although his begetting was eternal that of the sons is temporal, thus underlining what Candlish maintains is but a circumstantial difference preparing us for the essential identity of the relation. In the economic Trinity, the Son was begotten by the Father and thus becomes relationally subordinate to him as a Subject. This becomes apparent with the virgin birth: "The only-begotten Son becomes a subject - [that] they who are originally subjects may be, in a real and vital sense, 'begotten,' or born again, as sons."

As prerequisite to our new birth is the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit. Whereas the Spirit "generated Christ's humanity that he might continue to be the Son. He regenerates our humanity that we may become sons." He achieved this by creatively providing Christ with a manhood in which Christ could undo the corruption (the guilt and presence of the old inner man) of our manhood, thereby making it new again. Thus the new birth entails a regeneration through which believers participate in Christ's birth, resulting from which they can enjoy union and communion with him in his holiness. In this way they are moulded into conformity with their Father as true sons by grace.

However, an appropriate nature by itself is insufficient to constitute the relation of sonship. The subjective or inner renewal of regeneration cannot legitimise sonship without the Father's declaration or constitution of the relation. As Christ's Sonship was officially declared at his baptism ("this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"), so must there be an official procedure of adoption constituting believers as sons. Whereas the voice from heaven officially recognises the eternally subsisting Sonship of one who has assumed human nature, in adoption sonship is conferred de

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134 "Those who would make a distinction between the sonships... sometimes represent it as turning on the distinction between natural and adoptive sonship; - Christ being the Father's son by nature, we being sons by adoption only.... If we are the sons of God at all, we are, in virtue of our regeneration, his sons by nature as well as by adoption. The nature, as well as the standing, of the Son is ours." (FG, 155-156).
135 FG, 141.
136 FG, 144-145.
137 FG, 144.
138 Discourses, 48-53. In Calvinistic fashion Candlish uses the terms "regeneration" and "sanctification" interchangeably hence in these pages he sticks to the Confession's terminology, namely justification, adoption, sanctification. Important to note is McKinlay's observation that "For Candlish, the work of regeneration by the Spirit stands at the very heart of the doctrine of our sonship through union with Christ." (op.cit., 92; see also 94).
novo on those who otherwise would remain nothing more than subjects. Adoption “assumes a new born capacity of receiving sonship.... It is a pure, simple and exclusive act of the free relational or relative grace of God”. Thus there can be no genuine sonship without both new birth and adoption:

He must have us to be, not titular, but real and actual children; children by participation of nature as well as by deed of adoption; by a new creation as well as a new covenant; of one mind and heart, of one character and moral frame with himself;¹⁴⁰

There is an important point of contact between these official procedures. In each case the perfecting of subjectship is requisite. For this reason Christ was not declared to be the Son of God with power until he had magnified the law to the point of death by perfect subjection to it. Similarly, but rather speculatively, angels are not adopted by a sovereign act of the free grace of God until they have passed a trial of obedience and are declared justified.¹⁴¹ Likewise, fallen subjects are not capable of sonship until they have been united to Christ through faith and have been bestowed with the Saviour’s righteousness. By justification they become free subjects and the way is opened up for them to enjoy the ulterior and higher benefit of adoption.¹⁴²

Candlish’s point is that adoption uniquely achieves what cannot be accomplished by either regeneration or justification. He therefore sought to reverse the possible historical and theological isolation of adoption from regeneration and its confusion with justification. The isolation of regeneration and adoption divorces the filial nature from the filial standing. Sonship must be both an adoptive and a natural relation. “He who adopts regenerates.”¹⁴³ This is evident from the Johannine corpus where the apostle connects the process of entrance into sonship with regeneration (1 John 2:29-3:1).¹⁴⁴ Providing some evidence of a belief in the distinctiveness of the Johannine corpus, Candlish notes that “John does not say much of the manner of our entering into that relation [of sonship]; but what he does say appears to me to make it

¹³⁹ FG, 146. McKinlay, op. cit., 99 and 114.
¹⁴⁰ A Commentary on I John, 231. For a fuller exposition see 453.
¹⁴¹ Somewhat weakening his case for the adoption of angels, Candlish continues: “There is no inward work of the regenerating spirit needed in their case; nor need the Son assume their nature to redeem them, before he can have them as his brethren.” (FG, 148). However, if they need justification then why not regeneration? This speculative aside looks very much like an attempt to run further from the deduction that angels may have been created as sons.
¹⁴² “So long as men are in a state of guilt and condemnation under the righteous sentence of the law, they cannot be regarded as fit subjects for becoming the sons of God.” (FG, 149).
¹⁴³ FG, 155.
turn very much on regeneration, metaphorically expressed - as we have seen - in terms of the new birth.”

However, in seeking to end what he believed to be adoption’s isolation from regeneration, Candlish ironically made explicit what had been implicitly done in the tradition, namely, the reading of adoption into the Johannine writings. Thus, he followed the Puritan tradition of blurring the distinctiveness of the adoption and new birth models:

_The act of adoption... confers sonship of new, de novo, on those who are originally nothing more than creatures and subjects. It assumes a newborn capacity of receiving sonship. But it does not assume, it constitutes, the sonship itself. It is a pure and simple act of the free grace of God._

Thus in trying to solve the one problem Candlish created another. In effect he formulated one double-sided model out of the two analogies: believers are born as well as adopted into God’s family with the result that they have both the status and characteristics of the sons or children of God.

In contrast to Calvin, who grounded the reality of adoption on union with Christ, Candlish bases adoption more on regeneration, which, we recall, the reformer understood to be one of the two soteriological benefits of pneumatological union. “The adopted sons”, writes Candlish, “are sons by nature, and that, too, in a very literal acceptation of the term.” Yet, from Romans 8:28-29 in particular, it is clear that regeneration cannot be considered in isolation from union with Christ. The sons of God can only be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son because of their actual participation in his Sonship. Only then can there be a community of nature.

Sonship, Candlish perceptively notes, “has suffered perhaps still more seriously from so many of our theologians having failed to recognise sufficiently its entire

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144 FG, 151 and 154. Cf. FG, 151f. with 156-158 where Candlish points to extra Johannine passages in the same regard. E.g. 2 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 12:10; Rom. 8:28-29.
145 FG, 151-158. For instance, he states that the exegesis of 1 John 3: 1 is determined by the term “born of God” (2:29). “The expression suggests something more than the legal and relational filiation; it points to communication of nature.” (A Commentary on 1 John. First published 1870, Edinburgh. 3rd ed. 1877. Reprint ed. 1993, 228). This understanding of 1 Jn. 3:1 cannot be taken for granted. Due in all probability to John’s unusual reference to the status of the children of God, many have read into this text the doctrine of adoption. See for example the sermon preached by the renowned nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Robert Murray McCheyne (A Basket of Fragments. Reprint ed. Lochcarron, Rosshire, 1979, 40-43; Christ for Us: Sermons of Hugh Martin. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998, 225-245).
146 FG, 151.
147 Ibid., 146 (italics inserted).
148 Candlish puts this more clearly when he says that, “likeness or identity of nature is what makes likeness or identity of relation possible and conceivable.” (FG, 157).
distinction and separation from justification. The two have, to a large extent, been
confounded and mixed up together."¹⁵⁰ For this reason Candlish rejected Turretin’s
treatment of adoption as a mere appendage or necessary corollary of justification.¹⁵¹
This does not mean that Candlish relegates the importance of justification:

On the contrary, the higher anyone raises the privilege of justification, the better... since
I hold adoption to be a privilege higher still. It is the admission of a person thoroughly
justified, as being really one with the Father's righteous Servant, to fellowship with him
with whom he is one, in his higher position, as the Father's only-begotten and well-
beloved Son.¹⁵²

Turretin therefore “makes the act of God in adoption savour... too much of a legal and
judicial procedure.”¹⁵³ God's juridical and familial proceedings with his fallen subjects
and adopted sons respectively ought not to be confused.

Far from conceding anything to the “Erskinian” or “Campbellian” eradication
of a forensic understanding of soteriology, Candlish asserts that justification cannot be
treated too forensically. In fact it is the forensic understanding that highlights the grace
of justification. Far from being a legal fiction, justification points to the believer's real
and personal union¹⁵⁴ with Christ in his righteousness.¹⁵⁵ In adoption, by contrast, there
is union and communion with Christ in his Sonship. The implication of this is that
while the adoptive act is a legal procedure (as is seen in Roman usage), there is a wide
difference between that and a procedure which is wholly forensic: “The case is not
submitted to a tribunal for decision, but only to a recorder for ascertainment and
registration. No judicial sentence is asked for, or is competent. The adoption itself is

¹⁴⁹ FG, 157.
¹⁵⁰ FG, 158.
¹⁵¹ “On the subject of Adoption, Candlish was disposed to bring the weight of his criticisms to bear
against the whole of Protestant theology.” (McKinlay, op. cit., 25).
¹⁵² FG, 160. “As nearly all his theological works show, Candlish believed that the juridical aspect in
Reformed Theology was of crucial importance. However, he had also come to the conclusion - a
conclusion stated in many of his volumes - that the juridical or forensic element was being given far too
prominent a place in the Reformed Theology, and again and again he registered a protest against this
practice.” McKinlay continues “Candlish felt very strongly that this over-emphasis on the forensic
relation in Reformed Theology had done irreparable harm to a proper understanding of Justification, and
perhaps more important still, had prevented Reformed Theology from developing a truly Biblical notion
of Adoption.” (McKinlay, op. cit., 25).
¹⁵³ FG, 160.
¹⁵⁴ “Faith, justifying and saving faith, which is his own gift, unites us to his Son; so thoroughly unites us,
in a real personal and living oneness, that we are accounted and treated as one. In the eye of the law we
are one; being truly, spiritually, vitally one. Hence, because he is righteous, we are righteous. We die
with him; being crucified with him; and so in him bearing and exhausting the condemnation. We rise
with him to newness of life; to a new life of exemption from guilt and complete acceptance.” (Discourses,
103). For Candlish's denial of the legal fiction ibid., 41f. See also McKinlay, op. cit., 227f.
altogether extrajudicial".\textsuperscript{156} In adoption, then, God so abundantly pours out his love for his own dear Son that it flows over all those who are his.

Although distinct, justification and adoption are not successive states; the former applying to subjects and the latter to sons. Rather they "are simultaneous states, to be realised continually as such. Love reigns in both. Love delighting in the holy and good law of the Ruler reigns in one; in the other, love rejoicing in the endearments of the Father."\textsuperscript{157} Thus, while justification and adoption ought to be disentangled, they remain inseparably bound together by their mutual connection to union with Christ.

Two advantages accrue from this clear-cut distinction. First, it clarifies the role of faith. Although each blessing is received exclusively through faith, justification requires "the exercise of a mere and simple faith",\textsuperscript{158} but in adoption faith works by a filial love that apprehends and realises fellowship with the Father. Secondly, the distinction guards against both Antinomianism and Neonomianism:

The mixing up, in any way or in any measure, of God's dealing with us as sons in our adoption and his dealing with us as subjects in our forgiveness and acceptance, is apt to open the door for the notion, either of law, old strict law, being superseded, or of its being somehow modified. The idea of some sort of compromise between the paternal and the judicial in God's treatment of us, very readily suggests itself. And believers, once justified by faith, are either held to have nothing to do with law at all, it being their privilege to act, not from a sense of legal obligation, but from the spontaneous prompting of affection; or else they are held to be under the same mysterious new form or fashion of law, partaking too often not a little of the character of license. There will be little room for such imaginations if the right balance and adjustment between our justification as subjects and our adoption as sons is maintained.\textsuperscript{159}

Adoption, then, is the grace through which the definiteness and distinctiveness of God's Fatherhood (as opposed to a mere feeling of fatherliness) can alone be known. A proper understanding of divine paternity is required for the privileges of sonship to be clearly seen. An analogical perspective on sonship such as prevailed prior to the incarnation could only give but a pale reflection of the reality of the believer's experience. Instead, Candlish goes to angelology for the defined privileges and obligations of sonship.\textsuperscript{160} From the unfallen angels Candlish draws the lesson that for those that witnessed the fall of their disobedient counterparts, the most essential feature

\textsuperscript{155} "So entirely are we one with him, that what is his is ours; his righteousness, with the merit and the fruit of it, is common property; a common possession between him and us; common to him and us together." \textit{(Discourses, 40ff.)}
\textsuperscript{156} FG, 163. "I think it is of as much consequence to maintain the thoroughly un forensic character of God's act in adopting, as it is to maintain the strictly forensic character of his act in justifying."
\textsuperscript{157} FG, 168.
\textsuperscript{158} FG, 165.
\textsuperscript{159} FG, 167-168.
of sonship is the assured permanence of the relation, such as was obtained by adoption upon successful completion of probation.\textsuperscript{161} Having rejected the spirit of insubordination the unfallen angels came to possess the Spirit of the Son as their "recompense of reward". Had they remained under divine government, they could never have attained an infallible assurance of safety. On the contrary, their doubts would have increased with the removal of their blissful ignorance of sin. Thus, God must have raised the status of unfallen angels in order to protect them from the reality and fear of falling.\textsuperscript{162}

So it is in salvation. Our distinctive blessing of adoption is the permanent and assured security we have within the household of God.\textsuperscript{163} This security is rooted in the believer's participation in the righteousness and standing of Christ, through which we obtain the Spirit of adoption\textsuperscript{164} and a higher standing than Adam ever knew.\textsuperscript{165}

From John 8:35-36 ("The servant abideth not in the house forever, but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."), Candlish argues that the Lord represents his own sonship alone as absolutely ensuring permanence of position in the Father's family.\textsuperscript{166} Only once believers know that they share Christ's sonship can they enjoy real liberty. This liberty is based on the assurance of the permanence of sonship. It is derived from the witness of the Spirit "not in right of a past act of adoption and work of regeneration, but in virtue of a present filial heart and filial frame of mind towards him [the Father]." This filial heart cries out with confidence: "Abba, Father!") The Father hoped in is not merely in respect of a paternal right in us and over us, nor even in respect merely of a gracious paternal feeling towards us; but a father to us really and truly; a father, not to blame and censure us as disobedient and rebellious children; nor to pity us simply, and long after us, as self-ruined and miserable children; but to rejoice over us

\textsuperscript{160} FG, 171ff.
\textsuperscript{161} Candlish argues that an analogical view of sonship could not achieve this for it only stands for a similitude between the paternal or filial relationship between God and man. In the analogy of an earthly household a son may be kicked out and can lose his privileges (FG, 176-177).
\textsuperscript{162} FG, 175.
\textsuperscript{163} Candlish resisted enumerating all the privileges of sonship dismissing them as "benignant offices of government, and of government merely" (FG, 170).
\textsuperscript{164} Discourses, 6.
\textsuperscript{165} It is important to note in regard to the household of God that contrary to McLeod Campbell Candlish believed predestination to ensure that the family would consist of more than an elite minority. The household includes not only the sons now on earth but also the great multitude already in heaven and all the obedient angels (Discourses, 35).
\textsuperscript{166} FG, 181.
as children recovered and reconciled, once dead but now alive, once lost but now found.\textsuperscript{167}

The assurance of sonship is dependent furthermore on its maintenance in all holiness.\textsuperscript{168} This is apparent from Romans 8 where there is indicated the connection between the realisation of sonship through the receipt of the Spirit of adoption and the mortification of all sinful bodily deeds (Rom. 8:12-17). Consequently the extent to which sonship is realised depends on the seriousness with which the mortification of sin is taken.\textsuperscript{169} That said, the full realisation of sonship is eschatologically contingent on the manifestation of the sons of God. Interestingly, just as Candlish omits the retrospective aspect of adoption in redemptive history (Rom. 9:4), so he overlooks its prospective aspect (Rom. 8:22-23). The nearest he comes to a redemptive-historical approach to adoption is in his emphasis on the full realisation of sonship as the intended goal of divine predestination (Rom. 8:29-30). Otherwise, Candlish’s interest in the history of salvation as it pertains to adoption is summed up in the three stages he outlines: “Called as sinners - justified as subjects - glorified as sons; so runs the climax.”\textsuperscript{170}

As in Campbell, the life of Christ serves as the key to understanding sonship. Candlish latches onto Jesus’ statement - “the Son abideth ever” - to better explain the reality and potential of divine Fatherhood and human sonship. However, although Candlish stresses the necessity of participation in the Son as the means of filial status and security, in his lectures he fails to set out clearly, in the way that Calvin did, the manner in which this union takes place.\textsuperscript{171} Although he mentions the Holy Spirit’s work more frequently than either Erskine or Campbell had, it is referred to less regularly than in Calvin. In fact, Candlish is silent on the Spirit as the bond of union.\textsuperscript{172} Furthermore, his truncated exposition of the adoptive state leaves the operations of the Spirit of adoption largely unexplored.\textsuperscript{173} All that is taught is that those participating in the Son

\textsuperscript{167} Discourses, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 183. See WCF ch. XVIII: i and iv.
\textsuperscript{169} FG, 184-185.
\textsuperscript{170} FG, 186.
\textsuperscript{171} Indeed Candlish recommends that any commencing a similar study should begin with Q. 65 of the LC: “What special benefits do the members of the invisible Church enjoy by Christ?” to which the answer returns that they “enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory.” Of this answer Candlish comments that “this covers and comprehends all; union inferring communion.” (FG, 196-197).
\textsuperscript{172} This is less so of his commentary on 1 John where he wrote: “The Holy Ghost makes you one with the Son of God, so that, abiding in him, you partake of his sonship; his filial relation to the Father and filial heart towards the Father.” (272).
\textsuperscript{173} In dealing with the one peculiar benefit of sonship, Candlish confessed: “I have no time or space left for what I might call relational details. The relation itself is manifested and acted out in the history of the man Christ Jesus.” (FG, 189). This is a shame for, according to the conditions of the lectureship,
enjoy the Son’s own rest in the ever-present consciousness of filial fellowship with the Father, and that as servant he bears our yokes upon his shoulders before his Father with all meekness and lowliness of heart.

### 8.2 Thomas J Crawford

Candlish’s Cunningham lectures were of great contemporary relevance. Surprisingly, however, the anticipated response from the Broad School did not materialise. Instead the strictures of Thomas Crawford (1812-75), Professor of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh (1860-75), came as a bolt out of the blue. Although of the “Auld Kirk”, Crawford was nevertheless Candlish’s fellow soldier at arms in defence of Calvinistic orthodoxy. Indeed, in taking a less reactionary stance, he

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Candlish fulfilled the mandatory minimum of lectures. Thus, his discussion of the familial details of sonship compares unfavourably with Calvin.


The theme of divine Fatherhood was therefore very much in prominence during the nineteenth century. Lee writes that, “it was natural that with the new interest awakened by Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures on the Fatherhood of God, others should enter the field, making their contribution on this somewhat neglected theme” (op.cit., 146). We concur, but would want to emphasise that Candlish’s lectures were themselves a reaction to the revolutionary era and not the stimulus for it.

175 “As the point is one on which there has been no dogmatic deliverance by any of the churches of the Reformation, it was but natural that Dr Candlish’s volume should be examined with interest by the Professors of Divinity in the Scotch Universities;” (“The late Controversy”, 304).

176 The extent of Crawford’s Calvinism has been a moot point. Cf. the Broad School theologian A M Fairbairn. See DSCHT, S. v. “Fairbairn, Andrew Martin” by J C G Binfield, 313; “The Westminster Confession of Faith and Scotch theology”, CR, XXI (1872); see also A C Cheyne The Transforming of the Kirk, 71, and Lee: “Like Candlish, Crawford was an honest and decided Calvinist, but he found much in the Principal’s position from which he dissented.” (op.cit., 147. For the original quote see “The late Controversy”, 305). Similarly Macleod describes Crawford as one of a number of “good divines” who were “quite competent Calvinistic theologians” although tainted by Erastianism or prepared to yield to its aggressions” (Scottish Theology, 267).
proved to be more Calvinian than Candlish in his approach to the Fatherhood of God.\(^{177}\) He was certainly less dismissive of what the Westminster Standards say of God’s paternity and maintained that they stand out in historical theology for having sought to do justice to adoption. The Standards, he writes:

> seem to me to teach many things that are highly interesting and important concerning this Christian privilege.... They trace it to its source in the sovereign grace of God. They connect it with the person and work of Jesus Christ. They also represent it as inseparably connected with Justification, as well as with effectual calling or regeneration. And they enter, somewhat fully and minutely, into the details of what it implies or carries with it. And though their statements are not perhaps so precise and particular in regard to some of the matters connected with it as they would have been if any serious controversies had been agitated upon the subject, yet I am satisfied that they express or imply everything that is either very clearly revealed in the Word of God or very necessary for our comfort and edification.\(^{178}\)

In 1866 Crawford published some of his course lectures under the familiar title *The Fatherhood of God.*\(^{179}\) While we cannot be sure that the lectures were intentionally published to controvert Candlish’s views, we know that he had certainly read Candlish. Indeed, by the time the volume appeared two editions of Candlish’s lectures had already been published.\(^{180}\) According to John MacLeod his efforts resulted in “one of the most important contributions to the literature on a side of Christian truth that was very widely discussed in the third quarter of the 19th century by different schools of Theology - Broad and Orthodox alike.”\(^{181}\)

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\(^{177}\) According to Kinnear, however, he was prepared to concede some modification of federal theology (*op.cit.*, 181-182).

\(^{178}\) Crawford, *FoG*, 445. Hugh Martin, Candlish’s arch defendant, took a mediating position on this particular point. While refusing to go as far as Candlish in exposing the inadequacy of the statements of the Standards, he did acknowledge that there was absent “any scientifically theological treatment of the doctrine, such as they have so conclusively and exhaustively bestowed on the question of Justification by faith” (“Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures”, 724).

\(^{179}\) “The following Lectures were originally prepared as part of a course of instruction in Systematic Theology, during the past session in the University of Edinburgh” (*FoG*, v).

\(^{180}\) Subsequently, Candlish published a third edition with a reply to Crawford who in turn issued his second edition with a reply to Candlish (*ibid.*, viii). By 1869 Candlish’s *Fatherhood of God* had gone to a fifth edition in which he “brought back the lectures, with the appendix of Scriptural Expositions, to the original form; putting the subsequent controversial matter, hitherto included in the same volume, into a separate and supplementary volume.” (*FG*, xi). “I have been constrained in prosecuting this inquiry to controvert the views of some modern writers respecting the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, as well as with reference to the efficacy of baptism; and on other points I have been brought into direct collision with the novel opinions set forth by Dr Candlish in his recently published ‘Cunningham Lectures on the Fatherhood of God.”’ (*FoG*, vi).

\(^{181}\) *Op.cit.*, 268. Important in its own right, the volume also helped Crawford clarify some of the central issues in preparation for the publication of his volume on the atonement (1871). Lectures 3-5 are taken up with the theme of the atonement and are entitled “The Fatherhood of God in Relation to the Atonement” (*FoG*, 68-164).
Although Calvin is mentioned on eight occasions, Crawford’s chief concern was to provide a via media between what he saw as the latitudinarianism of Maurice and Campbell and the conservatism of Candlish. On the one side, he felt that the Broad School abused the doctrine of God’s Fatherhood by regarding his relation to humankind as solely paternal, thus overshadowing God’s rectoral and judicial character. This undermines the necessity of atonement, for if God is solely Father he must be able to lovingly forgive his children without demanding atonement. On the other side, his rejection of Candlish’s reactionary stance enabled him to provide a biblically balanced doctrine of divine paternity. Although agreeing substantively with Candlish on the reality of the Fall, the extent of human corruption, the necessity of redemption and its accomplishment through the atoning work of Christ, Crawford demurred from his Free Church counterpart’s position on the question of the general Fatherhood of God, and the nature of Christ’s Sonship in relation to the sonship of believers. In the process of debate adoption is mentioned on at least 155 occasions.

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183 Crawford’s volume clearly displays the two fronts on which he was fighting. On the one hand, his lectures on “The Fatherhood of God in Relation to the Atonement” are clearly intended to refute the Broad School, and of Maurice and Campbell in particular. On the other hand, in the surrounding lectures Crawford is clearly concerned to rectify Candlish’s reactionary stance.
184 Later Crawford argues that were God solely paternal in his relations with humankind an atonement would not necessarily be deemed superfluous. This is because God is not unlike an earthly parent whose responsibilities are limited to the one household. He is the common parent of the human race and of all other intelligent creatures whose domain has expanded from a family into a kingdom. Therefore, the discretionary powers of an earthly parent might not comport so well with those of a universal parent (FoG, 70-71).
185 It has been observed, however, that “neither of these disputants seem to have sought, in the first place, to interrogate Holy Scripture on the various senses in which fatherhood is spoken of, though both are ready enough to seek to discover in Scripture support for their respective opinions.” (“The late Controversy”, 305-306).
186 See Lee, op. cit., 241.
187 Rainy curtailed his brief investigation to the “two observations on which the opposition took hold”; namely, “the denial of original and primitive Sonship in man as created”, and “the Sonship of believers identified so decisively with the Sonship of our Lord - as in fact the same relation - His by original right, ours by gracious communication.” (cited Wilson, op. cit., 619).
188 FoG, 24, 25, 26, 33, 48, 166 (x2), 167 (x3), 168 (x2), 169, 170 (x2), 171 (x2), 172 (x4), 173, 174 (x2), 175 (x2), 177 (x2), 178 (x3), 179 (x2), 180, 181 (x3), 183 (x2), 184, 188 (x2), 190, 191, 194 (x2), 195, 197 (x2), 217, 232, 237, 240, 245, 255, 261, 264, 288, 290 (x5), 291 (x3), 292 (x5), 293 (x2), 294 (x3), 296, 298 (x2), 299 (x3), 300 (x3), 301 (x4), 302, 303 (x3), 304 (x2), 305, 306 (x2), 307, 310, 316, 320, 323 (x3), 324 (x2), 326 (x2), 329 (x3), 330 (x2), 331 (x2), 332 (x3), 336, 339, 340, 341, 342 (x2), 343, 366, 373, 374 (x3), 385 (x4), 386 (x4), 387 (x2), 388 (x2), 390 (x3), 391, 398 (x3), 440 (x3), 441, 443 (x3). As many of these are citations from Candlish the reader should not generally expect to find a more developed doctrine than is found in Candlish’s lectures. Crawford only goes further than Candlish when expounding the adoptive state.
Adoption: The transferral from a general to a special sonship

In the first, second, ninth and tenth lectures, Crawford argues that original derivation is the basis of a common Fatherhood of God. To his knowledge, neither a common nor a special Fatherhood had ever been formally controverted. As the terms “Fatherhood” and “sonship” had never before been queried, Crawford insists that they need not be precisely or logically defined. “Fatherhood” may imply as little as “the origination by one intelligent person of another intelligent person like in nature to himself, and the continued support, protection, and nourishment of the person thus originated by him to whom he owes his being.” However, a looser definition is warranted by the analogical or metaphorical nature of scriptural references to “Fatherhood” and “sonship”. They ascribe to intelligent creatures the reality of what really subsists behind the earthly terms parent and child. The analogy reveals humankind’s original relation to God and indicates the divine intention to bring restoration through salvation.

In Calvinian fashion, Crawford argues that the general Fatherhood rests on the bestowal of the divine image in humankind. He allows, therefore, for a richer understanding of the imago Dei than was allowed for by Candlish. The implantation of God’s image and likeness in humanity involves the granting of intellectual faculties, natural affection and conscience. Regardless of the Fall, these characteristics are still traceable. Nevertheless, humankind’s demise is such that the higher revelation of God’s Word is required for the awareness of this original relationship to God.

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189 Lectures I and II are entitled “The Common Fatherhood of God”, Lecture IX - “Fatherhood of God as known before the Saviour’s advent” (FG, 237-245) and Lecture X - “The Fatherhood of God as Taught by Christ” (FoG, 258-268). Whereas Lecture I is propositional, Lecture II is exegetical. It was not an uncommon method of nineteenth-century inquiry to investigate the scriptural data subsequent to the propagation of the argument.

190 “These principles are certainly of a very novel and startling kind, being not a little opposed to those things which have hitherto been commonly received among us.” (see also FoG, 12). Even Hugh Martin, Candlish’s arch defendant, acceded that “our author has pushed his line of thought somewhat boldly”, but went on, “it is a boldness which we are not prepared to reprehend” (“Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures”, 721f.). Crawford knew, however, of disagreement over the characteristics of the higher or special sonship. To some it is restorative of that relationship known before the Fall. To others it is a new relation standing on particular grounds.

191 FoG, 11.

192 FoG, 13. Cf. 27.

193 FoG, 9-10.

194 Irrespective of whether “Father” and “Son” are used in connection with the relation between the first and second persons of the Trinity, God and humanity, or between God and his people; Crawford understood the terms to be metaphorical and used in order to express as best as possible the reality of these relations (FG, 240).
This does not render general revelation useless however.\(^{195}\) The common Fatherhood is discernible from divine providence. While all that comes upon the human race speaks of God’s moral government, the fact that extravagant kindness is bestowed beyond the normal course of strict justice testifies to a paternal care over humanity. Similarly, human consciousness of moral obligation speaks dimly of our subjection to the law of a supreme governor but our ‘religious tendency’ signifies an affinity to the Father of spirits. Even Aratus and Cleanthes, the Athenian poets, recognised this when they described humanity as God’s offspring (Acts 17:28-29).

Contrary to Candlish, Crawford argues that a due emphasis on the paternity of God ought not to be regarded as conflicting at any point with the administration of his sovereignty.\(^{196}\) Whereas the latter determines that humanity should be created out of unmerited goodness, the former ensures that God’s image and likeness was impressed upon humanity. Far from contradicting sovereignty, God’s Fatherhood provides a further claim on the obedience of his children.\(^{197}\)

Similarly, there is compatibility between a general and special Fatherhood. One rests on creation and the other on adoption. The creative Fatherhood of God ought not, then, to be regarded as a concession to Victorian liberalism. Even Candlish acknowledged that were there a creational paternity it could not be identical to the relation subsisting between the Father and the Son, for whereas the former relation was insecure the latter is inviolably secure. A common sonship ought not to imply, then, that a restoration to that original status would never be required.\(^{198}\)

The picture drawn from general revelation is confirmed by special revelation. Although the Scriptures naturally speak more of a regenerative and adoptive sonship, there are references pertaining to a general sonship.\(^{199}\) Although Malachi 2:10 is immediately applicable to the Jewish nation who were in a special sense God’s son,

\(^{195}\) FoG, 21.

\(^{196}\) Cf. FoG, 24 and 28. There is “nothing in His fatherhood that should hinder Him from inflicting on His rebellious offspring such penalties as He may, in His co-ordinate character of a judge or ruler, find to be necessary to maintain the honour and authority of His laws, and to further the peace and happiness of His universal kingdom.” (FoG, 28).

\(^{197}\) FoG, 24. Crawford’s predominant focus on the biblical evidence for Adam’s filial status in Eden should not be understood as a denial of Adam’s subjection to God’s regal and judicial sovereignty over him, although, in the light of Crawford’s intended rebuttal of Candlish, it is a matter that he says remarkably little about (FoG, 28-29).

\(^{198}\) “This, as is fully conceded, does not imply any such permanent position of the children in the family as should interfere with their subjection, if need should be, not only to parental chastisement, but to judicial condemnation.” (FoG, 27).
there divine paternity is said to rest on creation. Hence, as a son of God Adam enjoyed his Father's providential care, intimate fellowship and dominion over all lower creatures. (Lk. 3:38). This was the point that Paul made to the Athenians. Understandably then, the author of Hebrews describes God as the “Father of spirits” which, on Crawford’s creationist rendering, means that immortal souls are “directly communicated to us by the Creator, so as to be in a peculiar sense His offspring”. Not surprisingly, then, the “first and great commandment” calls humankind to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt. 22:37-38; Mk. 12:30). Were God a ruler, the command would constitute a call for homage, reverence, submission and allegiance and not love, at least not “love in the utmost fulness of its exercise, and to the highest stretch of our capacity.”

