Adopted into God's family

EXPLORING A PAULINE METAPHOR

Trevor J. Burke

To the memory of Ken Burke
22 December 1925 – 24 October 2002
and in gratitude to Dick Dunlop
9 December 1917–

Contents

Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we shall try not to separate what God has joined. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

While some of the volumes in this series have offered fresh insight into biblical themes commonly studied in almost every generation, this contribution from Dr Burke offers a fresh and probing look at a strand often overlooked and sometimes misunderstood. Christians who read the writings of Paul soon become familiar with terms such as justification, sanctification, reconciliation, redemption, and election. They soon learn, too, that they are children of God – or 'sons of God', as a more pedantic rendering puts it. But what additional theological weight is carried by the five passages where Paul tells believers that they have been *adopted* as sons? Or even, as one passage puts it, that they *will* be adopted as sons at the last day? Such questions must be addressed not only by understanding the sociolegal customs of

Paul's day (in other words, the questions have an historical dimen-
sion), but also by examining in some detail how this adoption
terminology is carefully integrated into a variety of theological
categories. Not only the importance of God's family but also the
enormous privilege of belonging to it are powerfully underscored by
Paul's understanding of what it means to be the adopted sons of God.
With such themes in view, a wide array of pastoral implications soon
springs to light. In other words, this volume not only probes a
neglected theme – it also edifies.

D. A. Carson
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Author's preface

This book was written on the move. I started to write it while teaching in the South Pacific, and completed it when I moved to a new post in North America. The bulk of the book, however, was written while on sabbatical in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during the academic year of 2003–4.

My fascination with Paul's family terms in general and adoption in particular began in Nigeria, West Africa, where I was a missionary lecturer in New Testament in a theological seminary. Because my students did not have many theological books (a Bible, one-volume commentary and theological book were their only library), I sought to have my lecture notes printed for them to use. One of my first handouts, 'Doctrines in Romans Simply Explained', featured adoption.

Teaching a class on Romans exegesis also coincided with one of the highlights of our married life: the birth of our first son, Luke, and my awakening to the joys (and rather early starts!) of fatherhood, which sharpened my interest and study of adoption.

I owe a huge debt to many people who have helped in one way or another in the writing of this book. I am especially grateful to Professor D. A. Carson for the invitation and privilege of contributing to this series. I owe a huge debt to him for his interest in the project, his many insightful comments and support, all of which have been a huge stimulus in completing the book. I am grateful too to Dr Philip Duce and the staff at Inter-Varsity Press for their fine editorial skills.

Moreover, I wish to thank students and faculty in the institutions where I have had the privilege of teaching and who have interacted with this material: Peter Achimugu College of Theology, Ankpa, Nigeria; Samuel Bill Theological College, Abak, Nigeria; The Evangelical Theological College of Wales, Bridgend; The Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji Islands; and now, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, where I teach. My present colleagues' interest in how this book was progressing has been a great encouragement.

I am also deeply grateful to my MPhil supervisor, Dr Margaret E. Thrall, University College of North Wales (Bangor), who supervised the original thesis 'Adoptive Sonship (HUIOTHESIA) in the Pauline Corpus', of which this book is a revision, and to Dr (now Prof.) Loveday C. A. Alexander, University of Sheffield, for examining the work and providing ways to improve it. I also wish to thank many individuals who have read early drafts of this work, including Professors I. Howard Marshall (Aberdeen), John M. G. Barclay (now of Durham), and Revd Dr Christopher J. H. Wright, Langham Partnership, who read and commented on parts of the book in an earlier format. My present colleague Dr Gerald W. Peterman also kindly read and commented on part of the book.