The proof that sonship survives the Fall is found in the remaining vestiges of God’s image (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). It is strengthened by the fact that this image is restored in regeneration (analogically described as the new birth), wherein the regenerate become children of God in a fresh way. Hence, in the parable of the

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199 Crawford draws the reader’s attention to seven passages. While we have referred to all seven passages below, we have not done so in the order they are found (FoG, 34-61).

200 FoG, 34-35. “Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?” Up to this point Candlish agreed with Crawford in his exegesis of this text: “Fatherhood is made to rest on their being constituted his people through redeeming grace as well as by creative power.” (FG, suppl. vol., 16). However, unlike Crawford he would go no further. He held Is. 43: 1 to be teaching the same.

201 FoG, 42-49. For Candlish’s response see FG, suppl. vol., 20.

202 FoG, 49-52.

203 FoG, 36.

204 FoG, 59. “Just as reasonably may the common fatherhood of God be thus inferred from “the first and great commandment,” as the common brotherhood of men may be inferred from “the second, which is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Candlish made no response to this argument: “It proceeds upon the strange assumption that God cannot so manifest himself to his creatures in the relation of their maker and governor, as to appear worthy of their love, and entitled therefore to claim it by commandment. That assumption again arises from the fact that the whole argument requires him to strip the relation of God to us, as our creator and ruler of all beauty, amiability, glory, unless the relation of fatherhood is superadded to it, or held to be involved in it, not of grace but by necessity. And that fact again is explained by his failing, all along, to discriminate between the relation in which one person may stand to another, and the feelings which he may shew and upon which he may act towards him.” (FG, suppl. vol., 25fn.).

205 “if... a man who has newly been regenerated, notwithstanding the sins and infirmities which still beset him, may be held, by reason of his incipient renovation after the divine image, to be really a child of God; much more may it be held that Adam and Eve were children of God, when they came in their state of primal rectitude from the Creator’s hand, bearing his divine likeness without as yet spot or blemish.” (FoG, 41). Crawford could not understand what he believed to be a contradiction in Candlish’s thought: “Our objector is here reduced to a dilemma, from which I see no possibility of his being extricated. Either he must admit that man, in his original state, was a son of God, as being created in His image; or he must renounce his doctrine of a true sonship as constituted, ‘in a very literal acceptance of the term,’ by the restoration of the same image to converted sinners.” (FoG, 42). To be fair to Candlish, however, Crawford was overlooking the strength of Candlish’s stress on the believer’s union with Christ in his
prodigal son, the Father’s love both stimulates and permits the prodigal’s return. Given this, “it seems... impossible to put any fair or just interpretation on this parable, without assuming that general paternity which God, as our creator and preserver, may be held to sustain towards all men as His intelligent creatures” From first to last the prodigal remains God’s son. Therefore,

to say... that the parable is expressive, not of God’s love to His unworthy and sinful offspring, but of His desire that sinners who had never sustained any filial relation to Him should be numbered among His children, appears to me to be as forced and unnatural a perversion of the plain import of a passage of Scripture as I have ever met with.

On the contrary, were we solely subjects, God would not have announced salvation at the same time as passing sentence on fallen humankind. Had he done so, a purely forensic and judicial means of restoration would have been anticipated. It is apparent, however, that Christ’s remedial work was motivated by paternal love countering the demands of divine justice. Christ atoned, therefore, to cover sufficiently all sin whether filial or servile (1 Jn. 1:7).

Whereas Candlish feared that a filial understanding of man’s relation to God would diminish the need for adoption, Crawford argues that having been disowned and disinherited at the Fall man is no longer a son in the full and precious sense as at creation. The noetic effects of the Fall robbed humanity of powers of recognition and relation of sonship. The reality of regenerative or adoptive sonship lies in the believer’s union with the Son.

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206 FoG, 53. Similarly, one reviewer wrote: “The whole point, and power, and pathos of the parable seem to us to be for ever eliminated, if we suppose that it is not as a son, who had despised his father and gone away from him, but only as some other and otherwise related being, that the prodigal comes back and is welcomed by his father.” (ER, 55). Over against this use of the parable Candlish responded: “I must still insist on the danger of bringing a parable, circumstantially interpreted, to prove a doctrine not otherwise established; and I venture to retain my opinion that to make such a use of this parable is not in the best taste. Plainly the point in it, at all relevant to the occasion, is the father’s way of treating the returning prodigal, as the model of the way in which any one claiming the position of the elder son ought to treat him. That point the Lord brings out in the most emphatic manner; and he does so, be it remembered, in the course of a ministry designed, in large measure, to reveal God’s fatherhood, and to prepare men’s minds for the reception of that truth in its highest sense. Interpreted too closely, in all its details, the parable, as Dr. Crawford must admit may be pressed into the service of error on the vital doctrine of the ground of a sinner’s reconciliation and acceptance. I submit that, whether my comment approve itself or not to competent judges, it is at least more in the line of safe exposition than that which Dr. Crawford would substitute.” (FG, suppl. vol., 24).

208 FoG, 57.

209 “We see in the work of our redemption a joint manifestation of the judicial and parental character of that adorable Being with whom it originated. It was doubtless as a judge that the atonement was exacted by Him; but it was, no less surely, as a father that He provided it.”

210 “Their Father-king, if He finds them to be incorrigible, may, in the exercise of His sovereignty, and without prejudice to His fatherhood, expel them from His household, deprive them of their birthright, and inflict upon them the just punishment of their evil deeds.” (FoG, 27-28).
of trust in God as their Father. Sin grieved the Father and rendered us unworthy of a place in his household. Not until regenerate is our awareness of our lost privileges and responsibilities sharpened. In the meantime, we are merely the “children of disobedience” and the “children of wrath”. Citing the eminent Free Church theologian, James Buchanan (1804-1870), Crawford writes: “It is only by the grace of Adoption that we can be raised to the enjoyment of filial privileges and the exercise of filial affections. But it is equally true that the original relation is presupposed in the doctrine of the Gospel, which is designed to restore us to the condition in which man was created”.

Although the term adoption appropriately conveys the idea of restoration, there is far more to it than that. Through adoption the original elements of sonship are elevated and enriched so that the benefits of special sonship outweigh the general sonship which Adam knew:

The sonship of believers has not only the original ground of creation and of providence to rest upon, but the superinduced grounds of discriminating grace, redeeming love, regenerating agency, and covenanted promises, in which none else besides themselves can claim an interest.

The universal family contains, then, an inner family that is, in a particular sense, the object of paternal love. Only those adopted from the universal family can enjoy membership of the inner household.

Given that the New Testament builds on the Old Testament’s bridging of general and special sonship by adoption, Crawford saw reason to regard adoption in terms of a federal rather than a forensic framework. Although he believed the metaphor to be derived from ancient legal practices, like Calvin he believed adoption to be particularly appropriate to God’s covenantal arrangements with his redeemed people. In the light of more recent discussions of the origins of federal theology, it is perhaps significant that Crawford draws on the reformer’s commentary on Galatians (4:1-7) for his Old Testament perspective. Hence, his exposition of the passage echoes that of the reformer. He argues that the difference between the adoption of Old and

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211 *FoG*, 62.
212 "They do not regard the “Father of their spirits” with filial reverence, confidence and affection. And even His fatherly dealings with them, in their unregeneracy, are in a great measure limited to temporal mercies. In so far as regards His spiritual and heavenly blessings, they are outcasts from His family, - disowned and disinherited." (*FoG*, 167-168).
213 *FoG*, 169.
214 *FoG*, 170.
New Testament believers is accidental or circumstantial rather than substantial. This explains both the Old Testament allusions to the sonship of God's people and the muteness of these allusions in comparison to the New Testament.

The reason why indications of a familial relationship between God and his people can be seen even in the servitude that prevailed under Mosaic law is that God had redeemed the children of Israel and established them as his son (Deut. 32:6). Adoption expresses the reality of redemption. Thus, Hosea urges backslidden Israel to return on the basis that they are sons of the living God (Hos. 1:10). Similarly, Jeremiah urges God's people to cry unto their Father and guide of their youth (Jer. 3:4). However, although of a metaphorical nature, these instances cannot be dismissed by Candlish as "mere rhetorical modes of speech", for there are too many examples that require explaining away. Nevertheless, Candlish is right to the extent that often Old Testament allusions to Israel as the son of God speak of a collective sonship. This, however, did not prevent the relation between God and the Israelites from being personal and individual. Even in the Old Testament the Spirit evoked filial trust within each believing member of the covenant community in spite of the law's repression of the full development of their filial spirits (Gal. 4:1, 3).

Turning to the New Testament we learn that Christ so taught his disciples that with hindsight they would realise that divine paternity rests not only on creation and providence, but also on redeeming, regenerating and adopting grace. While better privileges belong to adoptive sonship, Crawford insists to an extent uncharacteristic of the Broad School on the impossibility of special sonship without atonement. Although a universal parent, God's holiness demands reparation for sin before there can be entrance into the inner household. Even humankind is conscious that faced with the reality of sin, deliverance can only come through a way of righteousness.

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213 _FoG_, 255-256. Cf. 237: "Among the manifold 'spiritual and heavenly blessings,' with which under the dispensation of the Gospel we are now enriched, there is no apparent reason why adoption should be singled out as that one blessing of which, beyond all the others, they were incapable of forming any adequate conception."

214 _FoG_, 236.

215 _FoG_, 242.

216 See for instance, Ps. 103:13; Jer. 31:20; Is. 1:2, 63:16; Mal. 1:6, 3:17.

217 _Eg_. Ex. 4:22-23; Jer. 31:9; Is. 64:8.

218 _FoG_, 254.

219 _FoG_, 264.

220 _FoG_, 288.

221 _FoG_, 76.
Both Scripture and the creeds teach that the atonement is the result and not the cause of God’s love. The Father provides the atonement that he himself demands. Thus, an atonement causing the Father’s love was as alien to Crawford (and we may add to orthodox Calvinism) as to the Broad School:

It may be that the atonement has occasionally been spoken of by ignorant and injudicious believers in it, in terms which would seem to imply that it is the means of appeasing a naturally implacable and vindictive Being, and of wringing from Him a reluctant and ungracious pardon, which, if left to Himself, He was indisposed to confer. But such is not the view of it, most assuredly, that has ever been taken by its intelligent and enlightened advocates. 224

Erskine and Campbell were guilty, then, of attacking orthodox Calvinism for a position it did not actually hold.

Contrary to Maurice, Crawford insists that Christ’s sufferings and death manifested the Father’s love precisely because he objectively expiated human guilt and satisfied divine justice. 225 What more could convince of the Father’s love than that he was prepared to give his own Son to death in order to make satisfaction (Rom. 3:25)? The problem with the modern theories of atonement is that Christ’s death is made incidental rather than essential to the gospel. 226 Many are the assertions about the atonement issuing from the Father’s love, but have much difficulty articulating the exact nexus between the events of Calvary and the Father’s love. 227

Anticipating the objection that limited atonement 228 is a denial of the paternal love of God toward humanity, Crawford argues that the definitive nature of atonement

224 FoG, 77-78. He blames “loose discourses and popular hymns” for the notion and quotes Archbishop Magee’s works as teaching the true relationship of love and atonement (FoG, 101-104).
225 FoG, 80-85.
226 FoG, 98. There are seven modern theories of atonement outlined and impugned by Crawford. These theories taught that: (i) The sufferings of Christ were exclusively intended to reveal the love of God; (ii) Christ was an incarnation of Deity representing the invisible God; (iii) Christ’s self-sacrifice presented humankind to God by serving as “the root and archetype of humanity” (Maurice, Theological Essays. 3rd ed. London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1871); (iv and vii) Christ’s sympathetic identification with fallen humankind through suffering (Maurice, Theological Essays; Campbell, NA and Horace Bushnell, Vicarious Sacrifice Grounded on Principles of Universal Obligation. London: Alexander Strahan, 1866); (v, vi and vii) Christ’s confrontation with evil through suffering (F W Robertson, Sermons Preached at Brighton. 1st Series. New ed. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.: London, 1883 (v); John Young, The Life and Light of Men: An Essay. London and New York: Alexander Strahan, 1866 (vi); Horace Bushnell, Vicarious Sacrifice) (FoG, 85-159).
227 The penal theory declares that the paternal love of God both exacted and provided the atonement so that “if we refuse the provision it has made, we have nothing that is more gracious and compassionate in Him to look for.” (FoG, 161).
228 More accurately referred to as definitive atonement or particular redemption, the term limited atonement ought to be dropped from the theological vocabulary of orthodox Calvinism. On the one hand, it does not do justice to the innumerable company saved through Christ’s atoning death. On the other hand, it implies that the value of the atonement is determined by the number of the elect saved, rather than by the infinite value of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The value of the atonement lies then not in the
pertains to God's eternal counsel. Therefore, however limited or particular redemption might be in its special destination, it is still an adequate propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and underpins God's universal offer of, and desire for, the salvation of all. Whether a sinner comes to know of God's special Fatherhood through the experience of special sonship depends on whether he or she is in Christ. (Eph. 1:4-5).

Special sonship is founded on his mediatorial work and is restricted to those receiving him and sealed by the Holy Spirit, and results in a filial disposition and piety.

Crawford unpacks this by highlighting three particularly significant ways in which special sonship is distinguished from its general counterpart. First, it originates in the special grace of God that is given to those who have no claim or right to it. As God needs no special sons it was a sheer act of grace to adopt children, gratuitously bestowing particular blessings on them out of unmerited love (1 Jn 3:1; Eph. 1:4-5). That only some are predestined to special sonship does not reflect negatively on either God's perfection or human free agency. As there is nothing unworthy in what God does through adoption, can there be anything unworthy in his planning to do it beforehand?

Secondly, special sonship differs through its connection with Christ's mediation. Special sons are adopted by Jesus Christ and in the Beloved (Eph. 1:5-6; Gal. 3:26; Gal. 4:4-5; Jn. 1:12). Christ removes every obstacle to special sonship and admits believers to every blessing of the Father. Through the blessings of adoption the sons of God are granted a higher dignity, excellency and blessedness than Adam ever knew. They become "heirs and joint-heirs with Christ" and shall one day be glorified together with him (Rom. 8:17). Paul conveys the same thing when the elect are "predestined to be conformed to the image" of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29; cf. Jn. 17:22, 23; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev. 3:21). Thus, there are "good and sufficient grounds for the fact that an innumerable company of elect are saved by virtue of it, but in the infinite cost born by Christ in the atonement."

Crawford acknowledges that the eternal decree of particular redemption and the universal offer are, to the human eye, irreconcilable. Although the nexus between the two cannot be discerned, Crawford holds that they are reconcilable to God (FoG, 163).

Other texts provided by Crawford in which a special sonship is spoken of are: Jn. 1:12-13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:1; Rom. 8:14, 15, 17; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Gal. 3:26, 4:6 (FoG, 165-166).

"The doctrine of predestination substantially amounts to this, - that whatever God does, He always intended to do; and whatever God permits to be done by other free agents, He always intended to permit. The only effect of this doctrine is, to trace back the procedure of God, such as we actually find it to be, to a previous intention - eternal and unchangeable like Himself - that that procedure, and no other, should eventually be adopted by Him." (FoG, 175).
persuasion that God's adopted ones have fellowship with their Redeemer in the blessedness and dignity resulting from His sonship, in so far as these may be communicable to created beings; and that at all events the privileges enjoyed by them, in virtue of their union and communion with the Son of God, are incomparably more excellent and exalted than any which our first parents could have experienced in the earthly paradise.  

Thirdly, special sonship comes only to those united to Christ by faith (Jn 1:12-13; 1 Jn 3:2, 3 and Rev. 21:7, as well as Gal. 3:26, 4:6; Rom. 8:14 and 2 Cor. 6:17-18). By regarding the receiving of adoption as none other than trusting in Christ, Crawford self-consciously differs from Maurice and Robertson. They held that in Christ's oneness with humanity all humankind were regenerated, justified and adopted. However, to articulate Crawford's objection in Calvinian terms, they wrongly locate the gospel in incarnational rather than mystical union thereby contradicting clear scriptural teaching on the necessity of pneumatological union with Christ.

In Evangelical doctrine it was the Father's purpose that the Son should assume human nature in order to fulfil obedience unto death so that all united to Christ through faith be justified and adopted. This faith is not a reflex act, which merely recognises that one is already a son of God, but a direct act from which sonship ensues. To say otherwise would confound faith with assurance:

The proper object of faith is, not the fact that we are sons of God, but the revealed truth that Christ is able and willing to make us so. And the proper office of faith is, not to recognise His benefits as already actually put into our possession, but to "receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel," in order that his benefits may thus come into our possession, by no other than the perfectly simple and intelligent process of trustfully receiving Him with all His benefits for our behoof.

The problem with Maurice's position is that gospel blessings are conferred on all humanity prior to a faith that may or may not be exercised, thus eliminating the possibility of elevation from a general to a special sonship.

233 FoG, 179.
234 FoG, 181.
235 He does not comment on Candlish's perception that John has regenerative sonship in view.
236 FoG, 189.
Crawford's other major disagreement with Candlish concerned his substantial identification of redemptive and eternal Sonship. Whereas Candlish, we recall, held that the sonships differed only circumstantially, Crawford regarded the differences as more substantive. He argued that the closest adoptive sonship comes to the natural Sonship of Christ is by way of analogy or equivalence. How can a natural son be said to share the same relation as an adopted son or a son by marriage? After all the natural son enjoys a “community of blood, conformity of features, similarity of physical constitution, and, it may be, congeniality of temper and disposition, to say nothing of the strong and warm instincts of natural affection.” Accordingly, “words cannot express the immensity of the difference between a divine sonship springing from a necessity of nature, and one that is ‘constituted by an act or work of grace.’”

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237 See particularly Lectures VII, VIII, XI and XII.
238 "The Semi-arians and their opponents did not deem it unessential to the relation of the second person of the Godhead to the first, whether he were eternally begotten of the Father by a necessity of nature, or by the Father's will. Yet here is an ingenious writer maintaining that "two persons may stand in the same relation to a third," with no difference but what is purely circumstantial, 'although in the case of the one the relation be dateless, and founded on a necessity of nature; while in the case of the other it may be of recent date, and formed or constituted by an act or work of grace!'" (FoG, 195).
239 FG, suppl. vol., 179. For Candlish's full response to Crawford's critique see FG, suppl. vol., 40-73 and 179-184. Of this whole aspect of the debate John Kennedy wrote in 1869: "This question has recently been discussed by two doctors of divinity. They differed from each other, but they both differed from the truth. They hit different points, but neither hit the mark. The one was right, in so far as he insisted that the Sonship of Christ affects the relation which adoption constitutes. The other was right, in so far as he denied the identity of the Sonship, constituted by the eternal generation of the Second Person of the Godhead, with that which results from adoption. Beyond this they have contributed nothing to the settlement of this question. Principal Candlish ignores Christ's federal relation to His Father and to His people; and applies to Him, as the Second Person of the Godhead, passages which refer to Him only as the federal head of the redeemed; the truth being, that the Sonship of Christ cannot affect the sonship of the adopted, except so far as it affects His own relations and power as the Christ of God. Dr. Crawford fails to perceive any bearing of Christ's Sonship on the relation formed by adoption; and commits the flagrant blunder of ascribing a sonship to Christ's human nature, distinct from that which pertains to Him because of His eternal generation." (Man's Relations to God, 73-74). In regard to Kennedy's comments vis a vis Candlish and Christ's federal relation to the Father see the implications as outlined by McKinlay, op. cit., 112.
240 As confirmation of the great distinction between the Son and the sons Crawford highlighted a contradiction in Candlish's argument. Having argued for the identification of the Son and the sons once "the exigencies of his theory seem to have been for a while forgotten" Candlish slipped into an inconsistency whereby he stressed that the sons, being regenerated, share the relation of the Son as only-begotten and yet in spite of this fundamental difference the relations are identical in that those regenerated become natural sons too. Candlish inevitably found himself in a corner when he came to explain how these natural sons are also adopted. No, concluded Crawford, "Assuredly the Eternal and Only-begotten Son of God must, as such, be essentially divine. His sonship must be regarded as something which is absolutely unique and unapproachable by any creature. And though the sonship conferred upon His people may be in some respects strikingly analogous to it, yet in other respects the distance between them is so immeasurable that we dare not speak of them as substantially the same." (FoG, 197).
Christ's Sonship is therefore absolutely unique, to which an analogical understanding of adoptive sonship can but bring us near.

Analogical usage, being limited in its applicability, cannot teach us much of the interior relation that Christ in his eternal Sonship has within the Godhead. In dependence on the respective Lectures of the United Secession theologian John Dick (1764-1833) and George Hill (1750-1819) the Moderate Professor and churchman, Crawford argues that the term "generation" is but an anthropomorphic expression faintly approximate to that which is really and necessarily unknown by us. It indicates the eternal subsistence within the Godhead; that is, "a unity of nature, a conformity of character, an intimacy of fellowship, an intensity of affection - and, it may be allowed also, an ineffable communication of somewhat pertaining to the mysteries of the Godhead, to which we can hardly venture to assign a name". Candlish's case for the identification of the relation of the Son and the sons must then stand on other grounds than Christ's eternal sonship.

This being so, the claim that the relation of eternal Sonship within the Godhead is communicated to humanity in the person of the incarnate Christ is brought into question. Were the sonship of believers identical with the Sonship of Christ then, logically speaking, this would mean that they have been joined to Christ by a personal union known by him since eternity past. But, reasons Crawford, the personal union with God that Christ has eternally known ought not to be confused with that mystical union constituted by faith between Christ and his people. Contrary to the personal union between persons of the Godhead, believers are not absorbed into the personality of God's Son. Rather, Christ assumed everything human, sin alone excepted, into personal union with his divinity, thereby entering into the relations which humankind has with God.

Consistent with the via negativa emphasis of the ancient creeds, the WCF teaches that the personal union entailed in Christ's personhood through the assumption of a human nature involves no conversion, composition or confusion of the two natures

242 FoG, 199.
243 Candlish was perplexed by the distinction between a personal and mystical union. "By the 'personal union,' as regards Christ, I understand the hypostatical union of the two natures in his person: and by the 'mystical union' as regards the believer, his union to Christ." (FG (suppl. vol.), 51).
The Westminster commissioners preferred therefore to remain guarded as to the positive understanding of the hypostatic union of the two natures. Candlish, by contrast, discarded this cautious approach. In doing so, he clearly contradicted himself; for how can Christ be the Son of God according to his humanity if there is no sonship common to humanity outside of the grace of adoption?

Crawford argues that Christ enjoyed two respective relations of sonship, the one divine the other human. Far from being identical, these sonships are so dissimilar that Crawford concedes they should be labelled differently. However, to do so would undermine the constitution of Christ's person:

**Christ's Two Relations of Sonship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christ's relation as proper to his divine nature</th>
<th>Christ's relation as proper to his human nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Constituted by eternal generation</td>
<td>1. Constituted by creation and providence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Implies participation in divine substance</td>
<td>2. Implies only conformity to the divine image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Christ's exclusive and incommunicable prerogative as the only-begotten Son.</td>
<td>3. Shared in common with humanity as the seed of the woman</td>
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</table>

The two distinct relations, Crawford argues, do not make for a divided sonship any more than a twofold nature constitutes a divided person. A twofold sonship is no more mysterious than a twofold nature and is permissible within the understanding of hypostatic union. If it is taught, contrary to the Monothelites, that

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246 FoG, 205. Note, however, that while the Son identifies himself with humankind, this identification is completed only when the Spirit brings Jesus near to us in order to make us one with him in his sonship. *(A Commentary on I John, 481).*

247 To drive home the point Crawford quotes Kidd to the effect that only Christ is the Son of God exclusively as regards his divine nature (FoG, 211-213).


249 "We do not admit it to be the fact, ...that the God-man 'can be held to be the Son of God, in the sense in which the Eternal Word was so, in respect of His human nature, as well as of His divine nature.'" (FoG, 205-206).
Christ had two wills, is it not also true that he had two sonships? What difficulties this involves are inherent in the transcendent mystery of the hypostatic union and explain why Christ variously addressed his Father in terms of his eternal and incarnate relations. However, Crawford's position is the result of the constraints of language rather than a heretical predilection. His description of "distinct sonships" is misleading, for even though he affirms the oneness of Christ's person, his position appears Nestorian. Surely it is the person who is in the relation of Sonship and not either nature. How can the relation of sonship be "born under the law"?

The dissimilarity between Christ's two relations of sonship lies at the heart of Crawford's denial of the communication of Christ's eternal relation of Sonship to the human nature of the Lord or to those believing in him. The reader waits in vain for a more explicit exposition of the analogical or equivalent connection between redemptive and Christological Sonship than the mere truism that believers are united to Christ by faith. Crawford assumes that the believer's sonship is linked in some way to that Sonship which is appropriate to Christ's human nature. Yet he prefers to focus more generally on the divine and human aspects of the mode of admission into sonship.

The divine aspect refers to the sovereign grace and mediatiorial work necessary to make admission possible, and is described by the WCF as adoption; a process known among the Romans, Greeks, Jews, Egyptians and others. It "has reference to the practice, occasionally observed by persons who have no offspring, of assuming the children of other persons as their own, and binding themselves to discharge towards them personal duties." Functioning as an analogy the language of adoption belongs to

250 FoG, 223-226.
251 Crawford's comments are interesting in the light of more recent discussions as to the source of Paul's use of the adoption model: "Among the Romans this practice was regulated by statute, and made a matter of public concern. The act of adoption was required to be performed with the sanction and authority of the civil magistrate, before whom the consent of all the parties interested in the transaction was publically and formally given; and when the relation was thus legally constituted, the adopted child entered into the family of his new father, assumed his name, became subject to his authority, partook of his dignities, and acquired a title to his inheritance. This practice was not peculiar to the Romans; it prevailed also among the Greeks, the Jews, the Egyptians, and several other nations. We have one notable instance of it in the case of Esther, who, when her parents died, was adopted by Mordecai. Another example, equally notable, is that of Moses, who, on being found exposed on the banks of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter, was nurtured and educated by the Egyptian princess as her own son; but who, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, esteeming the reproach and affliction of the Lord's people greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And from the readiness with which first Abraham, and afterwards Sarah, entertained the thought of another than their own actual offspring being admitted to the standing of a child, and constituted heir of the name and possessions of the family, it would seem that this practice was observed in patriarchal times." (FoG, 290-291).
252 FoG, 290.
the discourse of approximation. Nevertheless Crawford manages to say certain important things about adoption.

Consistent with this view of adoptive sonship, Crawford joins Candlish (in contradistinction from Turretin) in asserting that adoption is “a distinct blessing graciously superadded to [justification].”

Whereas justification is a wholly judicial act undertaken by God as ruler or judge, adoption entails more than justified sinners could have anticipated had not they been taught to expect this additional act of divine and paternal grace (Eph. 1:5; 1 Jn 3:1). Through the adoptive process the full privileges of Adam’s original sonship are regained, but there is more. Through union with Christ other blessings higher than Adam ever experienced were obtained. Thus, although for different reasons, Crawford nevertheless concurs with Candlish that adoption denotes a higher sonship than Adam knew.

Accompanying adoption is the renovating agency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit qualifies God’s people for the filial relation by regenerating them. Whereas adoption grants the filial standing or relation, the new birth bestows the filial character. Yet, anticipating queries concerning the incompatibility of the two models, Crawford argues that the analogies should not be taken too literally.

The human aspect of the mode of admission into sonship has reference to faith in Christ. This is implicit in the WCF’s statement that adoption is for “all those that are justified”. The receiving of Christ and all his benefits by faith is appropriately and amply illustrated in adoption. “Wherever this practice has ordinarily prevailed, it has been held necessary that the person to be adopted should give free consent to the transaction, provided he were old enough to understand the nature of it, and should

235 FoG, 292.
234 FoG, 293.
235 FoG, 289. This understanding is confirmed a few pages later: “They not only recover the full privileges of their original sonship, but obtain also, through union and fellowship with the Son of God, other blessings far higher and more precious than any which Adam forfeited; and are fully assured, moreover, of the possession of all their privileges, by the plighted word and covenant of the God of Truth which endure for ever.” (FoG, 291). Candlish retorted that had Crawford dealt more with those aspects of the special or salvific sonship earlier in his lectures then he would have realised that the respective positions of the two men to be nearer than he would have thought (FG, suppl. vol., 100).
236 Candlish had taken it literally because his case depended on the interplay between the Spirit’s agency in regeneration and in the conception of the Saviour, so supplementing his argument for the identification of Christ’s relation of sonship with ours: “Yes, he must make out, not only that there is a fair analogy between the processes, - for that would only suffice to establish an ‘analogical sonship,’ to which he attaches no importance, - but that there is ‘a close correspondence’ between them, and that they take place ‘after the very same manner.’ Now this, I venture to say, is more than he will ever prove;” (FoG, 298).
deliberately express his willingness to enter into the family of his benefactor."

So it is in the gospel. Adoption is freely offered but not actually bestowed until it is received (Gal. 3:26 and Jn 1:12). Faith amounts then to the receiving of Christ. It does not, Crawford objects, work by love, for this would reverse the scriptural priority of divine love over its human equivalent (Gal. 4:6 and 1 Jn 4:19).

Intimately connected with admission into higher sonship is the sacrament of baptism. Perceptively, Crawford observes that many theologians and creeds have regarded baptism as the means of obtaining this special privilege (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:11-12 and 1 Pet. 3:21). Although Scripture does not say it in so many words, baptism is the sacramental sign of regeneration and adoption. These blessings are not necessarily realised at the point of sacramental administration, even though the plainest statements of Scripture declare that they are. The scriptural context points to an expansionary era for the church during which time the adult baptisms of first-generation Christians predominated. Thus Scripture does not make clear the design and effect of infant baptism. Even when applied to adults, regeneration and adoption are not so linked to the sacrament that it cannot be administered without these special benefits resulting.

Only faith can confer covenantal blessings. Therefore, "the seals of the covenant cannot certify to an unbeliever that he is pardoned, regenerated, and adopted, when the covenant sealed by them may be seen, by any one who will look at the plain terms of it, to be certifying the very reverse. If they did so, they would be nullifying, or rather contradicting, the covenant, instead of ratifying it."

On trusting in Christ, the believer enters the higher filial standing entailing particular privileges and obligations. In contrast to Candlish's stress on permanence in the household of God as sonship's "great radical, distinctive, characteristic property", Crawford described this discussion as a misunderstanding explaining that: "Since adoption is a blessing distinct from justification and superadded to it, - Dr. Crawford holds that as decidedly as I do, - since it is a transference of the entire business of God's gracious dealing with us from the region of law and jurisprudence to the domain of the affections, - there may be room in it, more than in the other, for the recognition of believing love, or loving faith, as the element in which its experience moves and circulates." (FG, suppl. vol., 103).

For Crawford's examples see FoG, 309ff. "The sacraments, when viewed as seals of the covenant of grace, convey no assurance of spiritual blessings to their recipients, except on the terms of that covenant which is sealed by them." (FoG, 313).