Books, of course, are written in the midst of daily living and this one is no different, except for the nature of the circumstances pertaining to our family. During one of the most difficult periods of our family life, we had to take our older son, Luke, back to Methodist College, Belfast, to board while we remained 12,000 miles way in the South Pacific, Fiji Islands. Our year apart proved to be a testing and difficult time. Having settled our son into school, I returned to Fiji only to receive the news one week later that my father, Ken Burke, had been taken seriously ill and had died. I immediately made the same journey back to Northern Ireland, this time with an even heavier heart, for my father's funeral. It was during this time that I was grateful to my father-in-law, Dick Dunlop, for once again providing much support and as always an open house to stay on the farm. It is to these two fathers that I dedicate this book. During this second visit, I was very grateful too to Dr Bruce Winter for the opportunity to stay at Tyndale House for two weeks to enable me not only to reflect on the above traumatic events but also to write further on this book. Thanks are also due to Dr Elizabeth Magba, Tyndale House Library, for acquiring a number of articles.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Revd Harold Boyce and Margaret Galbraith in my native Belfast, who read parts of this book in an earlier format. Thanks too to my teaching assistants at Moody Bible Institute, Ashish Varma and my son Simeon Burke, for compiling the indexes.

This book would also have been completed earlier were it not for a period of illness when I was about to take up my new appointment at Moody Bible Institute. On nearing completion, the acquisition of important bibliographical material by Joe Cataio, Librarian at Moody Bible Institute, was not only timely but spurred the process

along to completion. I am very grateful to my employer for awarding me the 2006 Faculty Writing Grant, which was a great help and encouragement in the latter stages of writing.

My greatest debt, however, is to my wife, Yvonne, and our two sons, Luke and Simeon, the former having read and commented on much of the material, the latter two having listened to many discussions of Paul. Their understanding, support and encouragement as I retreated repeatedly to my study are deeply appreciated. Our children continue to be one of the greatest sources of delight to us as parents.

Trevor J. Burke
Chicago, June 2006

Abbreviations

1Q3S	*Stories about the Tribes of Israel* (Dead Sea Scrolls)
1QS	*Rule of the Community* (Dead Sea Scrolls)
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
4Q372	*Apocrypha of Joseph^b* (Dead Sea Scrolls)
4Qflor	*Florilegium* (Dead Sea Scrolls)
AB	Anchor Bible
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
A. J.	*Antiquitates judaicae*
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt*
Apoc. Bar.	*Apocalypse of Barnabas*
AV	Authorized Version
BBMS	Baker Biblical Monograph Series
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and W. F. Gingrich (2000), *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Bib	*Biblica*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
b. Pes.	*Babylonian Talmud, Pesaḥim*
b. Šab.	*Babylonian Talmud, Šabbat*
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
b. Taʿan.	*Bablynonian Talmud Taʿanit*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*

BTCL	Biblical and Theological Collection Library
c.	circa
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarium*
CR:BS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
Dig.	*Digesta*
Diod. Sic.	Diodorus Siculus
Dom.	*De domo suo*
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
Fin.	de Finibus
Gk	Greek
Haer.	*Adversus haereses*
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Instit.	John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Inst.	*Institutiones* (Gaius)
Int	*Interpretation*
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JRS	*Journal of Romans Studies*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Jub.	*Jubilees*
LCL	Loeb Christian Library
LD	Lectio divina
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint
N. A.	*Noctes Atticae*
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
Off.	*De officiis*
OT	Old Testament
pl.	plural
PLip	L. Mitteis (1906), *Griechische Urkunden der Papyrussammlung zu Leipzig*, Leipzig (no publisher)
Poet.	*Poetica*
POxy	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*
Prov.	*De providentia*
PSB	*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*
Quaest. Amphil.	*Quaestiones Amphilochiis*
RB	*Revue biblique*
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBET	*Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
Sir.	Sirach
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SJTOP	Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
Sobr.	*De sobrietate*
SP	Sacra pagina
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
Them	*Themelios*
T. Jud.	*Testament of Judah*
T. Levi	*Testament of Levi*
T. Reub.	*Testament of Reuben*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*

UBS	United Bible Societies
Vir. ill.	*De viris illustribus*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEC	Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

Chapter One

Adoption:
A misinterpreted metaphor?

Introduction

The relationship between God and his people has been variously described and understood by Old and New Testament authors. Of all the biblical writers it is arguably the apostle Paul who employs the richest vocabulary in describing how a person relates to God. For example, he speaks of election (Eph. 1:4), justification (Rom. 3:24), redemption (Gal. 3:14) and reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19) to name a few forms of relationship. These weighty biblical expressions are rich in the social setting in which Paul lived and moved and deepen our appreciation of the saving significance of Christ and the Christian's relationship to God.