Candlish did not deny that the other privileges of sonship were involved; he merely subsumed them under the central privilege of an inviolable sonship. However, given that Candlish delivered the mandatory minimum of lectures stipulated in the rules of the Cunningham Lectureship, it is disappointing that he did not include an enumeration of the privileges of sonship as part of his exposition. The fact that

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Crawford outlines five filial privileges that remind us of those found in Calvin. First, God’s children have the fullest security in knowing that their wants shall be supplied. God obligates himself to provide for the welfare of the adopted. Those provisions grant the temporal blessings that are expedient. He is particularly concerned for their spiritual welfare. Therefore the sons of God are guaranteed instruction, guidance, strength, encouragement, peace, and consolation (Phil. 4:19). Despite all this, Crawford objects to Candlish’s distinguishing of adoption from other Evangelical blessings (especially justification). He insists that adoption is no more secure than justification: “A son who proves incorrigible may be driven from his father’s house, no less than may a subject, who proves disloyal and rebellious, be banished from his sovereign’s kingdom.” Therefore:

Even if God had not been pleased to superadd the blessing of adoption to that of justification, the latter would not have been on that account the less secure, as resting on that perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, in which, by a divinely originated and divinely sustained faith, we obtain a sure and indefeasible interest,... on the other hand... adoption itself has no has no inherent security in its own nature, more than belongs to any other blessing of the Gospel, apart from the grace of God, whereby we are continually preserved in union with Jesus Christ, through whom we are partakers of it. We dare not regard any one of the believer’s privileges as furnishing in itself a secure tenure for the others.

Secondly, God’s children are privileged with parental chastisement. The importance of chastisement is that it prevents the sons of God from becoming spoilt. Chastisement so tempers their natural inclinations that they yield the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Thirdly, faced with the incomparable majesty and immaculate holiness of God, the sons of God are encouraged to draw near with free access to their Father so as to enjoy communion with him. “The name of Father,...dispels our fears, revives our confidence, and emboldens us with unreserved freedom.

he omits these reflects poorly on his treatment and severely curtails his relevance for our interest in the adoptive state.

261 *FoG*, 329.

262 *FoG*, 332. In defence of his case Crawford provides an exegesis of Jn. 8:35-36, 1 Jn. 3:9 and Rom. 8:14, 15, 17, 21, and 29. He challenges Candlish’s view of the inviolable security of sonship as its radical distinctive (*FoG*, 332-342; cf. Candlish’s *FG*, suppl. vol., 110-115). As for Candlish, he must have found the aspersions cast on his thoroughgoing Protestant doctrine of justification somewhat irritating. No doubt these were somewhat due to his poverty of expression. Hence, he replied: “I hold, as he does, that our standing in respect of our being justified is quite as infallibly secure as our standing in respect of our being adopted; and that the security of the former might be guaranteed altogether apart from the latter. Still I hold also that our being raised to a participation with Christ in his sonship does involve in it something that there is not in our being reinstated in the position of righteous subjects through participation with him in his righteousness; that the one benefit is not only the fitting sequel of the other, but may also be the means of making that other as inviolable as it is itself; and that all this may be in terms of the covenant of grace connecting the two inseparably together.” (*FoG*, 109-110).
to pour out before Him the desires of our hearts".\textsuperscript{263} Fourthly, and closely associated, there is the privilege of a filial spirit (Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15). Whereas human adoption can produce only a change of state, divine adoption also produces a change of disposition:

As often as He receives sinful men into His family, He brings their minds into harmony with their new condition. He changes the heart of the bondman into that of a child. He inspires them with that love which casteth out fear. He teaches them to esteem His service as perfect freedom, and to run with an enlarged heart in the way of His commandments.\textsuperscript{264}

Fifthly, the special sons of God have a hope of a glorious inheritance. They enjoy the same rights as the natural offspring. Therefore, Paul describes the children of God as "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17) and the inheritance as "the adoption". It belongs to those who already possess the first fruits of the Spirit, and are awaiting the ultimate redemption of their bodies and the full and eternal enjoyment of God.

Contrary to Candlish, Crawford insists that although these privileges are analogically derived, they reveal the reality of God's paternal character.\textsuperscript{265} They indicate his beneficence towards believers, and "assume an aspect of 'true and proper fatherhood,' as 'clear, specific, and well defined' as could be wished."\textsuperscript{266} The same can be said of the duties of sonship.\textsuperscript{267} First, the dutiful child loves, honours and obeys the Father by imitating him (Eph. 5:1; Lk. 6:36; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:14-15). Secondly, inspired by the very name of Father, the sons of God must exercise filial trust, for "when the great God ranks us among His children, what is there that we may not look for at His hands?" Thirdly, they must submit especially to chastisements mercifully sent from a Fatherly hand and for their good (Heb. 12:5-10). Fourthly, they ought to be holy. It is "a powerful motive to abstinence from base pursuits, sordid pleasures, and unworthy companionships, and to the maintenance of a dignity of character and

\textsuperscript{263} FoG, 322.
\textsuperscript{264} FoG, 323.
\textsuperscript{265} He is unclear, however, when he claims that his argument is not merely founded on analogy but is confirmed by the clear and unequivocal statements of Scripture to the effect that all true believers are adopted. We are left wondering how Crawford differentiates between biblical analogies from the clear and unequivocal statements of Scripture.
\textsuperscript{266} FoG, 327. Candlish remained unmoved by Crawford's argument: "What have we in this beyond the human analogy again after all? Of course I do not object to it, although I maintain the doctrine of "a real and proper fatherhood," more definite and illustrious, both in itself and in its fruits, than the human analogy can grasp."(FG, suppl. vol., 107).
\textsuperscript{267} "What these duties are must be evident on the slightest reflection - they spring so evidently from the nature of the relation that there seems scarcely to be a possibility of misconceiving them." (FoG, 342).
loftiness of sentiment suited to our high vocation." Fifthly, those who partake of the
daily sonship ought to show their high estimation of its preciousness by the
habitual gladness and cheerfulness of disposition with which the thought of it is fitted
to inspire them.

These then were the main issues at stake in the Candlish/Crawford debate.
Ignored by the Broad School, Candlish's lectures were reduced to a short-lived in-
house disagreement that left the questions raised largely unresolved. One of the more
prominent general issues at stake between the two men was the alleged novelty of
Candlish's views. In seeking to develop Reformed theology, Candlish claimed the
support of Justin Martyr, Athanasius, Calvin, Thomas Goodwin, Bengel,
Schleiermacher, Delitzsch, Treffry and Bingham. Nevertheless, there is something
reactionary in what he says. This leads us to concur with his own assessment of the
limitations of his attempt.

His insights tend to be more scriptural when analysing the Broad School than
when endeavouring to enrich Reformed theology. Indeed, Candlish evinced a measure
of both modesty and uneasiness in his breaking of new ground:

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268 FoG, 345.
269 FoG, 346.
270 Kennedy, op.cit., 71; McKinlay, op.cit., 20; Lidgett, The Fatherhood of God, 7. Only in this sense are
Candlish's lectures to be understood as creating a "considerable stir" (DSCHT. S.v. "Candlish, Robert
Smith" by J. R. Wolfe). The editor of BFER appends to Hugh Martin's lengthy treatment of Candlish's
lectures the following note: "We have willingly allotted a larger share of our space than usual to the
foregoing ingenious treatment of one of the most ingenious essays of modern theology. Without
pledging ourselves to every view or statement either of Dr Candlish or of his reviewer, we hold it of great
importance that the subject should be freely canvassed, and that it deserves a much more serious and
searching investigation from theologians than they have hitherto bestowed on it." (op.cit., 787fn.).
271 As Macleod states: "His venture in these lectures to advance the bounds of Systematic Theology is
Candlish's chief contribution to the exposition of the Reformed Faith." (Scottish Theology, 275).
272 FG, suppl. vol., 142-156. As Candlish acknowledges, this support stretches only so far as the spirit of
their words and not necessarily to the ipsissima verba themselves (ibid., 153).
273 As Macleod states: "His venture in these lectures to advance the bounds of Systematic Theology is
Candlish's chief contribution to the exposition of the Reformed Faith." (Scottish Theology, 275).
274 "I thoroughly believe that the line of inquiry which I have been tracing is as safe as I think it will
prove to be interesting for any one who will prosecute it with due reverence, docility and humility of
spirit. I commend the subject to the study of younger and fresher minds." (FG, 196). McKinlay rightly
argues that Candlish was more at home as a defender of the Reformed Faith rather than as its critic
(op.cit., 26).
I have endeavoured to lend some help in the way of, as it were, breaking new ground.... Some of the thoughts I have ventured to throw out may seem to some critics to be nothing better than speculations. But I hope it will be admitted that none of them touch the foundations of the sacred temple of truth, or displace any of its stones. What I have advanced may, perhaps, in the long run, and in other hands, add some features of symmetry and beauty to the structure, and even strengthen some of its buttresses. But all the old glory remains untarnished; all the old refuges for the weary and the lost are as open and as secure as ever.275

Crawford was surprised, then, that Candlish was offended by the charge of perpetrating the startlingly novel when he himself was claiming to have broken new ground.276 Others preferred to call his lectures "ingenious".277

As for the specific issues involved, the degree of affinity between the two theologies of the Fatherhood of God has been variously understood.278 Certainly, a clue to the strength of each theology is found in Candlish's response to Crawford's critique. Candlish's very defensiveness of his dismissal of a general Fatherhood suggests the strength of Crawford's affirmation of it. His offensive against Crawford's view of the relationship between the Sonship of Christ and the sonship of believers implies the weakness of Crawford's position.279 On the former issue, Candlish concurs with Crawford's definition of Fatherhood but queries whether it means anything more than a general benevolence or love.280 He insists that the scriptural proof for a general Fatherhood is meagre and that a derivation of the idea from the realm of analogy is fraught with difficulties. Thus, he declares:

On the whole, I am still of opinion, after weighing all Dr. Crawford's arguments and objections, that there is not only no evidence from reason or Scripture in favour of an original and universal fatherhood on the part of God, as a real and definite personal relation sustained by him towards his intelligent creatures, but strong presumption against it in what is revealed of man's sin and Christ's redemption.281

On the respective sonships of Christ and his people, Candlish agrees with all that Crawford says on the basis of adoptive sonship, namely, concerning the atonement, and is most laudatory of Crawford's treatments of the theme.282 He merely denies that it was a paternal love that caused the atonement. In Crawford's view this

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277 "The late controversy on the Fatherhood of God", 304. Cf. I L B's "Dr. Candlish", CP, 190. William Knight says that Candlish used to unfold many optimistic theories... but was not a great thinker" (op.cit., 105-106).
278 The two theories have been alternatively viewed as "logical contradictories" or a difference over choice of words ("The late controversy on the Fatherhood of God", 305).
279 FG, suppl. vol., 40.
280 FG, suppl. vol., 8 and 12.
undermines Scripture’s attestation that it was the Father who gave his Son to death.\textsuperscript{283} That aside, Candlish insists that Christ cannot possess a double relation of sonship appropriate to each nature without his person being divided.\textsuperscript{284} Only properties or attributes can correspond to a nature and even then the manner in which the properties of each nature function remains a mystery.\textsuperscript{285} Relations, on the other hand, correspond to the person. Supported by a rare quotation of Calvin, Candlish argues that the oneness of Christ’s Sonship is determined by the fact that he was the Son of God in regard to his human nature but not by virtue of it.\textsuperscript{286} For Crawford, however, the double sonship was essential to union with Christ.\textsuperscript{287}

Among others who were interested in the debate, the most erudite defence of Candlish came from a fellow Free Churchman Hugh Martin (1822-85). Martin esteemed Candlish as “an honoured and powerful defender of evangelical Christianity”,\textsuperscript{288} and commended him for clarifying the issues polarising the Broad School and orthodox Evangelicalism. In particular he commended him for providing an eminently valuable contribution to the development of Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{289} In fact, he regarded Candlish’s position on adoption as an advance on Cunningham’s. That was not difficult. “In Dr Cunningham’s Lectures on Historical Theology, the doctrine is not even broached - for the simple reason that it has no history to present.”\textsuperscript{290}

While Martin wrote at length in defence of Candlish’s two main propositions he outlined a number of reasons for the anticipated rejection of Candlish’s lectures.\textsuperscript{291} Exegetically, he doubted whether Christ prayed with his disciples. He thought it unwarranted that Candlish should have even discussed the possible consequences of sin on the Sonship of Christ. More significantly, he anticipated the querying of Candlish’s comparative emphasis on Old and New Testament Sonship. Furthermore, he expected

283 *FoG*, 362-363.
284 “The relation is one because the person is one.” (*FG*, suppl. vol., 62).
287 *FoG*, 373.
289 *Op. cit.*, 721. In John Macleod’s opinion, Hugh Martin was “in respect of sheer intellectual and spiritual power in the very first rank of the Scottish Reformed Church.” (*Op. cit.*, 325) Of the Lectures, Martin wrote: “Dr. Candlish, amidst labours in the service of the Church of every kind, from the humblest to the highest, has given to the Christian public a series of works in which one knows not whether to admire more the intellectual power with which he defends fundamental Christian truth, or the eloquence, and energy, and spiritually with which he kindles the finest feelings of the Christian heart, and enforces the obligations of the Christian life.” (*Op. cit.*, 787).
disputation over Candlish’s angelology, especially his connecting of the sonship of angels with the Sonship of Christ. Less worthy, Martin felt, was the inevitable criticism that Candlish portrayed finite creatures as partaking in a strictly eternal relation of Sonship. On this point, Martin defended Candlish’s perception of the difference between essence or nature and a relation.292

However, not all were so sympathetic to Candlish. In addition to Crawford’s criticism William White of Haddington, Candlish’s intimate friend, also waded in against him. White rightly understood that concurrence with Candlish on the two essential arguments was not necessarily a litmus test of Evangelical or Calvinistic orthodoxy.293

The debate, however, was largely confined in Scotland at least to the literary output of the two men. With limited active participation plus the tediousness of the arguments, it was almost inevitable that the discussion would peter out. Although Candlish’s reactionary yet strangely innovative approach stimulated interest, his lectures were marred by an almost trigger-happy zeal for orthodoxy that robbed them of the splendour of their theme. Indeed, one reviewer described the perusal of the lectures as “rather an irksome task.”294 Too many of Candlish’s points were presuppositionally driven from abstract principles and therefore lacked a genuine grounding in biblical and exegetical theology. According to John Macleod:

Both sides might be unduly straining the methods of Systematic Theology in dealing with a problem in the solution of which Biblical and Exegetical Theology had much to say. For the precise content of various portions of Scripture required that justice should be done to them, and the same terms in different writers or contexts did not of necessity always convey precisely the same shade of meaning.296

Candlish, however, was particularly guilty of the proof-texting approach so disliked by Erskine and Campbell. He dismissed the redemptive-historical aspects of sonship due to his battle against a general Fatherhood and was at times too reserved about the reality that is displayed through the analogical usage of Scripture. Understandably, neither churchman resolved the relation of adoption to the new

292 Ibid., 760f.
293 Macleod, Scottish Theology, 275.
294 ER, 3rd series, IV (1865), 52 and 64. As Lee puts it: “Although his sermons were characterized by their clarity of thought and dignity of style, his Cunningham Lectures do not display the same lucidity and elegance. In fact, he was criticized for their lack of definiteness.” (op.cit., 143 fn.). For an alternative view see “Dr. Candlish”, 195-196.
295 Macleod, Scottish Theology, 274-275. Candlish and Crawford were biblical theologians only in the more general sense that they used the Scriptures as the basic text for their investigations (McKinlay, op.cit., 24).
birth. Alexander notes that Crawford, being unable to clearly perceive the nexus between the two soteriological motifs, settled for a looser acceptance of the terms amounting to no more than mere approximation. 296

Of neither can it be said that he marks an advance on Calvin. Although Candlish shared Calvin’s contextualising of adoption as an outworking of predestination as well as his prioritising of union with Christ, 297 he was too speculative to compare favourably with the reformer. 298 His denial of an original divine Fatherhood was contrary to Calvin, as was his omission of the privileges and obligations of sonship, which Calvin clearly considered to be a paternal bestowal rather than a governmental prerogative. Included among the omissions of privileges was the most notable one, namely freedom from the bondage of servitude.

Crawford’s work gladly lacks Candlish’s reactionary tenor and has more of the breadth of Calvin’s doctrine. 299 Like the reformer he understood there to be both a general and a redemptive Fatherhood as well as a vital connection between adoption and predestination. Furthermore, he understood the extended implications of sonship, its freedom alone excepted. Of all the nineteenth-century thinkers summarised hitherto he stands alone as having placed adoption in the context of baptism. 300

However, the one area in which Candlish excels Crawford is in his understanding of the identification of the Son with the sons. While both accept the necessity of union with Christ, Candlish makes more of it. “Embracing Christ as offered freely in the gospel, made willing and able by the Spirit to do so, we are so thoroughly, vitally, truly, one with Christ, that we share with him in whatever belongs

297 McKinlay, *op.cit.*, 85, 92, and 100. Whether Candlish accurately represented Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ in terms of the identification of the Son with the sons we have yet to ascertain. See FG, suppl. vol., 58.
298 See the critical book review in *ER*, 52 and 59. His speculations ran contrary even to his own understanding of the purpose of the Lectureship, although - no doubt - Candlish would have disputed this (*FG*, xiii). Nowhere was Candlish was more speculative than in his understanding of angels (*FG*, 51-54, 94, 147-148; *The Sonship and Brotherhood of Believers*, 10-11; see also Martin’s “Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures”, 756f. and McClleland’s, *op.cit.*, 19-20).
299 “If we were to define what Dr Candlish has attempted to effect, we would say that, seeing the evils which have arisen from the Universalistic conception of the general Fatherhood of God, he sought to correct the language which has given a seeming support to such opinions, and has appealed to Scripture in support of such correction; while Dr Crawford has endeavoured to reconcile the use of such common phraseology with evangelical doctrines.” (“The late Controversy on the Fatherhood of God”, 306).
300 *FoG*, 304-319. He correctly noted that some of the creeds held that baptism is the means of obtaining the high privilege of sonship (see thesis introduction) and is the sacramental sign of the blessings of regeneration and adoption - a view most heartily shared by Calvin for whom baptism was the symbol of adoption.

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to him as Christ. This Martin correctly regarded as the doctrine of Calvin, even though it is unclear whether Calvin would have agreed with all the details of Candlish’s position on the relation of Christ’s Sonship. What we can be certain of is that Candlish distinguishes aspects of union with Christ differently from Calvin. Regeneration, justification and adoption refer to union with Christ’s nature, righteousness and Sonship respectively. Of these three, the latter is climactic. It is “the highest and best union and communion of the three” and means more than a standing, a title and some privileges. “It is as being one with himself that I would have this sonship. And if I have it as being one with him, it must be his own very sonship that I have.”

The debate teaches us, then, that although adoption can legitimately be regarded as “the appropriate crown of Calvinism”, Westminster Calvinists have been so unaccustomed to regarding the doctrine in these terms that Candlish and Crawford proved incapable of forming a consensus as to its meaning. Nevertheless, the debate was to have lasting value as a record of Candlish’s call for fresh work to be undertaken on adoption. In heeding this call, it has been necessary to undertake the preparatory work of exhuming from the annals of historical theology those sources and arguments that will help shape the future exposition of the doctrine. However, our history of the doctrine is not yet complete. There remains to be considered the contribution of Southern Presbyterianism, for it was in America that the pertinent issues of the Candlish/Crawford debate received attention to a degree unheard of anywhere else outside of Scotland.

Enough to say that Candlish failed to stem the tide. The 1870s witnessed a glut of heresy trials in Scotland: Fergus Ferguson, David Macrae, Robert Wallace, William Knight and, most notable of all, William Robertson Smith. The fruits of classic Victorian liberalism had come to stay. Men of eminence such as Tulloch, Norman Macleod, T M Lindsay and Alexander Whyte were now disseminating the new opinions, impacted as they increasingly were by views from England and Germany. With arguments rife that the great historic confessions were time- and culture-bound, it is not surprising that the confessional revolution resulted in The

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301 Discourses, 39.
302 Martin, op.cit., 752.
303 Ibid., 60. Or, as McKinlay rightly understood Candlish’s position, adoption is “the object of our redemption... the climax of our salvation” (op.cit., 118).
304 Discourses, 56.
Great Confessional Controversy (1860-1921), characteristic of which was the flurry of confessional reflection that led to the passing of numerous declaratory acts in various denominations.\textsuperscript{306} These signalled the end of the doctrinal definiteness of the major Scottish denominations. The confessional revolution had reached its goal.

\textsuperscript{305} For a most useful overview of the following years see J R Fleming's volume, \textit{A History of the Church in Scotland 1875-1929}. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1933.

\textsuperscript{306} Cheyne, "The Place of the Confession through Three Centuries", 25-27.
Chapter Nine
The “Development” of Adoption

To the best of my knowledge, it was the Presbyterian theologians of the American South, who most fully developed and applied the implications of the Westminster (and Biblical) teaching on adoption in the nineteenth century.
D F Kelly, “Adoption: An Undeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards”.

As interest in the intricate and unresolved issues of the Candlish/Crawford debate quickly waned in Scotland, far away in the heart of the American South two Presbyterians John L Girardeau (1825-1898) and Robert A Webb (1856-1919) took up in turn the question of adoption. Initially motivated by circumstances within Columbia Seminary, Girardeau soon found in Candlish’s lectures added incentive to investigate Adam’s Edenic status and the broader issues germane to adoption. Later Webb - Girardeau’s some-time student and son-in-law - followed up this interest with mixed results. Although he succeeded in confirming this uniquely Southern Presbyterian contribution to Westminster Calvinism - thereby staying its disappearance from the consciousness of the community, he spoke for many no doubt in asserting that “Calvin wrote nothing whatsoever of adoption”.

Accordingly, the present chapter completes our theological history of Calvinism with the most public indication to date that the tradition had let go of a major doctrine so favoured by its founder. Thus, the importance of the Southern Presbyterian contribution lies in its provision of further evidence to the effect that even when later Calvinists dealt with adoption they did so almost exclusively in terms of the framework of discussion established by the more scholastic approach of the Westminster Assembly. While such rare discussions added needed resources to the scant body of literature available, they lacked the richness of Calvin’s doctrine and therefore succeeded in implying that the theological history of adoption in the tradition was both truncated and monolithic in its approach.

While Candlish was waging his “war” against the Broad School in Scotland, Southern Presbyterians including Girardeau and Webb were caught up in the civil

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1 As mentioned already, their rare contributions were not published until 1905 and 1947 respectively. See J L Girardeau, The Discussions of Theological Questions, 428-521; and R A Webb, The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption, op. cit.
bloodbath of 1861-1865. According to Franklin, "perhaps no decade in the history of
the United States has been so filled with tense and crucial moments as the ten years
leading to the Civil War; and closely connected with the majority of these crises was
the problem of slavery."

Although the acceptance of the institution was unique neither to the South
nor to Presbyterianism (for the North was deeply racist as well), there was
something remarkable about the way that freedom to express support for slavery had
grown in the region. Not only was there the invention of the cotton gin in 1792 that
had reinvigorated the institution by making plantation agriculture possible again,
the flight of pro-abolitionists to the Northern states meant that those initially
unswayed by the arguments gradually came to hear only one side of the case. What
persuasive voices could still be heard from the North became mute with time as the
attention of the theological, ecclesiastical and socio-political conservatives was
turned to the emerging Unitarianism and the assorted forms of liberalism that beset

2 Ibid., 17.
4 Although horrified by its abuses, slavery had been defended, for example, by the great Methodist
evangelist George Whitefield (ibid., 256; cf. Arnold A Dallimore, George Whitefield: The Life and
However, opposition to slavery dated back to the humanitarian influences that were evoked by the
Enlightenment, and later by such Evangelical leaders as Charles Finney in America and William
Wilberforce in Britain. In particular Finney's emphasis on the importance of being useful released a
powerful impulse toward social reform. Thus abolitionism became a way of serving God. Over time
the abolitionists came to argue, first, that slavery was opposed to the teaching of Jesus in regard to the
universal brotherhood of man and his creation in God's image. Secondly, they argued that slavery
with its denial of the inalienable right of freedom of religion, marriage, family and employment
rights, was contrary to the fundamental way of American life. Thirdly, slavery was said to be a
menace to the peace and safety of the country (Franklin, op. cit., 242).
5 Eugene D. Genovese, The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American
6 Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America. Edited by D G Hart and Mark A
Noll. S.v. "Abolition, Presbyterians and" by K J Hardman. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,
1999.
7 In the North abolitionists succeeding in getting passed gradual abolition laws. While these laws were
subject to judicial interpretation, moves for total abolition were distracted by the need to free Southern
slaves. Nevertheless, Arthur Zilversmit states that "by 1830, when there were over 2,000,000 slaves in
the United States, fewer than one per cent were found in the New England and Middle Atlantic states,
and most of these were in New Jersey. Only 2,780 Negroes remained in bondage in the northern
states, and the free Negro population increased rapidly from just over 27,000 in 1790 to well over
the principal denominations, especially of New England. Those maintaining a vocal but increasingly militant protest only succeeded in convincing the pro-slavery leaders in the South that the anti-slavery lobby threatened the stability of the states.

In the South the theologian James Henley Thornwell had regarded opposition to slavery as a threat to libertarianism. Whereas the European bourgeoisie had rejected what was considered the divinely ordained hierarchy of society in favour of greater intellectual freedom and economic power, Thornwell taught that only a regulated liberty characteristic of representative republican government could safeguard the interests of society from "the social anarchy of communism and the political anarchy of licentiousness" that had dogged Europe:

It is not the narrow question of Abolitionism or Slavery – not simply whether we shall emancipate our Negroes or not; the real question is the relations of man to society, of States to the individual, and of the individual to States – a question as broad as the interests of the human race.

These are the mighty questions which are shaking thrones to their centres, upheaving the masses like an earthquake, and rocking the solid pillars of this Union. The parties in this conflict are not merely Abolitionists and Slaveholders; they are Atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, Jacobins on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battle ground, Christianity and Atheism the combatants, and the progress of humanity the stake.

While European Christian Socialists would not have agreed with Thornwell, they understood that secular socialism could not reunite society into an harmonious social enterprise. Anglicans such as J M Ludlow, Charles Kingsley and Maurice held that society would only come together on a shared understanding of a common brotherhood.

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8 Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860. University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 35. Nevertheless, we ought not to overlook the efforts of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had been making attempts to promote the cause of emancipation in the South since 1849 when he submitted a bill to Congress for the freeing of slaves in the District of Columbia. By the 1860s he was pushing for the ideas of compensated emancipation and the voluntary colonization of Negroes, although his plans were initially resisted in the North by those who considered the war to be about the preservation of the Union and not the dissolution of the institution of slavery. However, in December 1862 Lincoln passed a Proclamation of Emancipation freeing all slaves in the rebel states. Although a war measure that was intended to bring confusion to the confederacy as well as the depriving of its labour force, it held out to Negroes and the Abolitionists the hope of a better day. For more detail see Franklin, op.cit., 275ff.

9 Kent, "Christian Theology in the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries", 543.


11 Ibid., 405-406.

12 Kent, "Christian Theology in the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries", 546.
The fear of political instability aside, there were other reasons for upholding the liberty to possess slaves. Thornwell explained the theology for those of all denominations by arguing from the doctrine of providence that the history of society is the moral school of humanity wherein God assigns each man his place. On this understanding, the Negro, being inferior and therefore subordinate, does the labouring, the institution of slavery thereby functioning as God’s ordained provision of an essential supply of workers. However, while it is true that culture benefited, observers were quick to note that this was only possible precisely because of Negro slave labour.

Thirdly, in support of the institution mention was frequently made among Christians of the evangelistic opportunities that it presented. Not all, however, were convinced by this argument. If Negroes were incapable of improvement how could they be civilized and Christianised? Despite the paradox, churchmen such as Thornwell, Bishop Stephen Elliott, Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818-1902) and Robert Louis Dabney (1820-1898) held fast in their writings and sermons to the argument. Some sought to implement it as well. Although Thornwell, for instance, owned a plantation worked by slaves, Palmer, Thornwell’s biographer and the editor of his Collected Writings, doubts if the slaves made their own support. Rather Thornwell accepted their frequent taxing of him in the cause of their evangelisation.

To Thornwell, then, it was an anathema for the church to legislate against slavery. Consistent with his Old School Presbyterianism he regarded her as the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Thus ecclesiastical judicatories could rule against the institution of slavery only if it was found specifically condemned in Scripture by

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15 Thornwell and Dabney were not only two of the greatest theologians of the South but deserve to be ranked among the ablest of American theologians (Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders’ Dilemma, 2). Although Dabney outlived both Thornwell and the war, his views do not seem to have mellowed with the years. See his address to the Synod of Virginia (Nov. 1867) on the “Ecclesiastical Equality of Negroes” (or lack thereof) in his Discussions: Evangelical and Theological. Vol. 2. First Published, 1891. Reprint ed.; Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982, 199-217.
their king. As the church possesses only creeds and not opinions, ecclesiastical laws based on the latter were bound to transgress her jurisdiction. This, Thornwell argued, had in fact happened. With no explicit condemnations of slavery in Scripture, Thornwell insisted that if the matter was not inconsistent with the will of God, it must be one of Christian liberty.

Naturally Thornwell was aware of the dangers of slavery. He maintained however that the institution should not be confused with involuntary servitude. This did not mean that slavery was simply voluntary, for it was born of a dutiful submission to divine providence. But providence is kind: “According to the Bible, it is not much more harm to be a master than a father, a slave than a child.” Consistent with biblical expectations he claimed that the Southern States had made provision to protect the slave from want, cruelty and unlawful domination. Thus, while the slave remains the subject of contingent rights (such as free membership of the commonwealth) his claims to essential rights (without which his nature could not be human, which would include religion) ought to be justly rendered.

Accordingly, Thornwell regarded the Southern states as having captured the benevolent tenor of the scriptural perspective of the appropriate relationship between the master and his slave. Oneness with the Negro slave was, he stated, “a public testimony to our faith, that the Negro is of one blood with ourselves, that he has sinned as we have, and that he has an equal interest with us in the great redemption.” Personal worth was not then to be calculated by external circumstances, whether of birth, fortune or rank. Thus, he could declare of his fellow Negro slave: “We are not ashamed to call him our brother”.

The familial overtones of slavery are interesting and highlight the differences between the North and the South. Genovese tells us that whereas Northerners restricted their perception of family to the nuclear unit, the Southern perception included dependent labourers, which explains why slaveholders referred publicly

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17 “Relation of the Church to Slavery”, ibid., 384.
18 To the argument that the matter is settled on general principle, Thornwell says this cannot be, for slavery is provided for in the law (ibid., 391).
19 Ibid., 385.
21 Ibid., 403.
22 Ibid., 417.
23 Ibid., 403.
and privately to "our family, white and black", the Southern family benefiting from state protection. Of early Virginian views of slavery Douglas Ambrose comments:

> In a very real sense, evangelical Virginians understood slavery as a familial relationship between unequal members of a hierarchically structured and divinely ordained household... such a relation, like all relations, carried with it duties and obligations that flowed from God. Ministers continually reminded their flocks that how well individuals fulfilled or failed to fulfill those duties and obligations would bear heavily on the fate of their immortal souls.

Despite the familiarity of the imagery there is no detectable evidence to suggest that the Southern concept of the family was directly influential in the theological sphere. While such a link could certainly be read into Southern Presbyterian theology, the parallel nexus between the concepts of slavery and family in both the paternalistic society of the South and Pauline theology respectively are of a different order. Whereas the societal nexus was a matter of providence, in theological connection is an issue concerning grace.

For all the rationalising of abolition and slavery alike, neither ecclesiastical separation nor war could be averted. Differences as to how best to confront the increasing secularism and Enlightenment influence of the day proved unbridgeable. On the one hand, Southerners opposed the North's failure to resist the pressure for free labour. This they did on the basis that it bred egoism and license. On the other hand, they insisted that a Christian order required obedience to constituted authority, whether located in the family head, the master or whomever.

With the escalation of tension between the North and South it was decided to dissolve the ecclesiastical ties with the Northern brethren so as to organise denominationally along national lines. In December 1861 the conservative Old School Presbyterian Church broke apart with the forming of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. In a report to the synod of South Carolina (November 1861) Thornwell had justified the imminent formation of a new independent assembly on two grounds: the unconstitutional transcending of the jurisdiction of the old assembly by settling a political question in an ecclesiastical

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court and the transferring to the church of all the bitterness of the political feud. 26 By separating it was hoped that peaceful separate existence could be maintained. 27

It would be unfair to say that the new denomination supported slavery. "We would have it distinctly understood", stated Thornwell, "that, in our ecclesiastical capacity, we are neither the friends nor the foes of Slavery – that is to say, we have no commission either to propagate or abolish it. The policy of its existence or non-existence is a question which exclusively belongs to the State." 28 So far as the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America was concerned, slavery was an issue of manifold liberty and of providence. Contrasting the condition of Southern slaves with that of their fathers and their brethren in their native lands, Thornwell surmised:

We cannot but accept it as a gracious Providence that they have been brought in such numbers to our shores, and redeemed from bondage of barbarism and sin. Slavery to them has certainly been overruled for the greatest good. It has been a link in the wondrous chain of Providence, through which many sons and daughters have been made heirs of the heavenly inheritance. 29

Yet the North and South were already at war. Beginning as a campaign to prevent the dissolution of the Union, the military conflict played out over the next years as a conflict against slavery. Although the course of the war does not concern us, it is significant that Girardeau and Webb came of age, theologically speaking, during the crucial period of post-war reconstruction. 30 A combination of the emancipation of four million Negroes in the South and the devastating effects of the war ensured that both the North (now greatly industrialized) and the South felt a power unleashed that affected the whole course of the so-called Reconstruction. "From 1865 to the end of the century the United States was picking up the threads of her social, political, and economic life, so abruptly cut in 1861, and attempting to tie them together in a new pattern as a result of the war." 31

Reconstruction involved the tackling of several substantial problems: the rebuilding of the war-torn South, restoring her economic life on the basis of free

28 Thornwell, "Address to all Churches of Christ", ibid., 455.
29 Ibid., 460.
30 "In few periods of our history has the whole fabric of American life been altered so drastically as during the Civil War and the period immediately following it." (Franklin, op.cit., 293).
31 Ibid., 293-294.
labour and the resolving of the question of Negro survival as necessary for the Southern re-entrance into the Union. These problems could only be resolved through national action, action that Abraham Lincoln had already set in motion through a comprehensive plan outlined to the Congress in December 1863.

While the State's help for the Negro was largely economic, there was a social element too. Not least was the repealing of laws in the South barring Negro preachers and the right to assemble in separate congregations. Yet it was the church that provided much of the spiritual and material support. Although this support was not entirely new, the Negroes, who were used to segregation in biracial churches, now free to congregate independently and desirous to do so, withdrew from white congregations in order to establish their own assemblies. As a result Negro churches, from a variety of denominations (Primitive Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal), grew significantly after the war. Thus their economic independence was supplemented by a spiritual self-determination, which, while genuine, was nevertheless difficult to maintain in the face of habitual white encroachment.

Yet life in the South remained difficult. White leaders were continually pre-occupied with civil rights and Negro suffrage, while Northern industrialists — created by the War and made rich by victory — dominated the old war-torn agrarianism of the South despite the dynamic changes of economic reconstruction that were

32 For instance, Janet Cornelius has noted that “white Baptists not only ordained and appointed black leaders throughout the antebellum decades, but often encouraged their religious development. The result was a generation of leaders converted, trained and nurtured during slavery who took charge of an independent black church after the war. As one of these post-war black leaders put it, white people were gone from their churches, but “the gospel which they had preached was blooming like a green bay tree in the hearts of their ex-slaves.” (Janet Duitsman Cornelius, Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South. University of South Carolina Press, 1999, 29).

33 According to Cornelius' tracing of the Black Church's Baptist roots, segregation in biracial churches was operated along temporal and spacial lines. According to the former method blacks and whites met at separate times, but when they met together segregation was made effective in a manner that was traceable back to the class segregation found in congregations in the British Isles. Most common was the use of the galleries, whereby the slaveowners filled the downstairs and the slaves the galleries (ibid., 35-36). It was this segregation that provided opportunities for Black preachers and exhorters, thereby preparing Negro worshippers for the autonomy of congregational life in the post-war years.

34 White support for separate Negro congregations was not always encouraging. As aforementioned, we do find Dabney opposing the ecclesiastical equality of Negroes subsequent to the war (“Ecclesiastical Equality of Negroes”, Discussions, vol. 2, op.cit.). His solution to Negroes sitting on white sessions was either to have them solely as members under white eldership or the establishment of a separate black congregation (ibid., 216-217).

35 Franklin, op.cit., 305.

36 Ibid., 398.
introduced nation-wide from 1865 onwards.\textsuperscript{37} At no time was there Negro rule in the South. Instead both white and black Southerners became the victims of the economic revolution of the North that transformed the American economy into a world economy. Such was the context in which Girardeau and Webb laboured.

\section*{9.1 John L. Girardeau}

It is difficult to appreciate the esteem in which Girardeau’s contemporaries held him. In the Blackburn Collection held at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, he is variously described as a “distinguished and eloquent minister”;\textsuperscript{38} “a celebrated divine of the Southern Presbyterian Church”\textsuperscript{39} and “one of God’s beloved and honoured Sons”.\textsuperscript{40} More specific testimonies describe him as “the distinguished preacher, theologian and philosopher”.\textsuperscript{41}

In Thomas Law’s opinion, Girardeau “clearly stood in the front rank of the great preachers of his day. Without doubt the three greatest preachers ever produced by our Presbyterian Church in South Carolina - than whom there were no other superior - were Drs. James H. Thornwell, Benjamin M. Palmer and John L. Girardeau.”\textsuperscript{42} Theologically speaking, Girardeau has generally received less acclaim.\textsuperscript{43} W T Hall explains why:

\begin{quote}
History teaches that several conditions must meet in order to the production of a great theologian. Chief among these are extraordinary endowments, both natural and gracious; prolonged occupation as a professional instructor, and the stimulus of some absorbing religious crisis. This statement might be illustrated by referring to Calvin and Chalmers, or to Hodge, Dabney and Thornwell in our own country. The first and third of these conditions met in the case of Dr. Girardeau, but the second was, in a measure, absent.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 293ff..
\item \textsuperscript{38} “Dr. John L. Girardeau”, \textit{BC}.
\item \textsuperscript{39} “Rev. John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.”, \textit{BC}.
\item \textsuperscript{40} A letter from Edward C Jones to Mrs. Girardeau on the death of her husband, dated “Memphis July 10/98”\textsuperscript{.} (\textit{BC}).
\item \textsuperscript{41} “Dr. Girardeau Laid to Rest”, \textit{BC}.
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{The Life Work of John L. Girardeau}. Compiled and edited by G A Blackburn. Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1916. Published as \textit{Life Work and Sermons of John L. Girardeau}. Sprinkle Publications, 139 (no other details given). One reviewer of the original publication of this volume wrote: “When we closed the book, it was with the feeling that, take him all in all, he has had no superior in the Presbyterian Church, either North or South.” (“The Life Work of Dr. J. L. Girardeau.” \textit{(BC)}).
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Life Work}, 175-176.
\end{itemize}
Nevertheless, Girardeau’s theological prowess should not be underestimated.\textsuperscript{45} Whaling acknowledges this, but adds that that “there was one department in which he possessed unsurpassed scholarship and in which he showed remarkable gifts, and yet for various reasons the Church at large has failed for a time to appraise him at his true value in the field of philosophy”.\textsuperscript{46}

Girardeau’s papers provide some of his biographical details:


Motherless by the age of seven, Girardeau regarded his native South Carolina with maternal affection.\textsuperscript{48} There he attended Columbia Seminary, during which time he came into regular contact with Thornwell, professor and preacher at the South Carolina College, and Palmer, minister of Columbia’s First Presbyterian Church.

Subsequently Girardeau worked mostly among the Negroes of Charleston. Despite their esteem for him, the Civil War encouraged them to join the move out from under “paternalist white leadership” and “to align themselves with already existing black denominations”.\textsuperscript{49} Serving as chaplain to the Confederate armies during the Civil War, Girardeau remained thereafter pastor of Glebe Street,
Charleston, despite overtures from outside of South Carolina. At the General Assembly of 1875 Girardeau was unanimously elected to the chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology at Columbia Seminary vacated by William S. Plumer. There he taught Systematic Theology until his retirement in 1895. According to Hall, this was "time enough... to form an acquaintance with the broad field of theology and its kindred sciences, but not for formulating the result in a systematic treatise."

Although there is little evidence that adoption recurs throughout Girardeau's theology, it is apparent that he returned to the topic at various times during his ministry. As he did, his understanding of adoption matured. The evidence firmly suggests that there was more to his interest than merely an obligation to teach the Westminster Standards.

First, he sought to contribute to the emerging theology of Columbia Seminary. On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Seminary (1881), Benjamin Palmer had suggested to the Alumni Association that Girardeau "complete the system of theology begun by the late and lamented Dr. Thornwell, and arrested by his death; giving to the world a complete work issuing from this Seminary, and the lasting testimony borne by it to the immutable truth of God."

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41 *Life Work*, 176. His teaching during these years was, however, disturbed by financial and theological troubles within the Seminary. The latter arose out of a dispute with Dr. James Woodrow "who insisted on teaching evolution as a probable truth." (Girardeau, *The Federal Theology*, 12).
42 This may be due to the distorted picture created by his extant writings. We do know that in addition to his treatment of adoption he preached on the doctrine. Law writes: "I remember that he preached series on 'Prayer' and on 'Adoption,' some of which I heard and can testify that they were excellent and noble discourses, always very instructive and very edifying." (*Life Work*, 139).
43 S R Berry, "'Sons of God': An Examination of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Thought of John Lafayette Girardeau". (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi: Unpublished Course Essay), 38. It is not clear as to when Girardeau wrote his exposition of adoption. All he says is that "the remarks which will be submitted on this subject consist of several distinct papers prepared at different times. On this account they contain repetitions to a certain extent, but they have not been reduced to one logical whole, principally because each several discussion presents some statements and aspects of the question which are peculiar to itself." (*DTQ*, 429) This is confirmed by a later footnote in which he indicates that part of his argument was written prior to a sight of Crawford's *The Fatherhood of God*. For the MS evidence see Berry, *op. cit.*, 16fn.
44 After all, many others faced with the same obligation consistently overlooked the concept. Girardeau himself complains that "its place in a distinct and independent treatment of the covenant of grace has been refused" (*DTQ*, 429).
45 Cited by George Blackburn in his Editor's Preface, *DTQ*, v. It is no coincidence that Palmer should have been the one to proffer this suggestion, for six years earlier he had been prominent among those instrumental in securing Girardeau's services for the seminary. Of Palmer's speech at the Assembly, Hall observed: "It did not require... much eloquent speech to move and guide the Assembly on the occasion. The attention of the friends of the Seminary had been directed to Dr. Girardeau for years as the proper successor to the lamented Dr. Thornwell. They recognised in him a man of deep piety, scholarly tastes, large attainments and national reputation as a preacher. No other man of his age in all
opinion, Palmer desired to see a Columbia textbook on theology produced, similar to those prepared by Hodge and Dabney for Princeton and Union seminaries.55 “Dr. Girardeau”, Blackburn claims, “had the qualifications necessary to complete such a work, but instead of this, the course he marked out for himself was only to write on such subjects as in his judgement had not been satisfactorily treated by any other author whose writings were accessible to the church.” Thus, his literary output includes volumes entitled The Will in its Theological Relations, Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism, Discussions of Philosophical Questions and Discussions of Theological Questions.

The fact that Discussions of Theological Questions includes a lengthy section on adoption indicates that Girardeau considered the theme inadequately treated hitherto in Columbia theology. This should not be overlooked because it informs the discussion as to the extent to which Thornwell had written of the doctrine. That he wrote on the doctrine at all is most probably attributable to his use of Calvin’s Institutes.56 Douglas Kelly has suggested that in those seminaries in which Calvin’s Institutes were used adoption was taught, but in those seminaries where Francis Turretin’s Theologia Elenctica predominated adoption was not.57 Accordingly, neither Hodge at Princeton nor Dabney at Union Seminary made anything of adoption. It was utterly overlooked by Hodge, while in his 903-page volume on systematic theology Dabney included a mere twenty-two lines on the doctrine. This he justified by reference to Turretin, who, he argued, “devotes only a brief separate discussion to it, and introduces it in the thesis in which he proves that justification is both pardon and acceptance.”58

According to Whaling:

The most valuable work of our master Theologian was accomplished in the Theology of Redemption by the supreme and regulative place which he assigned Adoption. In fact, the organic and unifying principle in Thornwell’s theology is found in his doctrine of Adoption. The question proposed, both in natural religion and in supernatural religion, was the same, viz: how may a servant, through

the Church combined so many admirable qualities. He was known to be in full sympathy with all that distinguished the Southern Church from other Presbyterian bodies.” (Life Work, 167).

55 DTQ, v.
56 Thornwell’s notes on Calvin’s Institutes are in the Blackburn Collection (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS).
57 See Douglas Kelly’s article “Adoption”.
adoption, become a son. In the Covenant of Works the question relates to a righteous servant; in the Covenant of Grace to an unholy and condemned servant; but the end proposed in each case is the same, the change from the status of a servant to that of a son through adoption. No other system of theology has assigned so large a place to this ruling conception which occupies so supreme a position in the Scriptures and in religious experience; and in making Adoption central, Dr. Thornwell is at once the more Scriptural and the more philosophic. This is his chief achievement as a Theologian, making a distinct advance upon the Reformed Soteriology and that of all subsequent thinkers, by giving Adoption the regal position assigned to it in revelation, and belonging to it in Christian experience, and which theology ought to recognise in its systematic construction of Scripture and experience by giving Adoption the same influential and regulative place in the doctrinal system.

Girardeau, however, claims that “Dr. Thornwell... suggested justification as the central principle of theology.” Indeed, Thornwell described “justification as the dogmatic principle which reduces to scientific unity the whole doctrine of religion. It is common to both covenants, and it is evidently the regulative idea of both.”

One suspects that the right perception of the place of adoption in Thornwell’s theology is contingent on how he understood its relationship to justification. A perusal of Thornwell’s writings implies, however, that adoption was as neglected by Thornwell as by most other Reformed theologians. For instance, nowhere is the concept dealt with in its own right. Moreover, his lectures on the Covenant of Grace and “the nature of Salvation” contain no hint of adoption. Nevertheless, as we discovered with Calvin, the absence of a chapter or section on adoption can be deceptive. Yet, in contrast to the reformer, there are only a few sparse allusions to the concept found throughout the rest of his Collected Writings. His comments are restricted to two lectures entitled “Moral Government” and “The Covenant of Works” respectively.

Strongest proof of the incompleteness of Thornwell’s doctrine of adoption is inferred from Girardeau’s consultant editorship of Thornwell’s works, combined with the observation that in drawing up his own study of adoption, Girardeau refers

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59 *Thornwell Centennial Addresses*. Spartanburg: Band & White, 1913, 28-29. See also W C Robinson, *The Southern Presbyterian Church 1831-1931*. Decatur, GA: Dennis Lindsey Printing Co., 1931, 216f. and Smith, *op.cit.*, 253. Discernible from this quotation is another example of the ignorance of the place of adoption in Calvin’s theology and, given the date of this quotation, it shows how a lack of awareness of the importance of adoption to Calvin has lingered into the twentieth century.
60 *DTQ*, 65.
to Thornwell solely in relation to the question of humankind's original status. Nowhere does he refer to Thornwell in his general exposition of adoption. This strongly suggests that Whaling's assessment of the importance of adoption in Thornwell's writings is exaggerated. This is confirmed by Webb's comment that "Thornwell, in the brief fragments which were left to us from his mighty pen, makes but an incidental reference to it."

It seems, then, that it was precisely because of the doctrine's unfulfilled potential in Thornwell that Girardeau took up the doctrine with the intention of enriching Columbia theology. However, Girardeau's concerns were broader. He cared for the theology of the church and was concerned that adoption had not "received the didactic exposition which has been devoted to most of the other topics included in the theology of redemption."

Secondly, if less specifically, Girardeau's interest in adoption arose out of the general Calvinian nature of his theology that he inherited from Thornwell. Like the reformer Girardeau gave a central place to union with Christ. In a piece entitled "The Distribution or Division of Theology" he set out what were for him the criteria of a central theological principle: "A principle, which would be central, which would collect into unity all the doctrines of theology, must be one which is generic and universally comprehensive":

Were I required to speak more definitely, and signalize some one great truth or fact of religion as its central principle, I would, with hesitation, for the question is difficult, venture to specify Union with God; for, in the first place, it implicates in itself alike that intellectual and experimental knowledge of God in himself, and in his relations, which has been characterized as true religion; and, in the second place, it covers every possible case of religious life in every possible scheme of religion. It

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64 Ibid., v. This is substantiated by Smith's overview of Thornwell's theology in which he almost solely draws upon Thornwell's lectures on "Moral Government" and "The Covenant of Works". (op.cit., 121-182 (especially 145-148 and 162-163)).
65 For all the eloquence of Whaling's evaluation, it is supported by no independent testimony. Those following Whaling's assessment have been caught out by a contradiction. For instance, in Berry's otherwise helpful essay, he claims that "adoption held a high place in Thornwell's system" but goes on to assert that in writing on adoption, Girardeau "was consciously filling a gap left in his predecessor's theology" (S R Berry, "Sons of God", 21 and 38).
67 DTQ, 66. In doing so, he assured the reader of his DTQ that, "however much they may have read..., they will find in his discussions something fresh, something that no one else has said, and something that he thought worth saying." (DTQ, vi).
68 DTQ, 428.
69 "One of the perennial themes of his preaching and later of his theological teaching and writing", Kelly observes, "was the doctrine so central in St Paul's theology and so architectonic in John Calvin's interpretation of the Christian life: union with Christ." (Kelly, Preachers with Power, 125). Or, as one tribute puts it: "He was faithful to the doctrines of Christ and of Paul, of Augustine and of our Confession of Faith." ("Death of Dr. Girardeau", BC).
Thus, when Girardeau mentions adoption he does so in relation to union with Christ. In a manner reminiscent of Calvin he argues that, "faith is the instrument by which he becomes a partaker of the blessings of the federal union - justification and adoption - and is the great principle by means of which he attains the equally important blessings of sanctification." Thus, Kelly surely has Girardeau in mind when observing "that those in the Reformed tradition who stress the reality of adoption do so because of their strong grasp of the foundational doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ."

Contrary to modern commentators Girardeau felt no conflict between his emphasis on union with Christ and federal theology. He merely set the believer's union with Christ in the light of the federal development of redemption. Thus, his espousal of the former in no way undermines the importance he attaches to the latter. "If the federal scheme be destroyed," insists Girardeau, "there is no theology of the Bible which can systematise and harmonize all its facts."

Thirdly, recent discussions of Adam's Edenic status gave an added stimulus for his focus on adoption. These revealed to Girardeau that a straightforward supplementation of Thornwell's theology of adoption was impossible, for the two

70DTQ, 68-69.
71For example, in a sermon entitled "Sanctification by Grace" (Rom. 6: 1-2), he says that "by virtue of... union with Christ we are adopted into the family of God, and being brethren of Christ become sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ to a glorious inheritance." (Sermons by John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.. Columbia S. C.: The State Company, 1907. Edited by G A Blackburn. Published as the second part of The Life Work and Sermons of John L. Girardeau, Sprinkle Publications (place and date not given), 58-59).
72Ibid., 57.
74Writing during the same period the Scottish pastor-theologian, Hugh Martin (1821-1885), wrote: "The key-note of federal theology, as we take it, is UNION WITH CHRIST. Though it took shape, as a formal scheme of doctrine or exposition, later than the days of John Calvin, it is virtually - through the great predominance and ruling power in the 'Institutes' of the idea of 'union with Christ' - the leading thought in Calvin's theology; far more so than any or even all of the 'five' celebrated 'points.' And if this is true; if the heart and soul of this theology is found in the union and communion of Christ and His people; then is it so full of vital power that it will adopt into its service all fresh forms of literary effort and all valid products of literary culture, and will go on to create more for itself when these are done." (The Atonement: In its Relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord. Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1976, 29-30).
75"The Covenant of Works", BC, 10. "The defence of the federal theology rests upon the sovereignty of God. If he be God, he can create covenants, and nominate constituencies. Hence the objection vanishes into thin air. The federal theology can not be thus overturned with an a priori lever which seeks to show that the scheme is in its nature an impossible one." (ibid., 26).
men understood humankind’s original status differently. The independent and unknowing support of Thornwell’s position only exacerbated the need for a trans-Atlantic continuation of the in-house debate. Like Crawford Girardeau affirmed what he regarded to be an historical consensus:

> Until recent times the *consensus* of commentators and theologians has, with but a few exceptions, been in favor of the doctrine that man was by nature, in some sense, a son of God. This, of course, does not settle the question, but it creates a presumption, which can be rebutted only by considerations of the most convincing character. To my mind, this presumption has not been rebutted by the ingenious arguments which have been adduced to the contrary.

Although it is regrettable that his study consists of a collation of various papers written over the years, in contrast to those studied to date Girardeau’s treatment possesses a unique value in that it deals with adoption in its own right and is located in one place. This has the advantage of making lighter work of the delineation of its main tenets. Nevertheless, some re-organisation has been required so as provide greater clarity to his thought.

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76 Thornwell had died two years prior to the delivery of the Cunningham Lectures (see John Blackburn’s letter dated “Jan. 5, 1948”, *BC*). Candlish, for his part, shows no concrete evidence of having interacted with Thornwell at all. Of all the authors cited there is no reference to Thornwell or any other Southern Presbyterian (see ch. 8).

77 Girardeau provides no details about Mr. Wright apart from his remark that he was author of a volume on the same theme as Candlish’s Cunningham Lectures. In all likelihood he is referring to C. H. H. Wright (whose volume entitled *The Fatherhood of God and its Relation to the Person and Work of Christ and the Operations of the Holy Spirit* was published in 1867, as noted in the previous chapter).

78 “In recent years”, Girardeau observed, “some elaborate discussion has been had upon the question of the Fatherhood of God, in which the subject of adoption has received a measure of consideration. Dr. Candlish in his work on the Fatherhood of God, Mr. Wright in his book on the same theme, and Dr. Thornwell in his lectures on theology, have definitely maintained the ground that by nature man is not a son of God, but simply a subject and servant” (*DTQ*, 429). Again: “Inasmuch...as godly and learned men have, in recent times, differed in their interpretation of Scripture testimonies upon the point, there is room for discussion.” (*DTQ*, 431).

79 *DTQ*, 430.

80 The fact that Girardeau’s “preliminary remarks” consist of collated papers extending far beyond a preamble, means his argument is often repetitive and arbitrarily arranged. From Girardeau’s MSS it is clear that there was an order to his discussion. There we find a plan entitled “Relation of Man in Innocence to God: His filial relation to God”. The main headings are: I. Prove from Scripture that he was a son of God. II. General view of theologians. III. Develop the case. IV. Answer objections: Especially Candlish and Thornwell.” Although he conflates the content of several papers, he follows this plan quite closely. The papers follow the order: “Man: Relation to God in innocence” (*DTQ*, 431-433); “Adam’s Relations to God” (*DTQ*, 433-438); “Relation of Man in Innocence to God” (*DTQ*, 438f).
Contrary to the initial impression, Girardeau sets adoption in a threefold context. First, it must be understood in the light of eternity past. Like Calvin Girardeau does not mention adoption in this connection until well into the second half of his study. However, unlike the reformer, he gives only the briefest of consideration of this nexus, which almost wholly consist of the citation of the apposite texts. Nevertheless, under “II. The Grounds of Adoption” Girardeau enumerates first “the eternal purpose of God the Father”:

He eternally predestined the elect to be conformed to the image of his Son. Rom. viii.29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” He eternally predestined the elect to the adoption of children. (Eph. i.5, “Having predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”)

Secondly, adoption is placed in a relational context. It is with this aspect that the study commences and it consumes much of its first half: “Before the topic of adoption is directly considered, some preliminary remarks should be made upon the question of man’s natural relation to God. Is he, in any sense, a son of God by nature?”

In contradistinction from Thornwell, Candlish and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Wright, Girardeau believed that Adam was a son as well as a subject, and was therefore under the moral governance of God that was both retributive and disciplinary. His case for an Adamic sonship rests on two principal considerations: soteriological and governmental.

The soteriological argument is dealt with more briefly. Arguing backwards from re-creation to creation, Girardeau insists that the Bible consistently regards

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81 DTQ, 487.
82 DTQ, 428-472. The disproportionate amount of space that Girardeau gives to the relational context is testimony to the profile of humankind’s original standing to God during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The following exposition merely reflects that fact.
83 DTQ, 429.
84 DTQ, 429. “Dr. Candlish and Dr. Thornwell maintain that the fact of creation does not render God, in any proper sense, the Father of man; but that the relation which man sustained to God was simply that of a subject and servant.” (DTQ, 453).
85 DTQ, 439-441.
86 DTQ, 431-433. For the most part Girardeau leaves out detailed exegesis from both the soteriological and governmental considerations. He writes: “The Scripture passages which bear upon the subject have been subjected to so particular a consideration in the argument between Dr. Candlish and Dr. Crawford, that it is not deemed necessary here to reproduce the discussion.” (DTQ, 430). He continues: “It seems clear to me that the genealogical table in Luke affirms Adam’s filial relation to
sonship as a creative act. Through the “re-begottenness” of regeneration sinners are constituted the children of God by a new creation in Christ Jesus. Why then cannot the original generation at creation have made Adam a son of God? Indeed, “it would seem that the condition to which we are restored by regeneration or new creation is one which man had, in a certain degree, previously held, and which he had lost.”

The term “lost”, however, must be defined in terms of the distinction between what is natural and what is spiritual. The creative act constituted a natural filial relation that can never be destroyed. Sonship is, therefore, essential and not accidental to creation. This is evident from the familial analogy. “The relation which a son sustains to his human father, as a natural fact, can, from the nature of the case, never be changed. The son may be disinherited, disowned and cast out in consequence of his bad conduct, but to a disgraceful end he will continue to be his father’s son. Somebody’s child he must be; he is not the child of nobody.” The Fall did not, then, rob humankind of the natural relation of sonship to God. “Sinners and devils are sons in revolt - sons disinherited, excommunicated, reprobated, but still sons, under the indestructible obligation of nature to render filial obedience to God.”

However, the spiritual aspect of the filial constitution of sonship is accidental and not essential. Its loss at the Fall entailed an end of spiritual life. When Adam and Eve broke fellowship with God, they cut the tie that bound them to their Maker. No longer the sons of God, they became children of disobedience and children of the devil. Furthermore, disinherited by God they legally ceased to be his sons. Disowned, they became the children of wrath. Thus, while “the natural relation of man to God as a Father remains[,] spiritually and legally it has been destroyed.” Or, put alternatively, whereas the moral image has been entirely

God in some real sense; that the parable of the prodigal son proceeds upon the assumption that man was a son of God, and not merely a servant, before his apostasy; and that Paul’s argument at Mars Hill, in which he alleged the testimony of Aratus and Cleanthes to the fact of man’s filial relation to God, is dealt with violently when it is treated as simply an argumentum ad hominem.”

Later Girardeau asks: “If the new creation restores us to sonship, why could not the first creation have instituted sonship? And if the sonship restored in the new creation needs to be confirmed, and is susceptible of confirmation by adoption, why should not the same be true of the first?” (DTQ, 446).

DTQ, 431.

DTQ, 432. Similarly, later he writes: “He has lost his holy nature, broken the spiritual bond which bound him to his Maker, and erased the moral image of God from his soul.” (DTQ, 472).

For Girardeau’s general description of the Fall see his manuscript “The Divine Agency: Fallen Sons”, (BC), 1-6

DTQ, 433; cf. DTQ, 472.
obliterated, the natural image remains.\textsuperscript{92} Only by grace, through faith and penitence, can the moral image be spiritually and legally restored.

Turning to the governmental aspect, Girardeau confesses it to be "the strongest point made by those who deny that Adam sustained the filial relation to God".\textsuperscript{93} In response he denies the incompatibility of moral government and moral discipline as originally exercised towards Adam in a manner corresponding to his servanthood and sonship.\textsuperscript{94} Whereas government is the genus, discipline is one of its species. A species contains something of the genus and cannot therefore be generically distinct. It follows then that discipline must involve some aspect of government. Indeed, moral government is essential to discipline and must be outworked in either retribution or discipline. The question is not, then, whether government and discipline are compatible, but whether Adam was subject to both retribution and discipline.\textsuperscript{95} Those following Thornwell and Candlish must either prove that there was nothing disciplinary at all in God's dealings with Adam, or that no discipline was mingled in the application of retributive justice. Only then can the denial of original sonship be sustained.

In Girardeau's opinion, Adam was subject to both retribution and discipline. His argument rests on the belief that the judicial can be conjoined to the familial, as was the case with Christ who was, in the economy of redemption, both a subject and Son (Gal. 3:13 and Heb. 4:15).\textsuperscript{96} So are believers.\textsuperscript{97} Why then should there be any difficulty in conjoining the judicial and familial in Eden? In the Scriptures,

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\item \textsuperscript{92} DTQ, 472. In other words "the relation springing from creation simply is unaltered."
\item \textsuperscript{93} DTQ, 433.
\item \textsuperscript{94} The argument runs: "Adam certainly was under moral government [as a servant]; therefore, he was not under moral discipline [as a son]." (DTQ, 433).
\item \textsuperscript{95} In a fallen world of unpardonned sinners humankind is under a retributive and not a disciplinary government (DTQ, 435).
\item \textsuperscript{96} DTQ, 438. It is Christ's case which "proves that there is no impossibility that the same person should at the same time sustain a two-fold relation to retributive and disciplinary moral government." (DTQ, 439). In his case, however, the disciplinary government to which he subjected himself was perfective rather than corrective.
\item \textsuperscript{97} DTQ, 438 and 453. Girardeau was explicitly critical of Candlish on this point: "Dr. Candlish admits that the co-existence of the two-relations in the same person, in each of these instances [that is, Christ and the believer]. There is, then, e concesso, no impossibility in the nature of things that the two relations should co-exist in one person. Why may not one person sustain two distinct, but associated relations? If this be so, it must be shown that in Adam's case there was some peculiarity which created the impossibility. What was that peculiarity? If it cannot be indicated, then Adam's case must fall under the operation of the principle that it is possible that the two relations may co-exist in the same person - a principle which has been actually exemplified in the case of Christ and believers in him." (DTQ, 457).
\end{itemize}
Girardeau asserts, God is distinctly related to humankind as both ruler and Father. That being so, the assumption that Adam was both a subject and a son and liable to both retributive and disciplinary government is valid.

He goes further: “The authority of a ruler and that of a father may not only terminate on the same person, but on the same course of conduct or the same specific act.” Thus, contrary to Candlish and Thornwell, Girardeau argues that a father may apply final and irremediable retribution towards his son especially where his standing is conditioned upon the maintenance of filial integrity. Anticipating the objection that a genuine Father would not allow his son to occupy such an uncertain standing, he points to the work of Christ which proves the possibility of being under both species of divine government. The discipline he endured, being perfective rather than corrective, was the same as Adam faced in Eden:

He was, as a subject and servant, under obligation to render perfect obedience to the moral law as the rule of God’s retributive government. But he was also under a discipline which was intended to perfect him in the discharge of filial obedience to the law as the rule of God’s fatherly government.