In addition to the above theological terms, another Pauline expression has attracted less attention, the word *huiothesia*, 'adoption'.[1] The expression *huiothesia* comprises two Greek words: *huios*, 'son',[2] and *thesis*, 'placing', and etymologically denotes either the

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[1] Dunn (1998: 469) has rightly stated concerning adoption that its 'presence is noted but [its] significance . . . is too little reflected on'.

[2] In the ancient Graeco-Roman world both sons and daughters could be adopted, although the latter was less common, as daughters could not continue the line. Thus when I use 'sons' I am not excluding daughters, and this is perhaps reflected in Paul's movement in Rom. 8 from 'sons' (*huioi*, v. 14) to 'children' (*tekna*, v. 16). At the same time, Paul's preference for the term 'sons' in the adoption texts makes us aware that he lived in patriarchal society. His use of 'sons' in this context makes it clear that sons were not only the usual subjects for adoption but that they also stand as representatives of females. The NRSV translation of the Greek word *huioi* (v. 14) as 'children' muddies the waters and obscures this issue. This is because Paul wishes to make the point that our adoption as sons is dependent on Jesus as Son of God, and Rom. 8:12–17 is deliberately sandwiched between two references to Jesus as the Son of God (cf. Rom. 8:3, 29). Our adoption as God's sons is inextricably tied to God's Son; hence to translate *huioi* (sons) as 'children' in v. 14 blurs this important point.

process or act of being placed or 'adopted as son(s)'.[3] *Huiothesia* is unique to the writings of the apostle Paul, occurring five times in three of his letters (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). No other author in the New Testament employs this expression. Further, *huiothesia* and the verbal form *huiotheteō* are not found in the Old Testament (including the received text of the LXX), and *huiothesia* is also conspicuously absent from the corpus of classical Greek writers and from other Jewish literature of the period (e.g. Philo and Josephus). The earliest known occurrences of the term in the Greek world are found in funerary inscriptions of the second century BC at Adelphi and Crete. The first known literary appearances, however, are found in the writings of the two Hellenistic historians Diodorus Siculus and Nicolaus Damascenus. Diodorus, who to a large extent paraphrases Polybius, uses the 'adoption' term in the story of Aemilius and Scipio. He writes, 'when Aemilius, his real father, died and left his property to him and to Fabius, the sons he had given in *adoption* (*huiothesian*), Scipio performed a noble act, which deserves to be put on record' (Diod. Sic. 31.27.5; my emphasis). Diodorus also employs the expression in the Greek myth of Zeus, who persuaded his wife Hera to adopt Heracles (Diod. Sic. 39.2).

When we turn to the writings of the apostle Paul, the word 'adoption' is always employed metaphorically (never literally), and has no equal or parallel in the New Testament. Adoption graphically and intimately describes the family character of Pauline Christianity,[4] and is a basic description for Paul of what it means to be a Christian. *Huiothesia* is a theological metaphor Paul 'particularly cherished' (Dunn 2003: 435) and is used to denote the blessing of God's people by their heavenly Father. In short, 'for … Paul … *adoption* into the family of God *is a key metaphor* for the new status believers have obtained' (Yarbrough 1995: 140; my emphasis).[5]

[3] Scott (1992: 13–57) has carried out one of the most exhaustive computer analyses of the semantic range of *huiothesia* and concludes that it has a Hellenistic *meaning* (not background) and denotes 'adoption as son'. It has to be said that Scott's conclusion was one Lightfoot (1975: 168) had arrived at well over a century earlier. Others, for example Byrne (1979), prefer the more general translation 'sonship' on the basis that *huiothesia* does not exclusively refer to an *act* (of adoption) but to *status* (sonship) as well; see also Schweitzer 1993: 397.

[4] Interestingly, Stanton (2003: 183) describes the *central themes* of Paul's gospel and concludes his essay with the following summary of that good news: 'Paul's gospel is the good news of God's once for all disclosure of Jesus Christ as his Son, sent for our salvation so that "we might receive the adoption as God's children" (Gal. 4:4–5).'