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98 DTQ, 435.
99 Although Girardeau says that the question of Adam’s status and the question of whether he was subject to retribution, discipline or both are two distinct questions which ought not to be confounded (DTQ, 438), nevertheless he deals with them interchangeably throughout.
100 DTQ, 436.
101 For Girardeau’s vindication of the Father against “all culpable complicity in the fall of his earthly children”, either directly or indirectly, see “Divine Agency: Fallen Sons”, BC, 9ff. Although the Fall was, nevertheless, ordained by a permissive decree, “this decree did not make the fall a fact in the history of man, but a fact in the knowledge of God” (ibid., 36). Beyond this Scripture is silent.
102 DTQ, 440. Candlish and Thornwell argued that had Adam been a son, the Father could not have cast him out of Eden, for he would never have allowed Adam’s sonship to be contingent on obedience (DTQ, 454). They held that Adam’s failure of probation meant the foregoing of adoption and the loss of potential sonship. (For Girardeau’s alternative understanding of Adam’s Edenic potentiality for sonship in Candlish’s thought see DTQ, 466-467). “According to the view under consideration Adam was not created a son of God, but would have been, had he stood, directly elevated to sonship by adoption from the mere condition of a servant.” (DTQ, 468). Girardeau continues: “According to the theory in hand, had Adam stood, he would have been translated from no family into the family of God. He would simply have passed from the condition of a servant into that of a son.” (DTQ, 469). “It may be said that a human being may adopt his servant as his son. That may be true; but it would be impossible for him to adopt a servant who was not the son of another man. All adoption of which we know anything supposes the change of one kind of sonship into another.” (Cf. DTQ, 470). Texts provided as proofs of the point are taken from John 8:44; Acts 13:8 and 10 and 1 John 3:10 (incorrectly attributed to 2 John). “Those, therefore, whom God purposes to save he not only delivers from the kingdom of darkness and Satan into the kingdom of his dear Son, but formally transfers from the household of the devil and fixes in his own family forever.” Thornwell believed that this adoption would not have been supernatural, but would have arisen from the development, elevation and confirmation of Adam’s nature operational under the covenant of works (DTQ, 459-460). “We are accustomed to confine [adoption] to the covenant of grace, and surely had Adam been confirmed in life and adopted into God’s family, that result would not have been due to the introduction of the covenant of grace. All would have happened as legitimately actualizing the possibilities of the covenant of works.” (DTQ, 460).
Girardeau does not accept the indefectibility of Adam’s Edenic sonship. Were it indefectible, it would not have needed confirmation by a federal act after a limited probationary period. Rather, it is the contingency of natural sonship that distinguishes it from adoptive sonship. Nevertheless, while greater privileges may be secured by adoption, adoptive sonship springs from a natural sonship that was a token of God’s grace expressed through the covenantal arrangements of Eden. However, there is development between natural sonship in which Adam had to believe God for an understanding of his status and adoptive sonship that is empirically known. The failure of probation meant that this knowledge had to await a supernatural endowment of adoption.

Adam’s filial disobedience proved to be as much a transgression of law as his servile disobedience. Girardeau finds nothing in Adam’s original sonship that precludes this. Having been doubly disobedient, Adam was liable to both legal retribution and paternal discipline. “Without redemptive provision made to meet the case what can save the perpetrator of filial disobedience to God from a penal and everlasting doom?” Recovery can only be procured within the provisions of the covenant of redemption: the substitutionary obedience of Christ as son and servant alike. The Saviour’s obedience elevates adoptive sonship beyond the contingency of natural sonship. Nevertheless, adoptive sonship is conditioned upon faith, which is a divine gift won by Christ. Thus, even the confirmation of Adam’s sonship by federal act would have required faith on his part, and the regeneration that makes it possible.

103 “Whatever endowments God was pleased to bestow upon man in innocency, although expressions of his grace, were not supernatural endowments. They were a part of the furniture of his original nature.” (DTQ, 459).
104 DTQ, 459.
105 DTQ, 456.
106 DTQ, 462. “His disobedience was to God as sovereign and as father in the same act. God’s authority in both respects would have bound him and his sin would have been a transgression of the law that obliged him as a subject and as a son alike.” (DTQ, 462-463).
107 DTQ, 463.
108 DTQ, 454. This explains why, in his treatment entitled “The Covenant of Works”, there is no mention of sonship or adoption as the reward of a successful probation. For instance, he writes: “The object of the Eden condition and all the Eden dispensation was to test the fidelity of Adam, to try his spirit and see if it contained any degree of desire to obey God, any degree of loyalty to God as a servant.” (“The Covenant of Works”, BC, 29). On this aspect, however, Girardeau had evidently changed his mind (cf. The Federal Theology, 39). Even supposing on his later position that Adam had been adopted on successful completion of his probation, then he would have been in the line of the natural and not the supernatural: “The nature of Adam, as it was, would have been developed, elevated, confirmed; there would have been no necessity for the introduction of a supernatural element. The whole case would
Thirdly, like Calvin Girardeau sets adoption in a redemptive-historical context. Contrary to the reformer, however, his understanding of the principle of periodicity is as much a by-product of his defence of Adam's original sonship as integral to his exposition of adoption. Nevertheless, on one of the two occasions when he links adoption with redemption-history he refers to Calvin, thus showing as much insight into the redemptive-historical structure of Calvin's theology as Crawford, and more than either Erskine, Campbell or Candlish.

Girardeau's brief interactions with salvation-history help us reconstruct his view of the status of Old Testament believers. In Eden Adam was a son in minority who occupied the condition of a servant. Instead of attaining a majority sonship by obedience in Eden, his failure of probation meant disinheritance. Up to a point Adam's minority sonship resembled that of the Old Testament believers. They too were minors and heirs, differing little from servants. However, whereas Adam's attainment of a majority sonship was dependant on his perfect legal obedience, the sonship of Old Testament believers entirely lacked this particular conditional aspect. The full realisation of their sonship was only conditioned by the perfect obedience of Christ.

Whereas Adam waited in uncertainty and ultimate disappointment for his justification, adoption and attainment of a majority sonship, Old Testament believers were assured that the full inheritance would one day be theirs. This was because they were already regenerated and adopted and to a degree had already entered upon the promised blessing of their sonship, viz. the inheritance. Their faith looked to the appearing of Christ who would render an obedience unto death. They knew that only on these grounds could they be received into God's sovereign and paternal favour.

have occurred under the operation of the covenant of works. That being admitted, the supernatural element is excluded. That element we are accustomed to confine to the covenant of grace, and surely had Adam been confirmed in life and adopted into God's family, that result would not have been due to the introduction of the covenant of grace. All would have happened as legitimately actualizing the possibilities of the covenant of works. (DTQ, 459-460). Thus, Girardeau criticises Candlish for regarding the hypothetical adoption of Adam on completion of a successful probation as undertaken without a preceding regeneration. "If it be replied that in adopting him as a son, God would have created in him the filial nature and temper, why contend so strenuously, as Dr Candlish does, against the possibility of one's being constituted a son by creation?" (DTQ, 468-469). For Girardeau's defence of Adam's original sonship see DTQ, .

10 DTQ, 464.

11 "There can be no dispute about the teaching of the Old Testament. Believers are continually called servants of God. God calls Moses his servant, and Moses styles Abraham, Isaac and Jacob servants of God. So of the other Old Testament saints". (DTQ, 450).

112 DTQ, 466.
They believed the promise of God which guaranteed the reality of that future obedience, and were justified in anticipation of the actual occurrence of the great facts of redemption. Why not adopted the same way? "I agree with Calvin", says Girardeau, "that the Old Testament saints were adopted sons of God." 113

But though justified and adopted, they were under bondage, and the full enjoyment of the liberties and privileges of the New Testament believers were not, and perhaps could not have been, conferred upon them. The spirit of the servant was more prominent in them than the spirit of the adopted child - of the subject rather than of the son. 114

(ii) The Grounds of Adoption 115

The remainder of Girardeau's treatment deals with adoption as an element in the scheme of redemption. In addition to predestination (the protological context), Girardeau lists three other grounds which can all be subsumed under union with Christ and particularly pertain to adoption in the New Testament era. First, there is union with Christ naturally which at first sight appears to correspond to Calvin's emphasis on incarnational union (Gal. 4:4-7). 116 However, "union with the Son of God, naturally," does not refer to the incarnation per se but to Christ's "consequent community of nature with the elect". 117 Explicit mention of the elect immediately sets Girardeau apart from Erskine and Campbell. From Hebrews 2 he points to the necessity of the incarnation in which Christ's substitution involved a partaking of the same nature as his people. He became their brother so that they could become his brethren. Brotherhood to Christ automatically means sonship to the Father.

Concurring with Candlish, Girardeau rejects Crawford's belief in Christ's double sonship:

His sonship is eternally one. Had he become the Son of God as human, and thus, in addition to his divine sonship, assumed human sonship, the consequence would be involved that he became a human person, since sonship supposes personality. That doctrine the church has always rejected. The last attempt to support it, by the school of "Adoptionists," failed to receive the suffrages of the Roman Catholic Church, and has not been approved by the Protestant. 118

113 DTQ, 451. Unlike Calvin, however, Girardeau did not differentiate between the various degrees of adoption that pertained within the covenant community.
114 DTQ, 466.
115 Following on from his treatment of Adam's original status, which occupies the first half of his treatment, Girardeau commences his discussion of adoption proper with "The Nature and Offices of Adoption" and "The Grounds of Adoption". The following discussion reverses the order so as to outline what redemptive-historical contours can be drawn.
116 "A common nature with the Son of God, as human, is... one of the grounds of adoption" (DTQ, 488).
117 DTQ, 487.
118 DTQ, 488fn.
Secondly, corresponding to Calvin’s pneumatological emphasis on mystical and spiritual union, adoption is grounded upon union with Christ *spiritually* and vitally, and “is accomplished, first, on God’s part, by regeneration, and, secondly, on man’s part, by faith.”\textsuperscript{119} Thirdly, adoption is grounded on union with Christ *federally*. As a by-product of his adherence to Westminster Calvinism and in keeping with American Presbyterianism,\textsuperscript{120} Girardeau consciously differs from Calvin by overtly depending on a federal structure for his theology\textsuperscript{121} and, more immediately, on Thornwell’s central emphasis on justification. Girardeau confesses that his mind leaned

to the adoption of the principle of Federal Representation rather than Justification, and to the designation of it as regulative rather than central. It is broader, less specific, inclusive of the means to justification, of justification itself and its results, of at least equal value with it as polemic, and embraces adoption, which seems to me incapable of reduction directly upon justification, but coordinate with it as a consequence of federal representation, which in securing the confirmation of the servant as such, at the same time secures the confirmation of the son as such; the two benefits being concurrently acquired, but not being identical.\textsuperscript{122}

Union with Christ federally involves the Father’s imputation of Christ’s vicarious righteousness to the elect, which implies the imputation of his filial obedience. Whereas filial obedience is the special and immediate ground of adoption, the imputation of Christ’s obedience as subject is the special and immediate ground of their justification.”\textsuperscript{123} Nevertheless, Christ’s vicarious

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\item[119] As the elucidation of this aspect of union with Christ impinges on the whole nexus between adoption, regeneration and justification we shall return to this point later.
\item[121] “Even Calvin, magnificently endowed as he was by his abilities and learning for a systematic treatment of revealed truth, although he produced a theological work distinguished for its comprehensive grasp of the doctrines of religion in their relation to each other, did not seem to have had his mind definitely turned to the federal scheme.” (*Federal Theology*, 15).
\item[122] *DTQ*, 71-72. Cf. *Smith, op.cit.*, 252-253. In Girardeau’s opinion “apart from the conception of the federal system... no calvinist can state the successive steps in the application of the benefits of redemption, without plunging himself into inextricable perplexities.” (*The Federal Theology*, 41). Or again, “The *ordo salutis* is clearly settled by a strict construction of the federal scheme.” (*ibid.*, 43).
\item[123] *DTQ*, 488. Girardeau makes no such distinction in his treatment of federal theology. This suggests that his treatment of adoption was not formulated until after 1881, for in that year he presented his
\end{enumerate}
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righteousness remains undivided and embraces both aspects of Christ's obedience fulfilled as federal head for the elect. This parallels Calvin's doctrine of the mirifica commutatio.

(iii) The Nature and Office of Adoption

The nature and office of adoption concerns Girardeau's emphasis on the distinctive locus and particular value of adoption in the ordo salutis. This emphasis breaks with Charles Hodge's dependence on Turretin for the view of adoption as a second element of justification, and Archibald Hodge's view that adoption is but the generic result of both regeneration and justification.

Contrasting adoption and regeneration, Girardeau argues that they possess multifarious distinctions. Regeneration occurs logically prior to both justification and adoption and involves the creation of a child of God. Born into the Father's house, the regenerate undergo a real translation from Satan's household, are given "the tempers of children" and are thus prepared for life in the family of God where

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lecture on federal theology to Columbia Seminary's Alumni Association. That said, we cannot be exactly certain for he acknowledges that "a full discussion of this subject would necessitate a detailed exposition of the bearing of the federal theology upon the particular doctrines of the gospel scheme. But of this time will not admit." (Federal Theology, 43).

124 "If Christ's atoning obedience were vicariously rendered for all men, it would follow, from the demands of the representative principle, that all men having complied with the requirements of the law in him as their federal head would be pardoned and eternally discharged from obligation to punishment. Facts prove this to be untrue. The conclusion is inevitable, that all men were not represented by Christ in the accomplishment of atonement. It was the elect seed, given to him by the Father to be redeemed, who alone were represented by him when as a federal priest he offered himself an atoning sacrifice for sin. The truth is, that atonement made by a federal head and representative cannot, from the nature of the case, acquire merely possible, contingent, amissable benefits, but must secure results which are definite, uncontingent, immutable. Those must be pardoned and saved for whom he acts. Such results do not terminate on all men. Therefore, all were not represented in Christ's atoning obedience." (Federal Theology, 44-45).

125 DTQ, 473. See also S A King's "The Grace of Adoption", USM 22 (1910), 30.
126 DTQ, 473. See also King's "The Grace of Adoption", 31. Girardeau's assessment is derived not only from Hodge's Outlines of Theology but also from his commentary on the Westminster Confession. See Webb "iii. The Locus of Adoption".
127 DTQ, 475. For more on the regenerate child of God see "Adoption: The two Natures of the Regenerate", BC.
they enjoy the rights, privileges and immunities of the Father's children. As a monergistic work of the Holy Spirit regeneration is not conditioned by faith, for faith presupposes the spiritual life needed for its exercise: "We cannot, consequently, be said to be \textit{regenerated} children of God by faith." Adoption, on the other hand, recognises and treats believers as God's children. It formally introduces the regenerate into the Father's family and marks a formal (that is, legal and authoritative) translation from Satan's family into God's. Adoption is conditioned upon faith (Gal. 3:26). This explains why those regenerated are given through faith the \textit{εἰκοσια} to become the sons of God (Jn 1:11-12), for whereas in regeneration divine power is at work, in adoption legal authority is divinely conferred.

The obvious question, however, concerns the metaphorical interface between the new birth and adoption. Why should a born-child need to be adopted into the same family? This is because regeneration does not necessarily and of itself \textit{confirm} us as children of God; adoption does. Regeneration does not necessarily involve an indefeasible right to the inheritance of God; adoption does. In regeneration the heirship of the child is not necessarily uncontingent and absolute; in adoption it is.

Thus, justification and adoption confirm the regenerated child of God in his filial standing. Prior to this confirmation, justification and adoption are only virtual and not actual, and rest with Christ's federal securement of these redemptive blessings for the elect \textit{in foro Dei}. However, without actual justification and adoption there is no consummation of the vital union with Christ begun in regeneration.

Furthermore, the adoption of the regenerate is requisite for their legal translation from Satan's family into the family of God. Without it they still wear the

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\item 130 \textit{DTQ}, 475.
\item 131 "They come into the world as unregenerate, and at God's appointed time they are regenerated by the creative power of the Holy Ghost. He views them lying in their blood in the field of rebellion and bids them, live!" (\textit{The Federal Theology}, 41).
\item 132 "It is... impossible for us, until regenerated, to perform any of the functions of spiritual life, and, therefore, impossible for us to exercise a saving faith, since it is one of those functions." (\textit{DTQ}, 474).
\item 133 \textit{DTQ}, 474. Although Girardeau's exegesis of these verses reveals that he, in common with all other predecessors, had no comprehension of the uniquely Pauline usage of adoption his understanding of these verses has more recently received unattributed support from John Murray (\textit{Collected Writings}, vol. 2, 226 and 228-229).
\item 134 \textit{DTQ}, 476.
\item 135 Of the term "virtual justification", Girardeau says that it is "otherwise denominated Fundamental, General, Passive, Pactional, Federal, Representative, Justification." (\textit{DTQ}, 477fn.). He points the reader to Witsius, Owen, Halyburton and Thornwell as well as to his own discussion in \textit{Federal Theology}.
\item 136 For a fuller discussion see \textit{Federal Theology}, 22f..\item 137 \textit{DTQ}, 478.
\end{footnotes}
sinful badge of the former relation. Their adoption carries with it an implicit assurance that for all their sinfulness and pollution they are fully entitled to all the blessings of adoption inclusive of access to the Father’s presence and fellowship with the holy angels and glorified church.

It is equally important, however, that adoption is not confounded with justification. In justification the regenerate are legally and formally introduced as subjects or servants into “the society of a righteous universe as a community or polity”. While it confirms the servanthood of the regenerate in God’s rectoral regard, adoption confirms their childhood in his paternal regard. Thus, contrary to justification, “adoption legally and formally introduces the regenerated sinner into the society of God’s family” where they enjoy not the rights of a righteous person as in justification, but the rights of a child. In the justified community moral government serves as the rule of law of its members, in the family the adopted enjoy a title to the inheritance of sons. Adoption, then, “does more than justification, rich as are the blessings conferred by the latter. It is grace upon grace, rich, exuberant, transcendent grace.”

However, Girardeau anticipates the objection that “if justification terminates, on the regenerate, that is, on God’s children, it confirms them as children: they are justified children. Where, then, is the difference between justification and adoption?” His answer is fourfold. First, he notes that the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards both distinguish between them by regarding adoption as over and beyond justification. He anticipates the supplementary rejoinder that the significant distinction in Scripture is between justification and sanctification. Under this arrangement justification represents the objective aspects of the gospel which include adoption and refers to a change of legal relations. Sanctification refers to the gospel’s subjective impact and includes regeneration. Distinguishing adoption only militates against biblical simplicity. In response, Girardeau insists on the necessity of greater clarity than either his critics or, more relevantly Calvin, allowed for. If sanctification usually refers to growth in grace, but requires more precise articulation in order to acknowledge that its initial act is regeneration (the new birth), then surely greater clarity is also required on the objective side of the Gospel.

138 DTQ, 479.
139 DTQ, 480.
to distinguish between adoption and justification. Nevertheless, he concedes that the labels “objective” and “subjective” are useful. They refer to the various loci of redemption that attempt to do justice to each element of the ordo salutis while maintaining its unity.\textsuperscript{141}

As regards the Westminster Standards, Girardeau writes of the SC:

If adoption were only the second element of justification, no articular definition of adoption would have been necessary. At least, it would only have been requisite to state, in separate form, that second element. But an articular definition of adoption is given, and its contents are not the same with those of the definition of the second constituent part of justification. So far as the Westminster Standards are concerned, the view here maintained is supported. Their statements have been expanded, and given a particular exposition which seems to be needed. Adoption accomplishes something distinctively different from that achieved by effectual calling and justification. The distribution of the Westminster divines, which makes it a separate article, is vindicated by distinctions which are grounded in reality.\textsuperscript{142}

Secondly, the distinction between justification and adoption is proved by the differing ways in which they channel regeneration towards both slaves and children of the devil, rebels against divine government and apostate children. It “creates the subject anew as well as the son” and introduces him into both the family and kingdom of God (Jn. 3:7; Col. 1:13).\textsuperscript{143} Consequent on regeneration, “justification takes the new creature as subject and servant, and confirms him as such, adoption takes the new creature as child, and confirms him in that relation.”\textsuperscript{144} Thirdly, adoption and justification are worthy of being distinguished because they underline the fact that the believer occupies these dual relations forever after.

\textsuperscript{140} DTQ, 484f.
\textsuperscript{141} The objective/subjective division of redemption was not original to Girardeau. It appears to have been derived from Robert Breckinridge, one time professor of theology in Danville Seminary, Kentucky. Breckinridge intended to publish three volumes entitled The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered and The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered and The Knowledge of God, Relatively Considered (we can only be sure that the first two were published). See The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered, op.cit., xvi). More certain proof of Breckinridge’s influence on Girardeau is found in the copy of the second volume found in the Blackburn Collection. It contains annotated comments attributed to Girardeau and compatible with his own understanding of adoption (\textit{ibid.}, 185, 187 and 188; and W C Robinson’s \textit{The Southern Presbyterian Church 1831-1931}, 217). For a critical evaluation of Breckinridge’s method, see Dabney’s essay “Breckinridge’s Theology”, \textit{Discussions: Evangelical and Theological} vol. 1 first Banner of Truth ed. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, 29-73. For a far more favourable critique see Thornwell’s \textit{Collected Writings} vol. 1, 445-488. He describes Breckinridge’s division of theology as “original and grand”, but prefers to speak of abstractive or absolute theology, concrete theology and polemical or critical theology.
\textsuperscript{142} DTQ, 480.

\textsuperscript{143} More recently John Murray has stated, in the context of John’s familial terminology, that “the representation of Scripture is to the effect that by regeneration we become members of God’s kingdom, by adoption we become members of God’s family.” (\textit{Collected Writings}, vol. 2, 229).
\textsuperscript{144} DTQ, 481. “One may be an accepted and honored subject of a king, ...he is not therefore entitled to all the privileges of his monarch’s household.” (DTQ, 483-484).
Fourthly, the distinction is grounded on the distinctiveness of Christ’s obedience as servant and son. Christ “supplied the defects of Adam’s disobedience as servant and son, and makes us accepted and confirmed servants and sons of God.” Sharing Candlish’s objection to a twofold sonship, Girardeau nevertheless refers to a twofold obedience of Christ; that is, an obedience that was generically one with distinctive specific characteristics of servanthood and sonship.

These two distinctive characteristics of obedience underlie the corresponding distinctiveness of justification and adoption:

The obedience of Christ as the mediatorial servant of the Father, a subject under moral law, grounded the justification of his people as subjects of law, and... his obedience as a Son grounded their adoption as children in God’s house. The one entitles them to bow before God’s throne, the other to sit at God’s table.

Thus, for all Girardeau’s appreciation of the Westminster Standards, he sums up the nature and offices of adoption by virtually revising the confession’s chapter. In so doing he omits any explicit reference to justification. “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby, for the sake of Christ, he formally translates the regenerate from the family of Satan into his own, and legally confirms them in all the rights, immunities and privileges of his children.”

(iv) The Rights and Duties of Adoption

The adopted enjoy general and special rights. The general rights amount to heirship (Rom. 8:17): “We are heirs of God because we are children of God; and the mode in which the heirship exists is that of joint-heirship with Christ.” By its very nature heirship is a right of patrimony derived from sonship. It may be bestowed either naturally by descent, or by adoption. It can be either absolute or contingent; that is, either unconditioned or conditioned upon the heir’s behaviour. Contingency is removed by obedience.

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145 “Somewhat like the two natures in Christ, the two relations are brought into union with each other upon one and the same person, but are not interfused or blended so as to lose their peculiar properties. And as in the latter case the personal obedience was undivided, so in the former.” (DTQ, 482-483). Contrary to Crawford’s doctrine of the two sonships corresponding to each nature, Girardeau attributes the relations of servanthood and sonship to the person. Thus when he deals with the twofold obedience of Christ, it is the obedience of the Son that he has in view.

146 DTQ, 483.

147 DTQ, 486.

148 Girardeau deals separately with the rights and duties: “III. The Rights Involved in Adoption” and “IV. The Duties Springing from Adoption” (DTQ, 489-495).

149 DTQ, 489.
Initially humanity was dependent on the obedience of Adam for security of sonship. Since he fell, dependence is now directed towards Christ's obedience that was vicariously rendered according to divinely provided covenantal arrangements. Under these arrangements the Father appointed Christ, as mediator and federal head, to be heir to the inheritance. Christ has accepted this right of heirship on behalf of his seed. "His actual possession of the inheritance having been conditioned upon his perfect obedience to the Father in the work of mediation, this condition was perfectly fulfilled by him, and he is, by the Father's act, seized of the inheritance. The Father has formally put him in possession."150 Under the covenant Christ's vicarious obedience is imputed by the Father to all those for whom it was rendered:

The inheritance won was fully theirs, de jure, from the moment when Christ's righteousness was finished and formally approved by the Father. It is partially theirs, de facto, and will in that sense be completely theirs when their mortal pilgrimage is ended, and they enter into the rest of glory.151

Girardeau distinguishes between a covenant in which Christ inherits, and a testament in which the inheritance is administered to believers. The inheritance cannot be possessed without the Spirit's work of regeneration, followed by actual or conscious justification. These are essential prerequisites for the possession of the inheritance. Only then does Christ present his people to the Father, claiming that they be adopted and constituted heirs with him and formally invested with a confirmed right to the inheritance. The Father accepts Christ's perfect obedience and transfers it to the account of believers, so that his sons can be authoritatively adopted. Thus, the inheritance belongs to the adopted because Christ acquires it for them and is therefore rewarded by the Father for his consummated obedience.152

The inheritance is the paternal favour and love of God experienced in the present world of temptation and conflict, vicissitude and trial. It anticipates the future eternal world of heavenly bliss. Thus, the Father's love is manifested in riches of both grace and glory. In a word, the inheritance ultimately means "home!" and "all that is wrapped up in that sweet, transcendent word, heightened, sanctified, glorified, and projected everlastingly".153 It signifies the ineffable communion with the Father through Christ.

150 DTQ, 490.
151 For the use of these Latin terms in relation to justification see The Federal Theology, 25.
152 DTQ, 491.
153 DTQ, 492.
The special rights consist of immunities and privileges. Although Girardeau alludes to the development of these special adoptive rights in salvation-history, once again he omits a particular redemptive-historical ordering of his presentation. The adopted are: Immune from an abject slavish obedience; from bondage to human authority in religious matters when contrary to or in isolation from the Bible; from bondage to the ceremonial law and also to the moral law as a means of justification. While Girardeau acknowledges that these immunities are not peculiar to adoption but are also conferred by justification, he insists that they are "mightily enhanced by adoption into the family of God."155

Oddly, Girardeau provides a more straightforward redemptive-historical approach to the enumeration of adoptive privileges by noting their development through the Old and into the New Testament. The adopted have the privilege of a "free spirit of filial obedience", which results in bold access to the Father and filial communion with him:

This constitutes one of the most marked differences between the saints of the New Testament and those of the Old. Radically, as redeemed, there is no difference between them. Both must be viewed as regenerated, justified and adopted. But the Old Testament saints, according to Paul's description in the fourth chapter of Galatians, were minor children, under bondage to tutors and governors. They were as if servants. They were more characterized by the temper of servants than by that of sons. The New Testament saints possess in greater fulness the rich grace of adoption. The servant, with hat in hand, stands at a respectful distance awaiting the orders of his master; the child of God, as Luther has graphically suggested, rushes into the presence of his Father, leaps into his lap, and nestles in his bosom.

As Father of his children, God permits them to offer imperfect, yet sincere, obedience. Nevertheless, they are liable to the Father's discipline, but this is always wholesome, loving, saving and intended for their perfection and correction. Thus, chastisement should not rob the adopted of "the enjoyment of all conceivable good in God as the portion of the soul."156

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154 This itemisation highlights both the great strength and weakness of Girardeau's method. When looked at from one perspective, his comprehensive enumeration of the immunities is evidence of his attempt at providing a thorough systematisation of adoption. From another perspective it appears that his arbitrary ordering of the immunities reveals the omission of a framework for relating the redemptive-historical background of adoption to a systematic presentation of the doctrine. A combined redemptive-historical and systematic enumeration of these immunities would have placed the third and fourth before the first and second.

155 "The justified subject of law must feel that they are wonderfully strengthened, if he is also conscious that he is an adopted child, and that the Holy Spirit bears witness to his sonship." (DTQ, 493).

156 DTQ, 494.
The rights of God's children are supplemented by certain duties. Basically, they must render due honour to their Father by manifesting appropriate affections and feelings such as filial love, trust, hope as well as submission to, and acquiescence in the Father's will and rule. This, of necessity, implies obedience to the Father and imitation of him (Matt. 5:48 and Eph. 5:1). However, these duties are not "pater-monistic". Although the Father is the agent in adoption, adoptive duties are Trinitarian in nature. Honour, love, gratitude and obedience are also due to Christ because, as elder Brother, he is the one who relates the adopted to the Father. Furthermore, the adopted are to receive and honour the Holy Spirit, who as the Spirit of adoption cries out "Abba, Father" within them and testifies with their spirits to their sonship.

These duties are horizontally applied. All God's children, irrespective of denominational affiliation, are to be loved and treated as brethren. Possession of the spirit of adoption is incompatible with a bigotry that excludes from fellowship others who love the Lord. "It should be a maxim with us, that whenever we perceive in others the lineaments, however faint and disfigured with error or weakness, of our Father's children, they shall surely experience the embrace of a brother's arms." The family of God is then the adopted's sphere of fellowship. It is cultivated by a separation from the world wherever and whenever it is out of sympathy with the Father (2 Cor. 6:17-18), and also by a longing for the day in which all the adopted will be ingathered in the Father's glorious and everlasting home.

(v) The Evidences of Adoption

Finally, Girardeau turns to the connection between adoption and assurance. Romans 8:16 ("The Spirit itself beareth witness [summarturei] with our spirit that we are the children of God.") indicates that the evidences of adoption are twofold: the witness of the believing spirit and the witness of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 4:6). According to Girardeau, "the witness of our own spirit is a judgement of our own understanding, based on the testimony of God's Word as to the marks - *indicia* - which distinguish his children, and on our consciousness of possessing those

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1157 DTQ, 495.
1158 DTQ, 495-496.
marks. From these premises we conclude that we are children of God." 159 In Girardeau’s reconstruction of the *syllogismus practicus* Scripture forms the major, and personal consciousness the minor premise. In illustrating this from the new birth, he anticipates the objection that the new birth can only demonstrate the assurance of the regenerated and not the adopted. “The answer is easy”:

All who are regenerated are also adopted. The proof needs only an obvious expansion - thus: Every one that is regenerated is adopted; I am regenerated; therefore I am adopted. The proof of regeneration having been given, that of adoption is inevitable. 160

Interestingly, Girardeau’s *syllogismus practicus* differs from the Puritan Thomas Watson’s. In Watson’s opinion, the Word is the major proposition, conscience the minor and the Spirit of God the conclusion. 161 Girardeau fears that this arrangement obscures the distinction between the witness of our spirits and the witness of the Holy Spirit. 162 When Paul writes of the Spirit witnessing with our spirits he suggests that although “our spirit bears testimony, ...it also as distinctly teaches that the Holy Spirit bears his testimony, and bears it jointly with the testimony of our spirit.” 163 Girardeau takes the view that the witness of the Spirit runs parallel with the witness of believing spirits. The Spirit assists the adopted in interpreting the facts of Scripture, their own consciousness and the conclusion derived from the comparison. This influence of the Holy Spirit in the witness of the human spirit is not to be confused, however, with the witness of the Holy Spirit. Whereas the former is mediate and inferential, the Spirit’s witness is immediate:

The Word of God supplies the marks of sonship; our own spirit through consciousness testifies that we possess those marks; and then our own spirit, through the intellect, furnishes the judgement that we are the adopted children of God. Of course, the testimony thus borne is of our own spirit to itself; but the testimony is mediate. It is never immediate - as though our spirit should directly say to us, You

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159 DTQ, 496-497.
160 DTQ, 497.
161 The statement that Girardeau latches onto runs as follows: “Assurance consists of a practical syllogism, where the Word of God makes the major, conscience the minor, the Spirit of God the conclusion. The Word saith, he that fears and loves God is loved of God; there is the major proposition. Then conscience makes the minor: But I fear and love God. Then the Spirit makes the conclusion: Therefore thou art loved of God. And this is that which the apostle calls, The witnessing of the Spirit with our spirit (Rom. viii. 16).”
162 “The only way in which one can understand him is by supposing that he regarded the witness of our own spirit as inchoate and incomplete until consummated by the witness of the Holy Spirit. But if it is conceded that our own spirit is competent to perceive the testimony of the Word as the major, and to supply the minor, what hinders it from drawing the conclusion? Here Watson appears to deny the distinctness and immediacy of the Spirit’s witness, but in other places he seems to acknowledge them.” (DTQ, 498).
163 DTQ, 502.
are children of God. We shall see that such a direct and immediate testimony is borne to us by the Spirit of God.\textsuperscript{164}

The witness of the Holy Spirit is a positive immediate certification to believers of their adoption. "By immediate is not meant instantaneous in time, but not mediate, not rendered through or by means of anything else." That is, the Spirit witnesses or testifies directly with believing spirits.\textsuperscript{165} He does not proceed by argumentation.

In line with the reformers, Girardeau argues that the direct witness of the Spirit is possible because he possesses personality. One of the Spirit's personal acts is to witness to the believer's adoption. He also witnesses concurrently with human spirits.\textsuperscript{166} If "one is not conscious of possessing the true marks of God's children, his own spirit could bear no valid testimony to his adoption; and it would, of course, follow that the Holy Spirit would not testify to his adoption. The absence of the true witness of our own spirit would involve the absence of the Spirit's witness."

The witness of the Spirit is "a special act of illumination" regarding the personal assurance of a believer's adoption. It is variously described as a suggestion, an impression, an inspiration or a revelation. Although later Calvinists feared the misuse of these terms, Girardeau complains that their problem was with the fact of the Spirit's direct witness and not the terminology used. In particular, they thought that "inspiration" and "revelation" implied a mystical doctrine of the "inner light". Yet, if the Spirit testifies to the fact of a believer's adoption what does he do but inspire the adopted by revealing to them their new status? "Inspiration" and "revelation" then are not related to the offices of prophet and apostle. The Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly both distinguished between the Holy Spirit's testimony to all the adopted and a "particular" or "special" revelation to a certain class of persons.\textsuperscript{167} The former refers to assurance, the latter to Scripture; the one

\textsuperscript{164} DTQ, 498-499.
\textsuperscript{165} Girardeau claims the support of the Continental and British reformers for the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit. He acknowledges that many Calvinists later arose who contended for the mediate witness of the Holy Spirit, and analyses the various positions (DTQ, 499-501).
\textsuperscript{166} "That does teach that our spirit bears testimony, but it also as distinctly teaches that the Holy Spirit bears his testimony, and bears it jointly with the testimony of our spirit. We are unequivocally taught the concurrence of the two testimonies to the believer's adoption." (DTQ, 502). The identification of the Spirit and human spirits in Gal. 4: 6 is, Girardeau claims, a moral and not a substantive identity and refers to their concurrent testimony. That does not mean to say that "the two testimonies are always associated in time", but that being joined together they cannot be put asunder (DTQ, 503).
\textsuperscript{167} "The 'extraordinary revelation' of Westminster interprets the 'particular revelation' of Dordt. It is evident that both bodies meant to exclude revelation in its technical sense, as involving the idea of
terminates on the receiver, the other on those who are organs of divine communication and whose ministries are attested by miracles. Although fanaticism confuses the two forms of revelation, assurance is safeguarded by the role that the Scriptures play in both the witness of believing spirits and the Holy Spirit.

Whereas the witness of the human spirit is reflective and pondering, rejoicing in what is deduced, the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit is often a sudden, incomparable and unexpected flash of heavenly glory into a clouded soul. Its authenticity is attested by the accompaniment of a sincere desire for holiness:

Nothing more effectually tends to engender profound humility, a deep sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit, and the assiduous employment of the means of grace. For, as it is a free gift, bestowed in sovereignty in answer to fervent prayer, and not elaborated from the inferential processes of the believer's mind, the recipient of the heavenly boon cannot but be humbly grateful to God for its bestowal, and anxious to retain it by walking in the paths of holy obedience. The joy accompanying it is too precious to be imperilled by a careless indulgence in the sins either of omission or of commission.

Thus, "he who, in doubt as to his spiritual condition, sincerely struggles against sin and earnestly prays to be delivered from its power as well as its guilt, feels a sudden accession to his soul of joy-imparting assurance, impelling him in the way of holiness, is entitled to conclude that the Spirit bears immediate witness to the fact of his adoption." The assurance granted by the Holy Spirit is infallible or "perfectly assuring" because God cannot lie. While it surpasses the wavering assurance of the human spirit, it can still be silenced by sin indulged and tolerated. This robs the adopted of pledges of God's fatherly love by extinguishing the light of his favour. Under such circumstances the adopted perform the functions of spiritual life but mourn the

persons inspired - as were prophets and apostles. And in that sense, revelation is universally denied by the evangelical abettors of the immediate witness of the Spirit to be involved in that testimony. " (DTQ, 506).

Contra the Reformed doctrine of the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit the mystic believes that "the Spirit immediately reveals to individuals new, original truth, not contained in the Scriptures." II is a distinctive contention of the mystic that the Spirit immediately reveals to individuals new, original truth, not contained in the Scriptures. In this case, on the contrary, the Spirit applies to individual believers the truths embraced in the Bible. There is no pretension that the Spirit, in his immediate witness, departs in the slightest degree from his own inspired Word. His direct witness cannot be confounded with the inner light of the mystic. " (DTQ, 507).

DTQ, 508-509.

DTQ, 509.

WCF XVIII: i. Cf. DTQ, 506.

DTQ, 510.
loss of the Spirit’s witness. Only repentance can restore assurance. The fact that it is restorable further assures the adopted of their final salvation.173

9.2 Robert A Webb

No one contributed more to Webb’s interest in adoption than Girardeau. According to John Richardson, it was Girardeau’s preaching which first attracted Webb to Columbia Seminary. Webb remarks that while all his instructors “were towering men”, Girardeau “exerted more influence over [him] than any man with whom [he] had any dealings”.174

Born of English descent at College Hill, Mississippi, in 1856, Webb later married Girardeau’s second daughter, Sarah DuPre, in May 1880.175 By that time he had already graduated from Southwestern Presbyterian University, Clarksville, Tennessee (1877) and Columbia Theological Seminary (1880).176 Eleven years later Girardeau proposed Webb’s name for an appointment at Columbia Seminary. In the

173 This is where Calvinistic and Wesleyan Arminian advocates of the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit go separate ways. Contrary to the Methodist Dr. Thomas O Summers, a late professor of Systematic Theology at Vanderbilt University, Girardeau insists that “this they must do, or break with their theological system.” (DTQ, 511). In Girardeau’s words: “If the Spirit of God bears witness to a present salvation, he, ipso facto, testifies to an eternal salvation.” (DTQ, 519). The remainder of Girardeau’s treatment forms a critique of Summers’ articles in the Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Jan. and Apr. 1849) which review Walton’s treatise on the evidence of the believer’s adoption (DTQ, 511-521).

174 “An Autogram by Robert Alexander Webb: Written for his Children”, Louisville, Kentucky, 1914, ch. v, 8. Richardson is too cautious when he writes: “Probably the largest influence personal influence on Dr. Webb’s theological thinking was that of his teacher and father-in-law, Dr. John L. Girardeau.” (italics inserted) RDA, 8. Webb’s description of Girardeau testifies why: “He had a commanding presence. He had a voice like a silver trumpet. He had an imagination which could paint and adorn, until his subject was both vivid and thrilling. His rhetoric was more gorgeous than autumn leaves. His piety had the aroma and mellowness of old wine. He was widely read in books, and a ceaseless thinker. He was an erudite philosopher and a profound theologian. He used to declaim his lectures, until my very hair would rise on my head. He inflamed my mind, and made me almost wild with desire. He was full of humor, and illuminated his instructions with many anecdotes which convulsed his class. It was as easy to associate with him as with any student on the campus. And when he preached it was like hearing an angel from the skies. Through him I found out that theology was the darling of my soul. To this day I am living under the momentum of this great man. I subsequently became an inmate of his family, and very closely associated with him.”

175 “Autogram”, ch. ii, 9 (BC); see also The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, 27-28; contra John Richardson, RDA, 5. His marriage to Sarah Dupre ended abruptly with her early death. Webb’s remarriage did not affect his relationship to Girardeau (Letter from Girardeau to Webb dated “Columbia, May 19, 1891” BC). Their mutual affection and esteem continued as is proved by Girardeau’s letters to Webb (See “Letters from J.L. Girardeau to R.A. Webb (1882-1898)”, BC).

176 “Autogram”, ch. ii, 9. According to John Richardson it was not until after Webb had been brought near to death by cholera that Webb felt his call to the ministry confirmed (see his introduction to RDA, 5). Webb gives a different story. He states that his doubts as to his call were not settled until his early days at Columbia Seminary when the inevitability of his destiny settled on him (“Autogram”, ch. v, 5-6).
event Webb declined the offer. Nevertheless, Girardeau encouraged Webb to accept the Professorship of Systematic Theology at Southwestern in 1892: “Not only I but the brethren here feel great gratification in your being made Professor at Clarkesville, but also in the fact that the Columbia type of theology will be impressed upon the students there.” No doubt Webb learnt of the distinctives of Columbia theology as one of Girardeau’s students but also from the long hours of domestic converse with him. During these times he would have learnt of the growing importance of adoption to Columbia theology.

Thus, nowhere does Girardeau’s theological influence over Webb appear more profound than in instilling the needs of Columbia theology. Certainly, by the time that he became a theology Professor his Christian living prominently expressed his filial relationship to God: “One of his colleagues remarked, ‘Was spirit more Johannine than his? ...how tender and filial were his prayers in our morning chapel exercises! How he soared as he approached the Throne! How childlike his faith!’” It became natural then for Webb to want to make his own contribution to Columbia theology first at Clarkesville and then, from 1908, at Louisville Theological Seminary. Nowhere has his contribution been noted more than in terms of adoption. “A particular development in Southern Presbyterian thought... was the development of the doctrine of adoption as a separate locus in the Columbia Seminary school of thought.... This line of thinking began with John L. Girardeau of Columbia, and was continued by R.A. Webb, his son-in-law, who taught at Louisville Seminary.”

Webb therefore came to be regarded as Girardeau’s “theological successor in the Southern Church”. In Smith’s distant and therefore more objective assessment

177 “Autogram”, ch. vi, 12 and Girardeau’s “Letters”, “Columbia, May 4, 1891”.
178 Ibid., “Columbia, S.C., Oct. 5, 1892”.
179 “Columbia (Seminary) theology is the distinctive and dominant theology of the Southern Church. This is so because of the genius, gifts and influence of Jas. H. Thornwell. Dr. John L. Girardeau was Dr. Thornwell’s spiritual son and professional successor. Dr. R.A. Webb was Dr. Girardeau’s soninlaw [sic] and theological successor in the Southern Church. Dr. Webb is the third in succession of the Thornwell school and his writings would be most acceptable to conservative, Columbia, Clarkesville, Louisville, Austin, and Union men.” (See John Blackburn’s letter dated Oct.25, 1946 (BC)).
181 Blackburn continues: “I doubt if there was a single [sic] professor in the Southern church, in the past generation, as generally known, as universally admired, as Dr Webb.” (Letter from John Blackburn to John Richardson dated “West Columbia, S.C., Oct. 25, 1946” (BC)). W. H. McIntosh, minister of First Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, wrote: “It was impossible for him to write a dull sentence and his passing observations on theological questions were clearer and more
"Girardeau was the last of the theological greats of Columbia Seminary. The men who follow in the Chair of Theology there were able men, but not with the gifts of either Thornwell, Palmer, or Girardeau. The nearest thing to a real successor in stature is to be found in Webb".  

Webb's contribution was informed by his knowledge of the neglect of adoption and his awareness of how underrated the doctrine had been in historical theology:  

I know of no monograph on this subject, which devotes itself to the articulation and development of this great doctrine of grace, parallel in fulness and thoroughness with the manner in which the co-ordinate doctrine of justification has been expounded and set forth. Of those great treatises, which professedly cover the entire field of evangelical doctrine, many of them omit this topic altogether, as if it had no existence whatever; others give to it but a few incidental and passing observations, while none of them articulate it as a separate head in divinity.  

However, while correct in his general assessment, unfortunately Webb is far too dogmatic in some of his specific observations, the most obvious instance being his astonishing claim that Calvin "makes no allusion whatever to adoption"!  

Nevertheless, he makes the customary critique of Turretin and Dabney. In addition, he observes Charles Hodge’s entire silence on adoption and A A Hodge’s brief chapter on adoption. However, he further errs in claiming that Breckinridge says nothing on adoption. He says the same of Shedd and confirms our assessment of Thornwell by claiming that in the brief fragments left Thornwell makes but incidental reference to adoption. He pays careful attention to the place of adoption in the Westminster Standards, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Thirty-Nine Articles, but still concludes that:  

The evangelical doctrine of Adoption... has received but slender treatment at the hands of theologians. It has been handled with a meagerness entirely out of

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184 RDA, 17.  
185 This is not only an erroneous claim, but a strange one, for elsewhere he includes a quote from Calvin in which he mentions adoption (see The Theology of Infant Salvation, reprinted from the 1st ed. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1981, 38). In fairness to Webb, however, it has to be remembered that there remains to this day no widespread recognition of the importance of adoption for Calvin.  
187 RDA, 18.
Webb provides three reasons why adoption should receive greater consideration. Firstly, because the term is biblical. From a perusal of the relevant texts Webb concludes that

a doctrine... which stands so intimately and fundamentally related to predestination, to the atonement, to spiritual life, and to the consummation and perfection of the entire universe, possesses a Biblical importance, which renders it improper for theology to overslaught it altogether, or to depress it to a subordinate and parenthetical place in the scheme of saving truth. There is a sense in which it is to be the crown and glory of the entire redemptive process. The admission of sinful men, through the grace of adoption, into the family of God, with all the rights and privileges of sons in His house, is, in a lofty sense, the culmination and climax of the blessings of redemption.¹⁸⁹

Secondly, adoption warrants greater investigation because it points to “the intrinsic preciousness of the paternal relation of God to His people, and their corresponding filial relation to Him”. As the Fatherhood of God is “one of the most attractive and inspiring features of the Gospel” adoption must be worthy of conspicuous consideration in any system of evangelical truth.¹⁹⁰ Thirdly, adoption is important because of “the distinctive office which it performs in the scheme of saving grace.” Whereas “it is the office of the evangelical grace of justification to restore to the sinner the lost citizenship, ...it is the office of adoption to give back to the sinner his lost sonship.”¹⁹¹ Regeneration may incipiently re-impart to the sinner his lost filial disposition, but adoption restores to him his filial standing. It does then what no other act of grace can do: “Fallen sinners are received into the number of, and are given all the rights and privileges of, the sons of God.” Adoption is therefore deserving of a separate treatment in the scheme of salvation.

Like Girardeau, however, Webb’s contribution to Columbia theology was also motivated by a fascination with the questions raised by the Candlish/Crawford debate. While he shared Candlish’s polemic against the new theology,¹⁹² as early as

¹⁸⁸ RDA, 17.
¹⁸⁹ RDA, 19.
¹⁹⁰ RDA, 20.
¹⁹¹ RDA, 21.
¹⁹² "These phrases are all of comparative recent origin: You never encounter them in the older books on our library shelves. But in the present day you hear them aboundingly in pulpit and pew, in the forum and on the rostrum, encounter them in counting-house and on the street, by the domestic fireside and on the academic campus, and you read them in the religious literature which is pouring from the press. Everywhere these ideas are passing current, and radical conclusions are being drawn from them with perfect cocksureness. They have become the genetic principles of a reconstruction
1891 he published an article entitled “The Fatherhood of God” in The Presbyterian Quarterly on the in-house issue of Adam’s original standing. Webb’s primary contribution, however, were his class lectures. Although he intended to publish them in retirement his premature death meant that the lectures remained unpublished until 1947. Richardson believed that the manuscripts would make a genuine contribution to the conservative cause, to which Blackburn responded.

I have had a change of mind since my last communication to you. It was the last sentence in your brief letter of Oct. 11. “I am convinced these manuscripts will make a real contribution to our conservative cause” that has changed my viewpoint. The need of the conservative cause looms larger more urgent, more critical, in my mind’s eye. I put down the lectures on Adoption and picked up the lectures on Theology, and that set me wondering why such material had gone unpublished.

By 1947, however, the intention behind the publication had evidently changed from that which gave rise to the lectures. Hopes were no longer harboured for the development of Columbia theology but were placed in a defence of conservative Evangelicalism. The shift reflected the movement of theology in the years subsequent to Webb’s death in 1919.

Nevertheless, Blackburn was confident that Webb’s former students would be swift to purchase their copies of RDA. This was because he, Richardson and

which goes under the name of the New Theology.” (RDA, 22-23). For Webb’s succinct critique of the New Theology see RDA, 23-26.

In addition there is a lecture on adoption in Christian Salvation: Its Doctrine and Experience (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1985, 391-405) - a volume of “Soteriology - the heart of his theology” which “readily sold out”.


Throughout the whole run up to the publication of The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption Richardson was in communication with John Blackburn. It was in one of these letters, dated October 11 1947, that Richardson echoed this sentiment. Similarly, W H McIntosh wrote to Blackburn: “I firmly believe that Dr. Webb’s presentation of the doctrine of Adoption is the God-given answer to the modern dogma of the “brotherhood of man””. (Letter, Sept. 29, 1947, BC; See also his letter to Eerdmans Publishing Co., ibid., Sept.23, 1947).

Ibid, Oct 1947. Nine months earlier he had seen the relevance of the manuscripts more in terms of the Fundamentalist community than as a polemic against liberalism: “A manuscript is valuable in regard to its appeal. This is a precious doctrine. It is evangelical doctrine. It is pure, consistent Calvinism. Because it defines Fatherhood and Sonship in a scriptural orthodox manner, it makes a universal appeal to Fundamentalists.” (ibid., Jan.3, 1947).

Ibid., Oct. 25, 1946. It was also hoped that McIntosh and his friends would help with the distribution of the work (ibid., Sept. 25, 1947). As for McIntosh he urged that, “if it [the book] could be put into the hands of every protestant preacher, church officer, and Sunday School teacher in

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McIntosh recognised the general value of the work in addition to any apologetic force it contained. According to Blackburn, Webb’s lectures on adoption were his “most original contribution to theological science”. He reckoned that they would “make a book absolutely unique in the Calvinistic literature of America - or of Scotland, or of England.” Likewise Richardson confessed: “So far as my knowledge of theological literature goes there is nothing in existence comparable to these lectures. They constitute an invaluable contribution to Reformed Theology.”

However, hopes for the impact of the work were illusory. Sinclair Ferguson aptly describes the book as “somewhat disappointing”. Had Webb been spared he may have left a better volume. As it is, far too many of its eleven chapters are apologetical and concentrate on what adoption is not. Regrettably, he left so much to be said by way of positive exposition that we are largely dependent on his chapter on adoption in his volume *Christian Salvation* for the clearest statement of his position.

(i) The Context of Adoption

Although an independent thinker, Webb felt able to side with Girardeau and Crawford on the question of Adam’s original status. Adam was both a subject of divine government and a son in God’s house. One step further removed from the debate, Webb responded to the issues of the day with less haste. Consequently, he takes longer to outline the differences between a subject and a son. They differ, firstly, in their genesis or origins. Whereas Webb had always held that servanthood...

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America it, by the blessing of God, could greatly help in bringing in a new reformation which is the only hope of our country and the Christian Religion in the world.” (Letter, Sept. 23, 1947).

Ibid., Oct. 25, 1946. (Italics inserted). He was more correct in writing several months later that, “a manuscript is valuable in proportion [sic] to its uniqueness. That this is a rare production can be proved by a careful search of American publishers lists.” (Ibid., Jan. 3, 1947).

*RDA*, 11. That both Blackburn and Richardson can speak in absolute terms of the unparalleled nature of Webb’s book is evidence of the negligible impact which Houston’s volume, *The Adoption of Sons*, made and the speed with which it was forgotten.

Pulpit and People, 83. At the outset I wrote to Lloyd Sprinkle of Sprinkle Publications. As he had republished much of Girardeau’s work I wondered whether he would be interested in republishing *RDA*. His response was to note the superior quality of Girardeau’s treatment of adoption in *DTQ*.

As per usual, the following exposition tries to combine a biblical and systematical approach, at least, to the extent that his treatment will allow.

CS, 391. For Webb’s awareness of the lines drawn in the Trans-Atlantic debate see *RDA*, 42.

R A Webb, “The Fatherhood of God” *PQ* 5 (Jan. 1891), 56-59; *RDA*, 28-40. In the former article Webb enumerates six differences, in the latter chapter, seven. The reason for this difference becomes clear in what follows. As the arguments overlap we shall not follow either list, but draw up our own based on convenience, but covering the same ground.
can be entered into by birth, divine creation, free choice, misfortune, purchase, theft or war, his view of sonship appears to have undergone some organisational development. Initially he taught that sonship can be entered upon by divine creation, generation, regeneration or adoption. In RDA, however, he omits regeneration. Sonship “may come in one of but two ways: (1) by creation or generation, and (2) by adoption.” The difference between sonship and servanthood, however, remains unaltered. Whereas sonship involves derivation, servanthood requires subordination.

In Webb’s reorganisation, regeneration is subsumed under a second distinction, namely, a difference of nature. Whereas servanthood is servile, sonship is filial: “The filial heart and the servile heart are two distinct temperaments which create two distinct attitudes, two distinct governing principles, two distinct resultants of personal force.” Although Webb does not explicitly employ the term “regeneration”, his description of filial nature aptly portrays the doctrine. “A child has an item in his consciousness which links him to his father in a manner and with a spirit which does not characterise the relations of a subject to his sovereign or a servant to his master. To his father he owes his being, his nature, and his environment: he has a sense of oneness with him, a sense of being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.” This unity of nature forms the basis of the paternal, filial and fraternal relations. “To the filial spirit”, in particular, there belongs a distinctive group of cognitions, intuitions, perceptions, views, opinions, judgements - which constitute the distinctive filial mind; to it, a distinctive cluster of emotions, affections, desires, feelings, inspirations, sentiments - which

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205 PQ, 56. He does not explicitly address the issue in RDA. For a critique of Webb’s article in PQ, see Samuel J Baird’s “The Fatherhood of God” PQ 5 (July 1891), 350-362. He concludes that Fatherhood is used in only two relations in Scripture. It is employed metaphorically to refer to a divine benevolence that extends over the whole human race; and as a literal, proper and exclusive reference to the eternal relation which the Father has always sustained to his eternal Son, and which - through regeneration and union with Christ - believers share in.

206 RDA, 31.

207 RDA, 28. In RDA Webb quickly gets diverted by the question as to whether the derivation of a son from his father is according to the creationist or traducianist understanding of the origin of the soul. “According to the creationist, God is the causa qua, the efficient or producing cause of each child out of the substance of its antecedent parents, while the parents are but the causa sine qua non, or the instrument and the occasion of the origination of the child, while, according to the traducianists, God is the causa sine qua non, or instrument and occasion of the origination of the child, while the parents are the causa qua, or the real efficient and producing power which brings the child into being.” (ibid., 29-30). Webb sided with the creationists although he readily acknowledged that the question was not one that allowed for a dogmatic answer.

208 RDA, 32.
constitute the distinctive filial heart; to it, a peculiar complexus of acts, behaviour, conduct - which constitute the distinctive filial will.209

Thirdly, servants and sons differ as to the forms of government under which they operate.210 Whereas the servant is under the government of the state, strictly speaking the son is under the discipline of the family. Whereas the former is magisterial and is overseen by a sovereign, ruler, lord, king, master; the latter is paternal and is overseen by a father and kinsman. The sovereign rules over the servant according to principles of justice and righteousness; the son is disciplined with fatherly love and affection. Webb’s distinctions are endless:

A civil judge must satisfy law and conscience; a parent must satisfy heart and love. A sovereign must do what is right by his subject; a father must do what is kind and beneficial to his son. All civil policies must take their rise primarily in justice, and become loving and beneficient only in an incidental and secondary way; but the policies of paternalism must take their rise in love, and then be regulated by justice and conscience. A judge is always bound to be just to his subject; a father is always bound to be kind to his child. The metaphysical source of the one is conscience; the metaphysical source of the other is the heart. A father can always go beyond the magistrate in benevolence and in the display of grace. One is government by justice; the other is government by love.211

Thus, the chief ends of magisterial and paternal government also differ. Whereas the former aims to maintain the majesty of law and the preservation of order by making good citizens, the latter is intended for the well-being and happiness of the child. In the legal realm the servant faces justice so that the majesty and preservation of law may be maintained. Thus, whereas a servant’s inappropriate acts are crimes to be met with punitive justice, a son’s are faults to be corrected through paternal chastisement. “The punitive symbol of the one, is the sword; of the other, the rod. Retributive justice wields the sword; paternal love wields the rod.”212

Fourthly, servants and sons differ in their motive for obedience. This is implied by the fact that a son obeys his father and a servant his master. Therefore,

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209 RDA, 34.
210 This third point is a conflation of the third and sixth differences that Webb enumerates (RDA, 34 and 38-39). For more on the differences between the two forms of government see RDA, 86.
211 RDA, 35-36.
212 RDA, 36. “The sheriff, under order of the court, may thrash his own son at the public whipping-post; and then, with the same rods, hit him precisely the same number of blows at his own house, and lay on the licks with the same weight. Under such circumstances, there would be an exact agreement in the quantity and quality of the two beatings; but they would be marked by this great distinction; the public whipping was punishment, strictly so called, administered from a principle of rectoral justice, while the home infliction was chastisement, administered out of parental solicitude for the son.” (RDA, 39).
what is to the servant primarily a duty is to the son a response of love. Fifthly, the ground of the expectation of reward for obedience differs:

The servant pleads his work; the son his privileges.... The servant fixes his eyes upon his merits; the son upon his father's heart.... The servant presents his claim and points to the terms of contract; the son expresses his wishes and looks to the father's heart. Both expect rewards for their work, but the servant stands upon right, and claims remuneration in the name of the contract; the son stands upon paternal goodness, and asks in the name of fatherly affection. ...the right of the servant grounds itself in the justice of the law-court; ...the son in the justice of a father's house. The rights of one are found in magisterial equity; the rights of the other in paternal rule.211

Finally, servants and sons differ in their access to their superiors. Servants cannot enjoy the same communion, access and confidence with their master as sons can with their father. "The highest position attainable by servants in the kingdom of God is that occupied by the angels, who minister as flames of fire about Jehovah's burning throne; and the highest attainable privilege of the son of God is that of the redeemed saints, who have fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The honor of the son in the house of God defies all language."214

With these differences in mind Webb focuses on Adam's Edenic status.215 All theists assume that Adam's creaturehood automatically constituted him a servant of God, because subject to him.216 In entering the discussion as to Adam's sonship, Webb employs both reason and revelation. Using reason he notes that every relation has a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem. These refer to the fact rather than the mode of the relation derived. The fact is that God is Father, therefore it is reasonable to believe that Adam was created his son.217 Given no proof to the contrary, the case from reason stands. The fact that there have been in history patriarchal forms of government in which the dual functions of father and king were combined in a "father-king" confirms this. Such were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for their

213 RDA, 38.
214 RDA, 39. Webb ends his chapter on the general differences between servants and sons by warning that: "These descriptions are true to the filial relations as it ought to be in a sin-disordered society, violations of every description could readily be adduced. But the vitiation of a fact does not destroy it. In the new heavens and the new earth, if we may believe the prophecies, the abnormal will become the normal again; the servant will be as he ought to be, and the son as he was intended." (RDA, 40).
215 See "Lecture III. THE SONSHIP OF THE FIRST ADAM", RDA, 41-69; PQ, 59-70. In what follows we have also interwoven some of Webb's arguments against anticipated objections. See "Lecture IV. OBJECTIONS TO ADAMIC SONSHIP", RDA, 70-78.
216 It is "implicated, necessarily and logically, in the very notion of creaturehood." (RDA, 41). Although Webb acknowledges that Adam's servanthood is not immediately germane to the discussion of adoption, in common with other nineteenth-century participants of the debate he seems unaware that neither is Adam's sonship (RDA, 42).
subordinates were both children and servants. This was the form of government that Adam was under.

Webb accepts, however, that arguments derived exclusively from reason are inconclusive. Therefore, he argues more fully from revelation. Turning to the supreme authority in and of Reformed theology, Webb notes the scriptural distinction between a general and a special sonship, and points to six texts that prove the former. First, from Luke 3:38 he insists that sonship is derived from creation: “If creation were an impossible mode of constituting the filial relation, then Adam could not be the son of God in any other than a metaphorical sense. But sonship may be constituted by creation, for the sonship of believers is so originated. Regeneration is characterised by a ‘new creation.’” Rejecting Candlish’s hypercritical approach to the absence of “son” in the original, Webb argues that idiomatic Greek allows for Adam’s sonship to be understood as the prima facie meaning of the text. Hence, in Acts 17:28-29 Paul seeks to turn the Athenians from idolatry by arguing that humankind is filially related to God. Had his intention been merely to win the debate then he may have referred to humanity as God’s offspring just as an argumentum ad hominem employed simply for the immediate apologetic. However, an argumentum ad hominem would not have turned the Athenians from idolatry.

217 On this basis Webb agrees with Crawford’s definition of Fatherhood. For his citation and explanation of it see RDA, 43-44.
218 For Webb’s descriptions of patriarchal government see RDA, 72-73 and 79.
219 “Reason cannot disprove the fatherhood of God. On this question it is silent; it can speak neither to the one side nor to the other. It can accept whatever the Scriptures may teach.” (PQ, 59). For Webb’s anticipation of objections to his argument from reason see RDA, 44-46. For the outline of the supposed incompatibility of servanthood and sonship, ibid., 70-71.
221 RDA, 47.
222 If the use of the genitive article οὖν could be understood as ‘the son of’ throughout the genealogy why should the translation be changed just at the end when Adam’s relationship to God is in view? “Starting with Jesus, the evangelist traces a series of seventy-six sonships back to Adam. All the seventy-six are confessedly sons in the true proper sense of the word. But when Adam is reached, although the precise language is used in connection with all the others, without notice or warning or intimation in the text, the nature of the relation is suddenly changed, and the writer, in this abrupt way, is made to say, ‘Adam, which was the servant of God.’” (RDA, 49).
223 RDA, 51-57.
224 RDA, 56. Webb writes that, “in the absence of proof to the contrary, we are obliged to think that Paul meant to transfer the language of the heathen poet to the pages of inspiration and cause it for all time to come to do duty in the interest of the dogmatic thought of God’s church. Dr. Candlish’s view degrades it to the art of the sophist and the stump-politician.” (RDA, 57).
Thirdly, Webb appeals to the *imago Dei* as definitive of Adam’s position and duty before God (Gen. 1:27) and set succeeding humanity apart. The fact that one party produces another in his likeness, strongly suggests that humanity is made up of the sons of God, although fallen, who in regeneration are constituted sons by recreation and restored to the knowledge, righteousness and holiness which Adam knew in innocency (Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24).

Next, Webb groups together texts that illustrate that a created sonship is not foreign to Scripture (Deut. 32:6; Is. 63:16 and 64:8; Jer. 3:4; Mal. 1:16 and 2:10). Like Crawford, he acknowledges that these texts have primary reference to Israel, but asks whether, given that Israel was created a son of God by a sovereign and divine will, the same could not have been true of Adam. Webb anticipates the objection that his logic is nullified by the fact that only the spiritual Israel could call God their Father. Unaware of Calvin’s position, Webb says that if they all had “one Father” (Mal. 2:10) then they all could call upon him whether belonging to the carnal or spiritual Israel.