[5] Atkins (1991: 187) states regarding the significance of *huiothesia* for Paul, 'Paul's use of adoption terminology is both structurally and functionally a centerpiece of his understanding of what it is to be a follower of Christ.'

Theological misunderstandings of adoption

During my study of adoption, which began when I was teaching an exegesis class on Romans in a theological seminary in West Africa, I was struck by two main points: first, throughout the history of the church, adoption has (at times) been misunderstood; and second, popular and scholarly interests in this expression have been too narrowly focused. Regarding the former, adoption has been misinterpreted by systematicians and 'has . . . been more often in the dark than in the light' (Westhead 1995: 102). For example, adoption has been mistakenly viewed as the positive side of justification.

This confusion was evident at times during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Reformed theologians sought to situate adoption within the *ordo salutis* (scheme or plan of salvation) (see Garner 2002: 3).[6] Francis Turretin, one of the most influential Reformed theologians of his time, discusses the relationship between adoption and justification and poses the question 'What is the adoption which is given us in justification?' To which he replies, 'Adoption is included in justification as a part' (Ferguson 1986: 83).[7] By conflating adoption and justification Turretin eradicates the distinctiveness of adoption, thereby diminishing the theological importance of this Pauline term. Others, such as the post-Reformation theologian John Leith, have understood 'adoption [as] a synonym for justification' (Leith 1973: 99), a view shared by R. L. Dabney during the nineteenth century who described adoption in the following manner: 'Adoption cannot be said to be a different act of grace for justification . . . [Adoption] *performs the same act* for us . . . which justification does' (1996: 627; my emphasis).

On other occasions, systematic theologians have misconceived this term, misconceptions that persisted into the twentieth century, as is evident in the writings of L. Berkhof. Berkof (1981: 515) repeats the mistake of earlier systematicians by viewing adoption as a subsection of justification: 'there is also a positive element in justification . . .

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[6] Garner states the doctrine of adoption has received 'minimal attention by the church fathers'. Notably Irenaeus discusses adoption, and Origen and Augustine also mention it. During the Reformation Luther did not make much of adoption, whereas Calvin's theology is undergirded by an understanding of this term and has even been described as a 'Gospel of adoption' (Gerrish 1993: 89). For a discussion of Calvin's appreciation of adoption see Ferguson 1986: 81–88; Trumper 2002; Griffith 2001: 135–154; Westhead 1995: 102–115.

[7] According to Ferguson (1986: 83), Turretin's conclusions contributed to the demise of adoption in English-speaking Reformed theology.

justification is more than mere pardon ... believers are children of God by adoption'.[8] The table below depicts the views of Kuyper, Berkhof and Murray in regard to their understanding of adoption and its relationship to other theological terms. Kuyper and Berkhof mistakenly view adoption as a subset of regeneration and justification respectively, whereas John Murray rightly regards adoption as distinct but also related to justification and regeneration in the *ordo salutis*:

Abraham Kuyper	Regeneration/adoption–faith–justification–sanctification–glorification
Louis Berkhof	Regeneration–faith–justification/adoption–sanctification–glorification
John Murray	Regeneration–faith–justification–adoption–sanctification–glorification

Table 1.1

These misunderstandings still continue today, as evidenced in the remarks of Anthony Hoekema (1994: 185; my emphasis):

> two *positive benefits of justification* that we mentioned earlier [are] first our adoption as children of God. By this I do not mean the spiritual rebirth whereby we become children of God through regeneration ... I mean adoption in the legal sense: our being placed in the status of sons ... of God.

The subsuming of adoption under justification allots a secondary role to the former, which has resulted in the theological integrity of adoption being compromised and the expression being relegated to a secondary position. The consequences of this have meant that 'adoption was treated as a minor aspect of the way of salvation' (Theron 1956: 8), with adoption becoming the Cinderella of Pauline theology. To be sure, adoption is related to justification and is incomplete without it; hence any treatment of the former must include the latter. Nevertheless, adoption ought not to be subsumed under justification or mistaken as a synonym for justification. Undoubtedly, justification is the primary (Packer 1988: 231; Carson 1994: 1114) blessing of salvation upon which all the other saving benefits depend. But even though adoption is related to justification,