More tenuously Webb points to the New Testament distinction between the “fathers of our flesh” and “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). Drawing on John Owen’s commentary for his interpretation of “flesh” as body and “spirits” as rational souls, Webb argues that the body is, in an immediate sense, a result of procreation, but, according to his creationist understanding, the soul is the product of a supernatural and miraculous act of God. Thus, “there is a high and original sense in which God is the ‘the Father of spirits’ because He is the Creator of all spirits.”

Finally, Webb turns to the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15). “The dogmatic import of the parable is, in part at least, the original and created sonship of man. It is a picture of the fall and rise of a son of God.” This is clear from any competent interpretation of the parable:

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225 *RDA*, 57-61.
226 *RDA*, 61-63.
227 He even deals with the distinction between a carnal and a spiritual Israel (Romans 9:6) which was the basis of Calvin’s gradation of adoption in the community of Israel (*ibid.*, 62-63).
228 “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”
229 In spite of conceding that the creationist versus traducianist debate affords no room for dogmatism Webb does provide a critique of traducianism (*RDA*, 65-66). Webb cites Numbers 16: 22; Job 33: 4; Isaiah 57: 16; Zechariah 12: 1 and Hebrews 12: 9 itself as favouring the creationist view.
The father in the parable is God. The younger son is the penitential sinner, who returns to his Father's house through Jesus Christ. The Elder Brother is the fallen, impenitent, carping son, who croaks and complains at all the ways of God, and does everything but repent and show a filial spirit. In short, the prodigal son is the converted Christian. The elder brother is the worldly ungodly sinner.  

Both reason and revelation declare then that under the patriarchal government of Eden, Adam stood in two relations to God. In each case he was on probation. His obedience would have established him as a citizen and son within the kingdom and family of God by justification and adoption respectively. His disobedience, however, made him liable to magisterial displeasure and paternal disfavour:

The test for both relations was the same - the forbidden fruit. If eating that fruit contrary to the command of God would make him unfit to be in the kingdom, it would in the same way and to the same extent, make him unfit to remain in his Father's house. Fidelity to his duty in these premises would have secured his justification as a citizen and his adoption as a son.

God's prerogative in ordering probation was based on Adam's filial and therefore absolute dependence on his Maker. His disobedience was an assertion of independence from his Father and a groundless rejection of his love. In opting for fellowship with the devil Adam broke a covenantal arrangement. His behaviour put everlasting enmity between himself and his heavenly Father and made him forever after disreputable, thus provoking the Father's anger against his offspring. He thereby became an outcast citizen and a disinherited son who suffered the abrogation of both his civil and filial rights. He left Eden unjustified and un-adopted.

231 Webb outlines four rules: 1. The central truth must regulate the details; 2. It must not conflict with the general trend of doctrine running through the Scriptures; 3. The peripheral details must not be allowed to establish a doctrine not elsewhere expounded in Scripture; 4. Nothing should be treated as non-essential which, if neglected, would distort the doctrine (ibid., 68-69). For a slightly fuller treatment of these rules see PQ, 66.

232 RDA, 80. The picture becomes very blurred and apparently contradictory when Webb, in answering objections, argues that the original Adamic sonship was adoptive. How could it be adoptive, if upon a successful completion of probation, Adam was to have been adopted? The scenario increases in complexity as Webb unpacks the nature of Adam's adoptive sonship. "To the thought of God Adam pre-existed as a creature; by His will and decree he lifted him into His household and constituted him a son and heir, and clothed him with the standing, the rights and privileges and duties of a child." (RDA, 76).

233 CS, 391; RDA, 69.

234 RDA, 79-80.

235 RDA, 90.

236 "He denies the right of his Father to his heart and life; discards all duties of the filial relation; breaks with his own Father; declares himself his own master." (RDA, 90-91).

237 By this it is assumed he means a covenant of works (CS, 391).
From the indefinite evidence of scripture, Webb highlights the classic passage John 8:37-48.238 There Christ shows the Jews that in spite of their covenantal privileges their attempt to kill him demonstrated that they were the servants of sin and children of the Devil; for Satan had been a murderer from the beginning. Paradoxically “according to the flesh they were [Abraham’s] offspring; according to the spirit they were children of fornication.”239 Thus, Webb draws the deduction that “there is a sense in which all sinful men are the sons of God; [but] there is another sense in which they are not the sons of God.” Put conversely, God is always their creative Father but until redeemed he disowns them. That is why they still have need to become the sons of God. Similarly, Adam remained a subject of God even after becoming a subject of the devil. He was therefore outlawed by God and proscribed by divine government. Thus, Adam lost the rights and privileges of both servanthood and sonship. He became a “vicious servant and a depraved son” in heart.

Focusing on sonship, Webb says that nothing of its nature and heart was left in Adam’s bosom.240 He lost interest in his Father’s affairs, honour, name and goodwill. He became “bad-hearted, evil-minded, heady, exasperating [and] unendurable”. They can no longer live together. “The fallen child was as anxious to leave as his righteous Father was determined to expel him.”241 Adam lost the right as well as the spirit of a child. “He is legally disowned because he is morally bad. He is ungoverned, because he is ungovernable. He has thrown off his Father’s authority, because he has cast away his Father’s disposition.”242 Through downward moral gravitation Adam became a child of Satan and consequentially a child of wrath. “Nothing of statehood and sonhood remain to him but their penalties. The great end of the gospel is the recovery to him of his citizenship and his sonship.”243

(ii) The Basis of Adoption

The remainder of Webb’s monograph is taken up with the question as to how an outlawed and disinherited son can regain his filial status and place in the Father’s

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238 RDA, 80ff.
239 RDA, 84.
240 RDA, 91.
241 RDA, 91-92.
242 RDA, 92.
243 RDA, 84-85.
He seeks to answer this via negativa. Not until Lecture X ("Sons by Atonement (2)") does Webb arrive at his positive response. The outlawed son is restored to his status, place and privileges "through the atonement as a propitiatory sacrifice, issuing in an evangelical and redemptive sonship." An evangelical and redemptive sonship is unique and sui generis; one in which God is constituted a Father by the Atonement, and the sinner is constituted son by Grace; one in which the death of Christ makes God a Father of the Elect, and the Spirit conveys filial privileges and imparts a filial nature to cast-off and disowned sinners.

Evangelical sonship assumes two things. First, that there is a special sonship of the elect distinct from that common to humankind. From the mass of scriptural evidence Webb draws widely from the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 5:45; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 12:30) and the Pauline and Johannine corpora (Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:5 and Jn. 1:12-13; 1 Jn. 3:1-2). Common sonship was by creation; special sonship is by grace. The former was forfeited by the disobedience of the first Adam, the latter is realised by faith in the obedience of the second Adam.

Evangelical sonship also assumes that an appropriate atonement has made it possible. The moral nature of both God and man demands an atonement. All aberrant theories Webb regards as "so many acute attempts to construe sinners as heiring from God ex natura instead of ex gratia." The mode of vicarious sacrifice determines that a subject avails for a subject and a son for a son. "Atonement by a
servant for a servant - the satisfaction of justice and law by one citizen in the room
and stead of another citizen - would not logically issue in the reconciliation of a
disowned child to an estranged father." Thus, before reviewing the atonement
Webb discusses the essential link between Christian sonship and Christ's Sonship.

In incarnate and pre-incarnate history, Christ's Sonship has variously
manifested itself as Trinitarian on the one hand, and mediatorial or theanthropic on
the other. The former is monogenetic, divine, immanent, eternal, incommunicable,
chiefly existent for the happiness of God, unique, exclusive and unshared. As the
only begotten Son Christ alone is consubstantial with his Father, co-equal in power
and glory. "He is the Son of God, monogenetic, and was sent into the world, not to
be made a Son thereby, but to do a Son's work in restoring sinners to the embrace of
their and His Heavenly Father." Union with Christ in his Trinitarian Sonship was
not possible because it would have required participation in Christ's unique Sonship
and entrance into the circle of the Trinity. This would have introduced an alteration
in the metaphysical constitution of the Godhead.

Mediatorial or theanthropic sonship is humanitarian, primogenetic,
voluntary, communicable, chiefly existent for the happiness of humankind and
recognises that the Son of God became the son of man, thereby remaining one
person while assuming a true human body and a reasonable soul. The distinction

249 CS, 148-149.
250 RDA, 93.
251 Contrary to Crawford, Webb does not propound two simultaneous relations of sonship, rather two
manifestations of the one Sonship. "The recognition of this distinction - between the trinitarian
sonship of the Logos and the mediatorial sonship of the Theanthropos - I modestly believe, would
enable us to gain a clearer understanding of much Scripture, would be informing to both our
Christology and our soteriology, and give us vantage ground in our contention with the highest and
best types of Unitarianism. The distinction would permit us to admit the lower mediatorial sonship of
Christ on the one hand, while stoutly affirming His monogenetic and trinitarian sonship on the other." (RDA, 101).
253 RDA, 99. For the scriptural proofs of Christ's monogenetic sonship see RDA, 95-99.
254 It seemed to Webb that Candlish had grounded adoption on the Trinitarian sonship due to his belief
that the relation between the Father and the Son, as it exists in the Godhead, was capable of being
communicated to, as well as shared in by, a creature. "Unless the personalities of human sons are
somehow absorbed into the personality of the Son of God, the affiliation of human sons by faith in
Jesus Christ is the multiplication of persons in the Godhead. And further, it would amount to the
defication, not ethically and metaphysically, of every glorified saint. To fence off such abhorrent
circumstances, we must assume that Christ is the Son of God in some lower sense which permits of
His having true human "brethren." (RDA, 104).
255 RDA, 108-109. "Four factors... enter into any complete and correct conception of the incarnate
person: (1) True and proper Deity; (2) True and proper humanity; (3) True and proper unipersonality;
(4) True and proper distinction of natures." (RDA, 122). "The Son of God did not become the Son of
Man by a depotentiation of His divinity downwards to the dimensions of humanity as the Kenotists
explains the Scripture’s predictions of limitation and restriction to Christ’s relation to his Father, his subordination to and dependency upon his Father, his finite power and absence of omniscience. However, Christ’s sonship was not simply mediatorial (that is, created, temporal or human), otherwise it could not be unique. Rather, Christ’s mediatorial Sonship is theanthropic and combines the uniqueness of Deity and the accessibility of humanity, united with which sinners are redeemed into God’s family. 256

Christ’s theanthropic Sonship is famously notified in Galatians 4:4-7. “The advent of Christ, His incarnation, His subjection to law, the redemption wrought by Him had as one of its important and glorious ends ‘the adoption of sons.’”257 Although the incarnation was essential to redemption, adoption was purchased by Christ’s blood. Hence, Webb resists the focal shift from cross to incarnation characteristic of the general direction of nineteenth-century theology. “By that cross all redemptive relations were created, and upon it all heavenly privileges are based. All positions in glory, all states in grace, all heritages of salvation, including the crowning prerogative of sonship, are through Him, and in Him, and by Him.”258 The atoning death of Christ is the means by which the children of disobedience become the children of obedience and the proof that gospels blessings are granted ex gratia and not ex natura. Webb points to Ephesians 1:5 in order to show that all the blessings of adoption come to the believer in Christ; that is, through his mediation. This theme is developed in Galatians where deliverance is attributed to Christ’s crucifixon (Gal. 1:4; 2:20), 259 Calvinists have understood in terms of the satisfaction theory of atonement. 260 This he describes as

vainly teach; nor by an impotentiation of His humanity upwards to the proportions of divinity, as the Crypsistics bunglingly allege; But by His voluntary assumption to Himself of a true human body and a reasonable soul - by an act of His will, uniting to Himself a whole and complete human nature.” (RDA, 100). For the scriptural proof of mediatorial or theanthropic sonship see RDA, 101-107. 256 Were humankind “deitized” both their identity and God’s would be destroyed at a stroke (RDA, 94). 257 RDA, 174. 258 RDA, 172. 259 “We cannot... point to anything - to fatherhood, to sonship, to adoption, to heirship, to the house of God, to the family of God, in short, to any Christian blessing - without pointing at the same time to the crucifixion of Christ” (RDA, 173). 260 “Its advocates freely call it the catholic doctrine, and claim for it that it has been the prevailing view among evangelical theologians throughout the entire history of Dogmatics. It is referred to in doctrinal histories as the Pauline, the Augustine, the Anselmic, the Calvinistic, the Reformed, interpretation of the saving work of Christ. It has found its central place and full expression in the ‘Federal Theology.’ It is stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith” (CS, 151).
that work of Christ which was, in its nature, a vicarious sacrificial satisfaction of the moral nature of God as it had been offended by human transgression; and resulted in the extinction of guilt, the placation of Deity, the imprecation of the Spirit, and the final glorification of all those persons for whom it was made.263

The Atonement, then, “converts God into an amiable Sovereign and a complacent Father.”262 “It constitutes God a Father of the elect, and becomes the reason for His laying His fatherly wrath aside, and standing towards men as a reconciled Parent. It is the foundation of evangelical Fatherhood.” The cross also creates the very existence of the Christian sonship.263 It constitutes sonship de jure.264 The filial righteousness of Christ (or the obedience that Christ rendered as the Son of God and as the elder brother in the divine household (Heb. 5:8)), forms the material cause of adoption. It is of paramount importance as “the ground upon which [adoption] rests, or the matter out of which it is made”, and complements Christ’s servile obedience rendered in order to secure the salvation of disobedient servants. Thus, Christ’s obedience parallels the dual exigencies of rebellious citizens and wayward sons.

(iii) The Locus of Adoption

Apart from making it clear that Christian sonship involves union with Christ in his theanthropic sonship, Webb is markedly silent about this pivotal Calvinian theme. Writing of the covenant of grace, Webb notes that no sinner “has the power to enter upon the blessings of this covenant of grace even if he had the legal right to do so. A something has to be done within his nature. The Spirit converts him and leads to unite himself to Christ by faith.”265 Generally speaking this union is unique, mystical, spiritual and indissoluble.266 However, he distinguishes between mystical and federal union:

The first is subjective, internal, vital; the second is objective, external, pactional. The bond of mystical union is the Holy Spirit; the bond of the federal union is faith. In

261 For the build-up to this description see CS, 152-157; cf. RDA, 176.
262 RDA, 178.
263 RDA, 175. “The conception of a single blessing of redemption - particularly the consummate blessing of adoption - as one obtained apart from the atonement of Christ would be radical and revolutionary.”
264 RDA, 180.
265 CS, 20.
266 CS, 355. This union is illustrated in Scripture by several figures: the building and its foundation (Eph. 2:20-22); husband and wife (Rom. 7:4); the vine and branches (Jn. 15:1-10); the head and body (1 Cor. 12:12); the union of the race with Adam (Rom. 5:12, 21) (CS, 356).
the first, the Spirit unites with the believer; in the second, the believer unites with Christ.\(^{267}\) Calvin, however, includes both these elements under mystical union but further alludes to spiritual union. Nevertheless, Webb does understand that sharing with Christ in fellowship believers “have a community... in his covenant standing, rights, immunities and benefits.”\(^{268}\)

In union with Christ grace effects two radical changes in the sinner: a change of relation (an objective change of status) and of spiritual nature (a subjective change of heart).\(^{269}\) These are reflected in the *ordo salutis*\(^{270}\) that, in Reformed thought, includes regeneration, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification.\(^{271}\) Contrary to the Pelagian and Arminian *ordines salutis*, Webb emphasises the distinctive *locus* that adoption occupies in Reformed soteriology.

He does so, firstly, because it promotes clarity. While adoption coincides with regeneration, justification and sanctification at varying points, a separate treatment of adoption is eminently helpful to soteriology. Secondly, as “theological science has long vindicated the [subjective or internal] distinction between Regeneration and Sanctification; a parallel [objective or legal] distinction between Justification and Adoption ought to be recognised”. Thirdly, adoption gives a prominence to the filial relation that is too precious to be sunk into generalities, for it distinctively expresses the unspeakable love of God. Grace, the *efficient* cause of adoption, deserves to be richly and precisely magnified by all those who glory in its achievements.\(^{272}\)

The distinctiveness of adoption, however, stops short of isolation from the other elements of redemption. Hence Webb relates the doctrine to each redemptive element in turn. He begins with the other door of entrance into the evangelical sonship, viz. regeneration. Whereas regeneration is a subjective work of the Spirit (Jn 1:12-13; 2:29; 3:4-6, 8; 1 Jn 3:9; 5:1, 4, 18), adoption is an objective act of the

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\(^{267}\) *CS*, 354.

\(^{268}\) *CS*, 353.

\(^{269}\) *CS*, 393. In *RDA* there is far less emphasis on the subjective/objective elements of redemption.

\(^{270}\) Webb describes the task of soteriology as the discovery and exposition of the biblical *ordo salutis*. For Webb’s biblical, logical and analogical proof of an *ordo salutis* see *CS*, 13-14. For his various understandings of the Pelagian, Arminian and Calvinian *ordines salutis* see *CS*, 271-273; cf. 293.

\(^{271}\) It is somewhat strange that Webb should note the reformer’s inclusion of adoption in the *ordo salutis* while maintaining that Calvin wrote nothing whatever on adoption (*CS*, 394). We assume therefore some development in his understanding of Calvin.

\(^{272}\) Cf. *CS*, 392 and 405.
Father. Regeneration deals with the wicked heart of the disowned and debarred son by granting him a filial nature. This requires a transformation of his sinful character into the likeness and image of Christ. The child then possesses what Webb calls “the three prominent features of the child’s face”, namely, knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Adoption conveys filial rights and involves a reinstatement to sonship:

In Regeneration the sinner becomes the born-child of God; in Adoption, the lawson and heir. In the one he is made the child of God; in the other he is recognized as a child. One act constitutes him a child in nature; the other acknowledges him as a child in law. Both acts are necessary to complete the wholeness of his sonship.273

Webb, however, provides no solution to the obvious metaphorical dilemma of how a born-child can be simultaneously adopted. This is because his understanding of the ordo salutis has more to do with logical complementarity than a chronological ordering of the experience of salvation. “Both acts are necessary to complete the wholeness of his sonship.”274 Both acts are synchronous.275

Next comes faith, the sine qua non and instrumental cause of adoption.276 Webb distinguishes between historical faith, which is a mental assent to the Bible upon the testimony of history, and saving faith, a mental assent to the righteousness of Christ based on the testimony of the Holy Spirit delivered in foro conscientiae. Saving faith differs, however, according to whether justification or adoption is in view. Justifying faith looks to Christ’s righteousness as federal head, but adopting faith looks to the righteousness of Christ as Elder brother of the Father’s house; a righteousness that was confirmed by his filial obedience.277 Thus, Webb seeks to parallel the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith with adoption by faith (Jn 1:12, 14; Rom. 8:16), so as to develop Reformed soteriology.278

273 CS, 395.
274 CS, 395.
275 RDA, 180.
276 CS, 393 and 396. Indeed, Webb says that faith “performs the catholic and persistent office of an instrument - a sine qua non - throughout the entire development of Christian experience from regeneration to the glorification of the saint beyond the stars.” (CS, 394).
277 “These are not different species of saving faith, for the essence of this grace is always the same, but only special phases of it resulting from changing points of view. There is a great and glorious variety of benefits which accrue to the believer from the mediation of his Redeemer; all these benefits are received by faith, which is generically denominated saving faith; but these benefits are received individually, and the special act of faith upon each of these benefits gives rise to the distinctive characterizations as justifying, adopting, sanctifying, and so forth. Consequently the whole Christian life is a life of faith and all its stages are stages of faith. It is the sine qua non of every factor of Christian experience.” (CS, 397). On both accounts the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of faith.
278 For a lengthier treatment of saving faith see CS, 330-358.
Webb intends no overshadowing of justification. Surprisingly, given his stress on adoption, he claims that, "there is no more important doctrine, no more distinguished blessing, in all the Christian system than justification."\textsuperscript{279} Nevertheless, they remain parallel. Justification recovers citizenship in God’s kingdom, adoption sonship in God's house. The one conveys civil rights and absolves the subject from all charges of law. As a citizen in good standing he is free from all charges of law on the grounds of Christ’s civil righteousness. This righteousness which is imputed to the sinner is rooted in Christ's servile obedience. The other refers to filial rights and absolves all filial disobedience, reinstating the son to all the rights and privileges of God’s house. The one fixes the subject forever in God’s rectoral regard, the other as son in God’s paternal regard. By adoption, a believer becomes both a son and heir. His status is grounded on Christ’s filial righteousness, which is rooted in his filial obedience, and once imputed to the believing sinner, he is received back into the family.\textsuperscript{280} The final cause is then the reinstatement of the disinherited child in God’s patrimony. “It gives him legal title to the privileges and pleasures of divine sonship. It restores to him his property rights in the house of many mansions.”\textsuperscript{281}

In contrast to Turretin, Dabney and A A Hodge,\textsuperscript{282} Webb argues that:

Adoption is [the] forensic act of grace whereby the regenerated and justified is received into the number and given all the rights and privileges of the sons of God. Regeneration is that act of grace which gives the sinner a filial spirit in its rudimentary form. Justification is that forensic act of grace whereby the regenerated sinner is received into the number and given all the rights and privileges of the servants and subjects of God. Consequently, Adoption does something for the believer entirely distinct from these other forementioned graces. They are, therefore, not mere phases of Adoption, but acts of divine grace truly distinct from it.\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{279} CS, 359. For Webb’s lengthy treatment of justification see CS, 359-390.
\textsuperscript{280} CS, 398-399.
\textsuperscript{281} CS, 393.
\textsuperscript{282} For Webb’s response to Dabney’s argument for the correctness of Turretin’s position see CS, 399-400. In his commentary on the Westminster Confession, A A Hodge had written that, “Adoption presents the new creature in his new relations - his new relations entered upon with a congenial heart, and his new life developing in a congenial home, and surrounded with those relations which foster its growth and crown it with blessedness. Justification effects only a change of relations. Regeneration and sanctification effect only inherent moral and spiritual states of the soul. Adoption includes both. As set forth in Scripture it embraces in one complex view the newly regenerated creature in the new relations into which he is introduced by justification.” (The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expositing the Westminster Confession of Faith. First published 1869; reprint ed., Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983, 192). Webb believed Hodge to construe “Adoption as a genus, having Regeneration, Justification and Sanctification as its species or varieties. It is thus the culminating blessing into which all the processes of grace finally ultimate. It would therefore seem to be identified with Glorification.”
\textsuperscript{283} CS, 400-401.
Thus, “Adoption does something for the believer entirely distinct from these other aforementioned graces. They are, therefore, not mere phases of Adoption, but acts of divine grace truly distinct from it.”

Nevertheless, justification and adoption correlate, in that both are objective in character and effect changes in the believer’s relation to God. Furthermore, they are both forensic acts in which God formally acknowledges and proclaims the new relations constituted by grace and utterly dependent on the imputed righteousness of Christ received through faith. Inevitably, then, the destruction of one blessing destroys the other.

Finally, Webb relates adoption to sanctification and by implication to glorification. While the processes of sanctification are the same for the subject and the son, and involve the purging of the heart from evil, there is a difference in the realm where sanctification takes place. The servant is sanctified as a citizen in the sight of his Sovereign. He becomes content with his position, willing in his obedience, reverential in his view of the divine precepts and honoured as citizen. The son is sanctified as a member of the household of God. He possesses every domestic virtue and grace of an increasingly holy character. He superabounds in confidence in, and affection for, his heavenly Father and enjoys his companionship.

Adoption cannot be isolated from the sanctification of the son. Whereas it “is a title-deed to Heaven as a Home; Sanctification communicates the fitness necessary for a blissful residence in that Home.” Thus, while the glorified saints may be thought of as spontaneously obedient and harmonious citizens basking in the favour of their Sovereign, they can also be considered as a holy brotherhood possessing the typifying grace of their character and superabounding in all the love and confidence of their Heavenly Father. Without sanctification the believer is destined for misery in the Father’s family. A misfit and out of place in every way “the ‘prodigal son’ could not endure his father’s house.” He would soon apostasize: “The vicious character would be true to itself and insure banishment from the heavenly house just as it has secured expulsion from God’s presence in this life.” Therefore sanctification must produce congeniality in the Father’s house.

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284 CS, 402.
Where the sinner is sanctified, family life is blessed, secure and perpetual. Thus, the rights of sonship may give the son access across the Father's threshold, but they do not guarantee the nature of a child that would keep the sinner under the Father's roof. Only sanctification can provide the enjoyment of parents. An unsanctified heart leaves the adopted alien to his parents, unfit for the inheritance and feeling that home-life is irksome. Thus, whereas adoption makes for a lawful son, sanctification makes for a good son. Sanctification and adoption ought, therefore, to be considered as separate graces in the scheme of grace:

One terminates upon character and transmutes it into Christlikeness; the other terminates upon a relation to God and transforms it into a legal sonship. One transplants the sinner from the family of Satan into the family of God; the other fits him subjectively for genuine happiness in that relation. Sanctification makes a good son and Adoption makes a lawful son.

In concluding, a few remarks on what we learn of nineteenth-century theological discourse are apposite. Girardeau and Webb (Candlish and Crawford too) demonstrate that its abstract tenor did not always prove conducive to the immediate pastoral needs of Christian people. Expositions of the adoptive act were usually analogically driven. Although this is as true of Webb as anybody, at least his discussion of the place of adoption in the ordo salutis led him to weave in allusions to the adoptive state. Yet Webb provides no additional chapter or section for a clear delineation of these implications, and in fact there is really only one that Webb makes, namely, the inheritance (Eph. 1:3-14). The inheritance is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit's work of sealing, marking or certifying of sonship. Webb also notes how the apostle prays that the inheritors may enter into their spiritual blessings by acquiring an enlightened knowledge of the riches of its glory (Eph. 1:18). Thus, while omitting an explicit enumeration of the privileges and duties of the adopted, he nevertheless succeeds in capturing something of its ethos.

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285 Webb sums up the foregoing interrelatedness of adoption with the other elements of the ordo salutis as follows: "It is the office of Regeneration to create, incipiently, a filial spirit; of Adoption to convey rights. It is the office of Faith to receive, as an instrumental hand, those merits of the Saviour's meditation which constitutes the grounds of Adoption. It is the office of Justification to restore, indefectibly, a lost citizenship in the kingdom of God; of Adoption, to restore, immutably, a forfeited sonship in the house and family of God. It is the office of Sanctification to communicate meetness for membership in the Ruler's kingdom; of Adoption, to put into the hand indefeasible titles to the heavenly inheritance considered as a patrimony. It is therefore entitled to be considered as a distinct, co-ordinate, and glorious head in divinity." (CS, 403).

286 CS, 403.

287 RDA, 172-173.
For all the benefits of Webb's attempt to expound adoption for its own sake, his tendency towards proof-texting leaves his exposition less satisfactory than Calvin's fragmentary approach. Moreover, Calvin's insights are by and large free from polemical distractions. Conversely, Webb's theology of adoption is typically nineteenth century, in that it is overshadowed by intricacies that are peripheral to the Pauline doctrine and spirit. Consequently, our study leaves Reformed soteriology at a point of contradiction. On the one hand, Webb sought not only to treat adoption, but to do so distinctly. At the outset of RDA he complains that, "none of [the great treatises of evangelical doctrine] articulate it [adoption] as a separate head in divinity." On the other hand, his hasty dismissal of Calvin robbed his treatment of many of the reformer's exegetical and redemptive-historical insights.

288 RDA, 17. Richardson writes of Webb that, "one of the most marked characteristics of Dr. Webb's mind was his clearness of vision. It has been said that whatever truth he received he saw it distinctly in its separate value and saw it all around in its relation to its bearing on other truths." (RDA, 8).
Chapter Ten

The Concluding Implications of Adoption

Of course it had never been doubted or concealed by any worthy expositor of the ways of God in salvation, that we are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Adoption is a Christian benefit. But much depends on the place in the mind given to a thought like this, and, especially, much depends on the dogmatic form it assumes, and the virtue allowed to it in the system.

Robert Rainy (William Wilson, Memorials of Robert Smith Candlish).

The face of theology must be towards the future. We seek a theology nobler, stronger, more generous, and independent than any the world has seen. Take, for example, the great objective of God - of God in his sovereignty - which loomed out so largely upon us in the Reformed theology. How great and how manifold are the completings, supplementings, perfectings to be effected here! ... Strange that nothing like full justice has yet been done in modern theology to the sovereignty and absoluteness of God - so emphasized originally in Reformed theology - by adequate setting forth of that sovereignty; not on a mere monarchical basis, but as interpreted in terms of Fatherhood. I say 'strange', because - though it seems too often unknown or forgotten - Calvin had the high merit to be the first theologian for ages to give Fatherhood its rightful place in Christian experience.

James Lindsay. The Princeton Review.

Whereas the preceding study has looked back on the theological history of Calvinism it now remains for us to look to the future. Although it is feasible to argue that no other sector of the Reformation or post-Reformation church has dealt so significantly with adoption as has the Calvinistic tradition, nevertheless there is much yet to be done in the community to enhance the standing, expression and application of the doctrine.

Certainly, Samuel King's near century-old assessment that "adoption has not 'come to its own' in the teaching and discussion of our [Reformed] doctrines" remains as correct today as when he uttered it, and explains not only the low profile of the doctrine but the proliferation of unresolved issues (metaphorical, organisational, methodological, polemical and perspectival), as was forewarned at the outset of our study. Were these consequences to be addressed in the light of the foregoing history it would not only augur well for the prospects of adoption, it would present far-reaching challenges for both orthodox and revisionist Calvinists alike. Underlying this study has been the hope that the restoration and integration of adoption into Reformed theology would result in a more generally constructive
and contemporary approach to the tradition’s Calvinism. This would entail not simply the restoration of adoption in the exposition of Reformed soteriology, for that would merely bring the community’s expression of Westminster theology back into line with the Westminster Standards. The constructive Calvinist hopes, rather, to go further by opting for a back-to-basics approach that would involve a fresh look at New Testament teaching with a view to the integration of its familial themes throughout the system of Westminster Calvinism. Only in this way can the community give authentic expression to the old Puritan belief that the Spirit has more light to pour forth on Scripture; which belief encourages the hope that Westminster Calvinists may yet improve upon the tradition’s understanding and utilisation of adoption.

A back-to basics approach would inevitably call, however, for a recasting or revamping (but certainly a refreshment), of our Puritan creedal legacy. For all the immediate uncertainty that would cause, the benefits of a renewed appreciation of the familial themes and tenor of the Bible should excite all lovers of Scripture. Not only so, for such an approach would provide the best opportunity to date to counter effectively James Torrance’s revisionist claim that the federal theology of Westminster Calvinism is driven by the legal rather than the familial categories of Scripture. That said, the driving force motivating the renewal of Westminster Calvinism must be the teaching of Scripture and not the pragmatic desire to mollify the protests of revisionist Calvinists. This being the case, Westminster Calvinists would do well to take into account Candlish’s warning lest in the digging of new mines those shafts already dug be needlessly undisturbed.

Several challenges obstruct the realisation of these constructive Calvinistic hopes. First, orthodox Calvinists require convincing that an increased emphasis on the familial need not be, and in fact ought not to be, a subtle throwback to liberal notions of the universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. The teaching of Calvin, the Westminster Assembly’s seminal creedal statement and those rare subsequent treatments of adoption are surely evidence enough of the presence of reliable familial emphases in the tradition to warrant the dismissal of the likely charge that the balancing of the legal and familial is of necessity a concession to the universalising sentimentality of liberalism. We need only remember that our

1 Samuel A King “The Grace of Adoption”, 30.
insistence on the legal model at the expense of the familial actually contributed to the extremes of the Victorian liberalism to learn that sound theology can be as endangered by a reactionary orthodoxy as by any onslaught from without.

Secondly, orthodox Calvinists need to be persuaded that the tendency to defend Westminster Calvinism by regurgitation is, in the final analysis, counter-productive. By simply restating the lopsided expression of Reformed soteriology of recent centuries, orthodox Calvinists will only succeed in reinforcing the revisionist perception of the legal cast of Westminster Calvinism. Orthodox Calvinists ought then to belatedly acknowledge the kernel of truth in McLeod Campbell’s faltering attempt to do justice to the prospective aspect of the atonement.

A recent and much discussed development in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church in America has provided a second opportunity for Westminster Calvinists to address this focal imbalance between what sinners are saved from and what they are saved to. As mentioned in the introduction, the teaching of the training program “Sonship”, created by Jack Miller, former Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, resembles McLeod Campbell’s attempt to do justice to the prospective aspect of the gospel: “Our goals will be communicated through the vehicle of one very central and exciting biblical image which embodies all that we are and have in Christ as believers: that of adoption and our resulting ‘sonship’.”

Although the programme does not signal a forthcoming theological revolution (as was the case with Erskine and McLeod Campbell), nor challenge the way that Calvinists understand the atonement, nevertheless the programme raises issues that should have been addressed at the time of the Row controversy and the publication of The Nature of the Atonement.

Certainly there are remarkable parallels between the teachings of Campbell and Miller. First, both men realised the shortcomings of the Calvinistic outworking of the Christian life. Whereas Campbell’s impressions were moulded by his experience of parish life, Miller sought to resolve the jaded state of his own

2 “The concept of federal theology”, 35.
3 For the background see Rose Marie Miller, From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughters of God. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1994.
4 “Sonship”, v.
5 In the case of “Sonship” the controverted issues especially concern sanctification and ecclesiology. See Adams (op.cit.) and Van Dixhoorn (op.cit.).
Christian walk. In the process both men resorted to Luther’s commentary on Galatians rather than to Calvin or the subsequent history of Calvinism. In neither instance can we be certain why Calvin’s balancing of the retrospective and prospective aspects of the gospel was overlooked. One suspects that both Campbell and Miller had low expectations of finding much on sonship in his writings.

Secondly, both Campbell and Miller wrote in terms of a general concept of sonship without distinguishing the various structures of the New Testament models. Especially predominant in their writings are references to orphanhood in scriptural contexts that clearly point to slavery as the life-context from which the newly accepted son or daughter of God has come.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these issues, were orthodox Calvinists more abreast of the place of adoption and sonship in the theology of the tradition they would be more capable of a constructive approach to “Sonship” than has been evident in the discussion to date. They have failed to discern the valid underlying reasons for the programme. Instead they have merely repeated the reaction that their forefathers manifested when faced with Campbell’s aberrations. In their fixation on the more obvious and legitimate doctrinal questions raised by “Sonship” they have overlooked the critical issues of motivation and method. It is at the motivational and methodological level that the kernel of truth seen by Campbell and Miller lies. Thus, while the doctrinal questions may be answered in part by a regurgitation of the tradition, the questions of method and motivation call for more discerning and humble reflection on the weaknesses of the tradition. Historically, however, orthodox Calvinists, in their zeal for doctrinal correctness and precision have been unable either to recognise or acknowledging the validity of the underlying issues.

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6 “Sonship”, Lesson 1-2-1-6.
7 From Fear to Freedom, 29-30, 153-160; “Sonship”, lesson 2-10-2-12. Douglas Kelly may well be alluding to the same phenomenon when commending Miller’s book: “In this book and in their teaching about Sonship, Jack and Rose Marie Miller are developing and applying the most authentic aspect of Calvin’s theology concerning the Christian life: union with Christ as adopted sons and daughters.” (frontispiece).
8 Lesson 1 of “Sonship”, for instance, begins with 3 quotations from Galatians, in the light of which it is then stated: “The theme of these Scriptures is this: You are no longer a slave, by the power of the Cross, which alone deserves glory, because it alone can change you from being a slave, or an orphan, into a son. The key question, in a practical way, from Galatians is: ‘What has happened to all your joy?’ Galatians 4:15”. In Galatians, however, it is redemption from slavery to sonship that is in view. The introduction of the language of orphanhood is therefore confusing at best, and a manipulation of Scripture at worst. This problem is characteristic of much of the programme. See, for example, the remainder of lesson 1.
The challenges to the realisation of constructive Calvinistic hopes, however, are not all one-sided. Revisionist Calvinists face the task of realising that, for all the criticism levelled against the federal theology of Westminster Calvinism, there has been a revival of interest in Puritan theology as well as forms of Presbyterianism that operate on a stricter subscriptionist approach to the Westminster Confession. Thus, despite the fragmentation of conservative Presbyterianism, the publication of a substantial amount of Reformed literature since the 1950s has revitalised interest in Calvinism with the result that, for all the tensions in the community, it shows few signs of disappearing from the theological landscape. Accordingly, open-minded Revisionist Calvinists face a perennial choice of either ignoring conservative Presbyterians (as has too often been the case) or entering into the sort of dialogue that may call for a retreat towards a more balanced assessment of Westminster Calvinism.

At least three factors make the latter option unlikely. In the first place, being of the broader Reformed tradition revisionist Calvinists are not necessarily inclined to look in a more conservative direction for dialogue. Ecumenical dialogue is usually perceived of in terms of other traditions, whether Lutheran, Catholic or Eastern. Secondly, the changes brought about by historical criticism and the Barthian movement have complicated internal relationships within the Reformed tradition, leaving obstacles to theological and confessional agreement greater than simply a resolution of the distinctions between Calvin and the Puritans. Thirdly,

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9 This is usually largely attributed in the English-speaking world to the work of the Banner of Truth Trust (founded 1957) and the renowned ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Minister of Westminster Chapel, London (1938-1968).

10 Usually the two parties are content with separate co-existence. Note, for instance, the apparent absence of any recognised orthodox Calvinist from the entrances in Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics and Tradition. Edited by David Willis and Michael Welker. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. When the editors say that “it became clear that this volume could not represent the entire spectrum of contemporary Reformed academic theology of the German- and English-speaking countries in Europe and North America” (ix), it would be interesting to know whether they had in mind the possibility of representative conservative submissions. Where orthodox and revisionist writers come together to write on the Confession and related issues it is usually due to a shared denominational tie. See, for example, the contributions of Sinclair B Ferguson (although Ferguson’s work has led him to a more constructive Calvinistic ethos) and James B Torrance to The Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church Today, 25-54. One interesting attempt to bring the two parties together took place at the 1997 Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference (arranged under the auspices of the Rutherford House), the papers of which are forthcoming under the editorship of Lynn Quigley.

despite the loss of the sense of community among orthodox Calvinists (and, indeed, because of it), there has been little openness to wide-ranging discussion. Few have realised that however orthodox a confession may be, if it does not bind fellow confessors together then its use is, practically speaking, obsolete.\textsuperscript{12}

Secondly, so long as there are conservative Presbyterians there will always be those in the Reformed tradition who will question the revisionist acceptance of the transition towards a more familial expression of the church’s theology, not least because, as we have shown, it has left untouched the overall neglect of adoption. This fact by itself, as mentioned in the introduction, raises significant hermeneutical, exegetical and political questions about current perceptions of a paternal or even a maternal God.

Thus, juxtaposed in the Calvinistic community (broadly conceived) are two attitudes: critical disdain for Westminster theology and a fresh enthusiasm for it. Rooted in orthodox Calvinism with its enthusiasm for Westminster Calvinism, the constructive Calvinist is nevertheless of a mind to listen to the objections proffered by revisionist Calvinists in the hope of responding in such a way as will further the legacy inherited. Although this may entail the revamping of the Westminster Confession along the familial lines of New Testament teaching (as demonstrated in Calvin), the intention of such a revision would be the strengthening of Westminster Calvinism and not its dismantling. This could only be possible if undertaken with concern for the twin virtues of respect for the past coupled with a refusal to be enslaved by it.\textsuperscript{13}

Where could such a recasting of Westminster theology begin? Certainly there is much that a renewed interest in adoption could achieve by way of furthering the development of Reformed soteriology. By borrowing from Calvin’s redemptive-historical affinity to the apostle Paul, and then combining it with the Westminster commissioners’ concern for the logical presentation of truth \textit{(ordo salutis)}, it would be possible to formulate a theology of adoption that does justice to both biblical and systematic theology. Such a formulation would not only contribute to the ongoing

\textsuperscript{12} Borrowing a term from sociologists, Gerrish describes this sense of community as socialization. “A confession of faith... appears, quite simply, as an instrument of socialization.” He rightly argues that the task of confessional theology is subordinate to socialization. Involved in socialization is the community’s remaining true to itself and in doing so imparting and nurturing faith \textit{(Saving and Secular Faith: An Invitation to Systematic Theology).} Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, 53, 55 and 58).

\textsuperscript{13} Cheyne, “The Place of the Confession through Three Centuries”, 27.
concerns about the appropriation of the ordo salutis model, it would also raise questions about how doctrinal formulations are arrived at given the fresh evidence that adoption has cast on the importance of the authorial diversity of Scripture.

All this warrants fresh reflection on the very nature of systematic theology. The discipline, as traditionally practised in orthodox Calvinism, is insufficiently flexible to allow for the requirements of both redemptive history and authorial diversity. This can be demonstrated from the way in which systematic theology has flattened out the various covenantal developments of salvation-history while also playing down the authorial distinctiveness within the canon of Scripture. Nonetheless, there will always be a place for systematic theology in one form or another, simply because those working in biblical studies are often involved in narrowly defined projects that give little scope for the presentation of the overall theology of Scripture. By working with the bigger picture, systematicians are better placed to logically order the discoveries of biblical theology.

Lack of interaction partially explains why the advancement of interest in adoption within biblical studies has not been matched in the study of systematic theology and authorial diversity of Scripture. Nevertheless, Wilfrid Harrington writes: "...it is manifest that the New Testament writings must be taken according to their natural groupings, or be studied individually where it is necessary to do so." (Wilfrid J Harrington, The Path of Biblical Theology. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973, 211).

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14 The ordo salutis has been accused among other things of "distort[ing] the basic NT (Pauline) emphasis on historia salutis, substituting for it a less than biblical emphasis on personal experience" (NDT. 1988. S.v. "Ordo salutis," by Sinclair Ferguson. Cf. George S Hendry, op. cit., 16).

15 Sometimes systematicians have appreciated redemptive history but not the importance of the authorial diversity of the New Testament. See, for instance, John Murray's article on systematic theology (Collected Writings, vol. 4, 1-21). The nearest he comes to dealing with the latter issue is when he writes: "...the various passages drawn from the whole compass of Scripture and woven into the texture of systematic theology are not cited as mere proof texts or wrested from the scriptural and historical context to which they belong, but, understood in a way appropriate to the place they occupy in this unfolding process, [and] are applied with that particular relevance to the topic under consideration." (ibid., 21). It is particularly the authorial diversity of Scripture that complicates the work of the systematic theologian. Nevertheless, Wilfrid Harrington writes: "...it is manifest that the New Testament writings must be taken according to their natural groupings, or be studied individually where it is necessary to do so." (Wilfrid J Harrington, The Path of Biblical Theology. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973, 211).

theology over the course of the twentieth century. Thus, John Kennedy’s observation of 1869, that “a clear definition of adoption, and a just description of its effects, on the relation between believers and God, are still wanting”, is basically as true now as then.

The future of Westminster Calvinism needs to take into account, however, more than just the general relationship between biblical and systematic theology. There also needs to be recognition of those more particular discussions that have a bearing on the way adoption is to be understood. Five of these are particularly germane.

In the first place, there is the question of Adam’s status in Eden. Future discussions will have to address several issues concerning the basic relevance of the question. Although the Adam-Christ parallel is essential to Pauline theology, this does not necessarily mean to say that Paul regarded the nature of Adam’s relationship to God in Eden (whether familial, legal or both) as essential to his teaching concerning ἀδεστία, his borrowed reference to “offspring” (Acts 17:28-29) notwithstanding. Although Calvin’s comments on Paul’s Athenian sermon convey a certain relevance for the issue, the low profile of the reformer’s assumptions of Adam’s initial filial status comparative to the protracted discussions in the theologies of the later nineteenth-century Calvinists we have studied, suggests that he did not necessarily regard the matter to be a core issue at the heart of adoption.

The mindset among Westminster Calvinists today has not changed markedly since the nineteenth century. Given this, it may well be that any revival of interest in

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adoption will continue the discussions of the nineteenth century rather than investigate the riches of Calvin’s theology. Should this prove to be the case, it would be imperative for Calvinists to acknowledge at least the evolution of historical criticism if for no other reason than to maintain the credibility of the discussion. By presenting the case for the historicity of Adam and Eve (which would be a refreshing, constructive and well overdue change from preoccupation with the days of creation), it could be argued that there is more in the Genesis account of Adam than merely a symbol for the person, the collectivity of persons and the emergence of freedom in history.\(^{19}\) Having thereby covered their flanks, they could then address the question itself: Was Adam a son or a subject of God, or both? The findings of the present study could prove helpful to such an investigation, for, if nothing else, they reveal that few attempts have been made in the tradition’s history to define and interpret definitively Adam’s status in Eden:

Reformed Views of the Adamic Status in Eden\(^\text{20}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calvin</th>
<th>Candlish</th>
<th>Crawford</th>
<th>Girardeau</th>
<th>Webb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Common Father”</td>
<td>A variety of relations commonly pointing to rule or government (Judge/“Fatherly”)</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Father-King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonship assumed from the childhood of Adam’s posterity</td>
<td>Subjects (any filial reference to Adam’s status in Eden is just for popular or poetical purposes)</td>
<td>Sons (regal and judicial subjection to God assumed)</td>
<td>Son and Subject (cf. Christ)</td>
<td>Child-Servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imago Dei</td>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>Origination/Imago Dei</td>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>Derivation and Subordination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5

Secondly, Reformed orthodoxy has to affirm why it still holds that there was something unique about the nation of Israel and God’s progressive dealings with it as his ancient people. Writing in the 1980s Robert Gnuse stated that “within the

\(^{18}\) Kennedy, *Man’s Relations to God*, 71.


\(^{20}\) This chart, serving as but a summary, is intended as but a guideline to the predominant way in which each author understood the Edenic scenario. In the case of Calvin, for instance, the chart is not
recent generation [Heilsgeschichte] has come under serious criticism from philosophers of history, theologians, exegetes, and historians."21 First, it has been noted that not all the biblical material has a historical orientation. Secondly, history was never clearly defined as a theological or philosophical category by the biblical theologians. Thirdly, inconsistent definitions of history were employed such as Geschichte, meaning popular and interpreted history, and Historie, understood as that which is real, scientific and factual. Fourthly, a distinction was sometimes drawn between what really happened and what was later confessed in the traditions. Fifthly, unfair comparisons were made with the Near Eastern modes of thought so as to highlight the uniqueness of the Israelite mindset.22

Because these criticisms are levelled against a wide range of biblical theologians, they cannot all be pinned on those of a conservative bent. Nevertheless, in calling for the widespread use of the redemptive-historical model in biblical and systematic theology, the Reformed ought to exercise awareness of the contemporary challenges to its employment.

A third recent challenge to be taken into account is the new perspective on Paul's theology. It is increasingly likely that the revised understanding of Paul will have a lasting impact on studies of his theology, whatever modifications it will undergo in future years.23 While we cannot possibly enter into the issues here in any detail, we may just note that an early contribution by N T Wright to the recent discussions of justification provides a clue to at least one way in which Westminster Calvinists (and indeed all classical Protestants) may respond.

In his chapter, "Justification: The Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism"24, Wright provides a summary exposition of the doctrine based first on the Old Testament then on the various (authorial) perspectives of the New Testament – the Gospels and Acts, Paul (Gal., Phil., Rom.)

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22 Ibid., 1-2.
together with other books. Three features stand out: his corporate definition of justification, his silence about adoption, yet his evident confusion of justification and adoption.

"Justification", says Wright, "is God's declaration that certain people are within the covenant." To elaborate, "those who believe the Gospel are in the right, are members of the covenant family." 25 Behind this understanding is a rejection of the individualism of the reformers' definition, which has been exchanged for the more corporate or communal covenantal understanding. The basis of this exchange is rooted in the view that justification is not a subject in its own right, but part of the larger subject of God's covenantal purposes for his own people. This Wright traces back not only to the Old Testament but to Jesus and to Paul: "For Paul, as for Jesus, the salvation of the individual is set in the context of God's redefinition of Israel, his call of a worldwide family whose sins are forgiven in the blood of the new covenant." 26

With profuse mention of the covenant family, one would expect Wright to mention adoption at any moment and repeatedly thereafter. After all, adoption has its own distinct term, context, and climactic use in three of Paul's major epistles. It is surprising, then, and not a little significant to find that not once does Wright refer to adoption, not even in his expositions of Galatians and Romans. In a manner reminiscent of Erskine's treatment of Romans 8 (see ch. 7 above), Wright mentions sonship, citing Romans 8:14-17 as well as Galatians 4:1-7 in the footnotes, 27 but does no justice to adoption itself. 28

Thus, confusing justification and adoption, Wright strikingly states that "Romans 8 points to the crowning glory of Paul's doctrine of justification" 29. That it may do, but justification itself is not necessarily the apex of Romans 8. That honour, theologically speaking, belongs seemingly to the adoption for which the whole created order groans (8:17-23). One point then that Westminster Calvinists can contribute in response to NT Wright's version of the new perspective is that in the

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25 Ibid., 15. This definition has remained unchanged with the passing of the years: "'Justification' is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family on this basis and no other." (What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans and Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1997, 133).
26 "Justification", 19 and 21.
27 Ibid., 26 and 116.
28 The same complaint can be made of What Saint Paul Really Said, 95-133.
context of Paul’s thought it is not justification that is the declaration that the believer is within the covenant family, but adoption!

The implications of this are manifold. For one thing, such a response demonstrates the importance of a grasp of the history and theology of adoption. As it stands, classical Protestants are ill equipped to note this particular distortion of the climax of Paul’s soteriology, for there has been little awareness of adoptive sonship in Romans 8, Galatians 3-4 or Ephesians 1.

For another thing, what is clear from Wright’s case is that his argument is born of the failure of classical Protestantism to demonstrate how the individualistic implications of the reformers’ doctrine of justification are supplemented by the corporate implications of adoption into the family of God.

Furthermore, as valid as Wright’s protest may be, it is but the repetition of a pattern documented already in chapter seven. As we have seen, just because a protest is valid does not mean to say that the solution is automatically commendable. For this reason, Wright’s advice to go back to the New Testament to see if it can be understood any better than by the reformers is well taken.\textsuperscript{30} However, it is by no means clear, to this author at least, that exponents of the new perspective have done any more justice to how the reformers understood the New Testament than classical Protestants. With a better knowledge of Calvin, the new perspective may in fact find that their protest has to a large measure been answered from Geneva. Wright’s confusion of justification and adoption apart, his following statement suggests that this might be so:

\begin{quote}
The people of God are an historical and visible family, demonstrating their historical nature in the sacraments and in that continuity of ministry, in the context of life under the Word of God, for which the later writings of the New Testament show so much concern. Justification is not an individual’s charter, but God’s declaration that we belong to the covenant community. If we are not taking that community seriously, we have not understood justification. 
... if justification declares that the believer is a member of the covenant community, that community itself is called to live as the family who accept one another in love.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

In Calvin we find due emphasis on the covenantal setting of the gospel, the fundamental importance of union with Christ (so countering the accusation that the

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, 27. 
\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, 31. 
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, 36.
imputation of Christ’s righteousness is a legal fiction), and the corporate or communal application of the gospel worked out in full.

There is a strong case for arguing then that Wright’s protest is fully resolvable within the traditional categories of soteriology – justification, adoption, sanctification – so long as full justice is done to the believer’s membership of the household of God. Arguments may persist about vital details such as imputation, but Calvin’s doctrine is so hedged around from accusations of a legal fiction that at face value there is merit to the conclusion that the so-called new perspective is, by comparison with Calvin’s soteriology, another valid but seemingly aberrant protest against the loss of a familial understanding of covenant (and adoption, we may add) in classic Protestant theology. While the protest is valid the added incentive of drawing on Calvin as opposed to Wright is that the Genevan Reformer leaves in tact the doctrinal benefits of the Reformation. Thus, for all the appropriateness of Wright’s concern that Evangelicals take the family seriously, the present study has demonstrated that the reliability of Calvin’s old perspective, while not Scripture, is preferable to the uncertain and exaggerated implications of Wright’s new perspectival protest! This is so for all sorts of reasons, not least because Wright confuses justification and adoption by blurring the distinction between these inseparable Pauline doctrines:

If justification is God’s assurance that those who belong to the Messiah are indeed members of his covenant family, then the whole of the New Testament is all about justification – which is, after all, what we should expect from a book whose collective title indicates that it is the documentation of the new covenant.

Fourthly, there has been the emergence of feminist theology. Any feminist reader perusing this dissertation will, no doubt, have found it curious to say the least to discover a Calvinist appealing to his fellow Calvinists for a due emphasis on the Fatherhood of God during a time in which feminist theologians are urging upon us a change in the linguistic register to the Motherhood of God! However, my appeal need not be understood to be so incongruous. As the dust settles, and with it some of

32 Writing of 1 Cor. 1:30, Wright states: “It is the only passage I know where something called ‘the imputed righteousness of Christ,’ a phrase more often found in post-Reformation theology and piety than in the New Testament, finds any basis in the text. But if we are to claim it as such, we must also be prepared to talk of the imputed wisdom of Christ; the imputed sanctification of Christ; and the imputed redemption of Christ; and that, though no doubt they are all true in some general sense, will certainly make nonsense of the very specialized and technical senses so frequently given to the phrase ‘the righteousness of Christ’ in the history of theology.”
33 “Justification”, 35.
34 Ibid., 29.
the heat of the feminist protest, so we may hope that some of the more extreme feminist positions may become modified over time. Down the road it is certainly possible to envisage a modest coming together on the issue. On the one side, radical feminism is simply too extreme to win the day, but on the other side the challenge to the naïvely sexist understanding of the masculine terminology of Scripture (as if God were male), complemented by the increased awareness and appropriation of the female imagery of God in Scripture, will eventually undermine the force of the feminist challenge in the eyes of those who regard Scripture as the dictum for theology and not the exemplar of how to do it.35

For those regarding the Scriptures as normative for theology, there can be no calling God “Mother”, firstly because the New Testament never calls us to address God in this way. Neither has the church ever advocated it.36 Secondly, this is inappropriate because to meddle with the terminology of Scripture inevitably leads to a certain tampering with doctrine. For instance, Paul’s emphasis on the Son (υἱός) and the sons (υἱοί) is an implicit affirmation and explanation of the reality of union between Christ and his people. Through this union Christ becomes the elder and firstborn brother of the adopted. This does not make the apostle a misogynist. Far from it! Hence, he understands the adopted to be both sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6:18). He calls them ἵνα several times in Romans 8 probably in view of the fact that the noun embraces females as well as males.37 In any case, in Pauline theology it is the church that is mother and not God (Gal. 4:26)! Thirdly, the feminist case is too pragmatically argued. What matters in the final analysis is not what is individually appropriate and acceptable to us, but what is normative in Scripture. If we can only use what is immediately or universally meaningful, then soon there will arise problems over the concept of the Motherhood of God. Consistency would demand that if the Fatherhood of God be abandoned because for some God could not be conceived of without the haunting memory of a tyrannical

35 As has been written: “Whatever an individual’s conclusions and decisions, the question of the ‘motherhood of God’ can be asked and answered as an issue of biblical exegesis and interpretation, governed by the criterion of what is true to Christ and his Word, and to the exclusion of any unbiblical neo-pagan goddess religion.” (The Motherhood of God: A Report by a Study Group appointed by the Woman’s Guild and the Panel on Doctrine on the invitation of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Edited by Alan E Lewis. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1984, 62).
36 Ibid., 44. “The obvious reluctance of theologians of the past generally to admit feminine conceptuality acts as a warning today, some of us believe, against widespread expansion of our theological models into the realm of the feminine” (Ibid, 53).
37 Ibid., 38.
earthly father, at some point others will be only too glad to jettison any concept of the Motherhood of God because of the memory of a painfully overbearing mother. What happens then?

Calvinistic orthodoxy should have less problem with the feminist challenge than may be thought. Although the term Father is normative in Scripture, the necessity of a non-sexist understanding of it means that there is liberty in appropriating the female imagery of God's love found in Scripture. This imagery does not overturn the divine paternity, but it does reinforce the view that God's Fatherhood is also motherly in its expression. We saw an example of this in Calvin's commentary on Isaiah (ch. 2.2). However, the Reformed emphasis on applied biblical exegesis should keep the tradition free from the dictates of any age, yet without alleviating the tradition of the responsibility of bringing to Scripture the challenges of each succeeding movement or 'ism'.

Fifthly, Calvinistic orthodoxy ought to derive benefit from metaphorical theology. Some of the difficulties in accepting the motherly Fatherhood of God are due to ignorance of how scriptural language functions. The postmodernist challenge has given rise to questions of language that are forcing the church to think of appropriate responses. There is hope that continuing discussions will eventually clarify how biblical language operates so as to shed light in turn on the nature of Paul's use of familial terminology.

These discussions, however, should not hinder the Reformed from ongoing reflection on Westminster Calvinism with a view to the overcoming of the

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38 Consistent with what we have said throughout, wisdom needs to be employed in the handling of Scripture. For instance, while it is God who is Father and the church who is mother, Christ the firstborn Son and the adopted his siblings in Pauline theology, Moltmann makes out a case for the depatriarchalization of our picture of God based upon the Johannine model of the new birth. Although we do not go all the way with Moltmann, nevertheless there does seem to be something in his claim that, if the new life is "thought of as rebirth or as being born again, this suggests a singular image for the Holy Spirit, an image which was quite familiar in the early centuries of Christianity, especially in Syria, but which came to be lost in the patriarchal Roman empire: the image of the mother. If believers are 'born' again from the Holy Spirit, then the Spirit is 'the mother' of God's children and can in this sense also be termed a 'feminine' Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is 'the Comforter' (Paraclete), then, it comforts 'as a mother comforts'. In this sense it is the motherly comforter of believers. Linguistically this again brings out the characteristics of the Hebrew expression 'Yahweh's ruach'."

39 For the biblical evidence for this see The Motherhood of God, 32ff.; cf. Smail, The Forgotten Father, 62-64.

40 John W Cooper addresses some of this in Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive
shortcomings of Puritan methodology, the integration of fresh biblical insights, not
to mention the attention required by the varied cultural needs of the now worldwide
community of Westminster Calvinists. As far as the results of this particular study
are concerned, we may conclude that only as the tradition comes to grips with the
legacy of adoption will Calvinists be better placed to consider the implications of
these modern discussions for the future formulation of the doctrine. To do so will
require a constructive Calvinistic ethos, that is, a serious listening to the complaints
raised against Westminster Calvinism coupled with a response that is faithful to
Scripture and, where that is so, within the trajectory of the post-Westminster
tradition. Such an approach could well challenge revisionist Calvinists concerning
the dangers of relativism while sparing orthodox Calvinists their propensity for
sectarianism.

Obvious benefits are to be gained from the recasting of Westminster
Calvinism. First, it presents the community with an opportunity to escape the rut of
some of our harsher and more well-worn expositions of the theology of the
Assembly. Surely the austerity of much of the exposition of Westminster theology
over the last two centuries has run counter to the spirit of Calvin's theology of grace.
The unhappy result has been that the persistent caricaturing of the Reformed faith
has gained a staying power that has confused Westminster's creedal soteriology and
that expounded by some of its proponents. Too often Westminster soteriology has
been read more through the grid established by the retrospectively dominant
perspective of later Calvinists than through the more balanced statements of the
Standards themselves. The preceding history of Calvinism has shown that despite
the support of longevity the tradition of exposition that has developed over recent
centuries ought not necessarily to be equated with the theology of the Assembly
itself.

This argument is not original. Many years ago Candlish made very much the
same point:

It would be a curious and interesting speculation to inquire whether we may not
thus, to some extent at least, account for the lapse of the theology of the
Reformation in the schools and colleges of the Continent, as well as among
ourselves, first into rigid and frigid scholastic systematising, and then into
rationalism. At all events, I am persuaded that we have a strong safeguard against
any such danger, if we do full justice to the common sonship of Christ and of
Christ's disciples; - erecting it into a distinct and separate article of belief, and
giving it a well-defined place of its own, "with ample room and verge enough,"

among the truths of the Christian creed and the elements of Christian experience.
"Beloved, now we are the sons of God." Let that be fully taught.41

To put the matter in terms of the current “Calvin versus the Calvinists” debate, what is needed is more than a simple realisation of the strategic teaching of the WCF. Great theological and devotional profit is to be gained by a return to Calvin and a subsequent re-reading of the WCF in the light of his rich insights. The tradition of theology cries out for a “Back to the Bible” approach that could, in effect, result in a healthy synthesising of the teaching of Calvin and the Calvinists, with a fresh openness to those insights of Barth, which, upon reflection and/or modification, may be deemed biblical.

Secondly, the recasting of Westminster Calvinism would spiritually benefit ministers and laity alike. Noting that among the Puritans adoption was “never highlighted quite enough”, in the same chapter J I Packer cites himself:

> 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.... Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.42

How necessary then is the recovery of adoption, given its plight in the recent history of Calvinism. As Kelly notes: “the departure within the Westminster Tradition itself from this fruitful Biblical theme of family relationship at the very heart of Christian salvation weakened even further the impact that these powerful Standards could have exercised.”43 The loss of influence was not only theological but also spiritual and practical. Thinking back to the Southern Presbyterians, Kelly writes:

> The way they worked out the implications of this crucial doctrine should be of more than passing interest to us today, who inhabit a world of broken families and disrupted relationships, where masses seek for a sense of belonging and intimate, personal and family relations.44

Doubtless, then, the work facing Westminster Calvinists is important, but only those convinced of the need of a constructive approach to the future will apply themselves to it. To do so is to honour our forebears by fulfilling the potential for adoption that some of them promised. As James Buchanan once wrote:

41 Candlish, FG, 166-167.
42 J I Packer, Knowing God, 224 and 249.
43 Kelly, “Adoption”, 112. “Those in the official Westminster Tradition have far less excuse for this omission than others, for their Confession of Faith is unique among other historical confessions in granting an entire chapter to this significant Biblical doctrine. It is the first among Protestant Confessions to do so.” (ibid., 111).
44 Ibid., 114.
This closer and more endearing relation to God, which is constituted by Adoption, is necessary, in addition to that which is included in our Justification, to complete the view of our Christian privileges, and to enhance our enjoyment of them, by raising us above “the spirit of bondage, which is unto fear,” and cherishing “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” It is necessary, also, to explain how the sins of believers are not visited with penal afflictions properly so called, but are nevertheless treated in the way of fatherly chastisement; and, still further, to show that the kingdom of heaven hereafter will not be bestowed as wages for work done, but as an “inheritance,” freely bestowed on those, and those only, who are ‘joint-heirs with Christ.”

The study ends, then, in the hope that the Reformed community may realise once and for all the place adoption occupies in its own tradition, live more in accordance with its spirit, and thus proclaim that in Christ there is an abundance of the gratuitas and fides adoptionis to be enjoyed. Such a hope concurs with A B Bruce’s sentiment: “What a change would come over the face of Christendom if the Spirit of adoption were poured out in abundant measure on all who bear the Christian name!” We have seen what such an outpouring did for Methodism. Why not also for the Reformed, and indeed for the whole church?

45 The Doctrine of Justification, 263-264.
46 A B Bruce, St. Paul’s Conception of Christianity. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894, 203-204.
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