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[8] Other systematicians devote minimal attention to this term: e.g. Hodge (1979: 184), who in his massive three-volume *Systematic Theology* (2,000 pages!) mentions 'adoption' only once.

it is nevertheless an act of God's grace *different*, *distinct* from and *additional* to justification' (Murray 1961: 132; my emphasis).[9] J. L. Girardeau (1986: 479) rightly draws the distinction between the two concepts when he states:

> The Scriptures make a difference between [justification and adoption]. They treat adoption as something over and beyond justification . . . justification . . . introduces the . . . sinner into the society of (the) righteous . . . adoption . . . introduces the sinner into the society of God's family.

Adoption and justification are not the same – adoption emphasizes aspects of the believer's relationship to God that are not present in justification.[10] To be declared righteous at the bar of God is one thing; it is, however, quite another to be adopted into God's family and able to call him '*Abba*, Father' (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). Put another way,

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[9] See also Buchanan (1962: 276), who states, 'According to the Scriptures, pardon, acceptance, and adoption, are distinct privileges . . . while the first two properly belong to the (sinner's) justification, as being both found on the same relation . . . the third is radically distinct from them, as being founded on a nearer, more tender, and more endearing relation.'

[10] Since the 1980s, the traditional interpretation of justification and Paul's understanding of the Law have been challenged. According to the conventional understanding of justification and the Law, Paul endeavoured to earn God's favour by trying to keep the Law, something he found impossible to do. It was only with his conversion that Paul was liberated from enslavement to a legalistic religion. In response to this view, Sanders (1977) followed by others (e.g. Dunn) has advanced the so-called 'new perspective', in which it is argued that first-century Judaism was never regarded as a works-based religion. According to this view, Jews of Paul's day did not keep the Law to merit God's favour; rather, God gave the Law in order to regulate an already existing covenantal relationship. Put differently, keeping the Law did not 'get one in' but was a means of 'keeping one in' a covenantal relationship with God. Thus, in Sanders' view, the phrase 'covenantal nomism' sums up the fact that God first established a covenant with Israel, and the Law was given as a means of maintaining this covenantal relationship with himself.

There are various weaknesses with Sanders' views. For example, Sanders has a minimalist view of 'sin' and 'justification' as not exclusively forensic but forensic and transformative. Also, regarding the Law, some ancient Jewish texts, as Sanders admits (e.g. *4 Ezra*; *2 Apoc. Bar.*), actually view good works as meritorious for salvation. Thus we are prompted to ask that if such evidence exists, which Sanders has overlooked, might there not be other evidence that has yet to come to light? Again, it needs to be properly appreciated that ancient texts often have more to do with the setting forth of ideals or aspirations than with practice. So while the texts might inspire first-century Jews to regard the Law as maintaining their relationship with God, it is conceivable that the outworkings of this were very different, and could easily degenerate into a situation where behaviour or 'works' were regarded as earning favour with God. For the most recent interaction with the new perspective see the two volumes edited by Carson, O'Brien and Seifrid 2001 and 2004.

God does not only justify people and then leave them destitute with nowhere to go – he adopts them into the warmth and security of his household. Because of this, James I. Packer (1988: 230) rightly insists that 'adoption is . . . *the highest privilege that the gospel offers*; higher even than justification' (emphasis in original) owing to the '*richer relationship* with God it involves' (Buchanan 1962: 277; my emphasis).[11] In short, adoption is the pinnacle of Pauline theology or, as John Murray (1976: 233) succinctly puts it, 'adoption is . . . the apex of redemptive grace and privilege'.[12]

Not only has adoption been misunderstood for justification but it has also been confused with regeneration, a term Paul rarely uses – probably because the mystery religions used the latter expression and the apostle wanted to avoid it.

We find similar confusion in R. Peterson's (2001: 52) popular treatment of the term: in an effort to present or preserve a familial theme, and in the interests of theological unity, he understands John 1:12–13 and 1 John 3:1–3 as instances of adoption.[13] In his exegesis of John 1:12–13 Peterson concludes, 'to grant the right to become children of God is equivalent to adoption' (2001: 85). Peterson is of the view that the Greek term *exousian* (authority) in John 1:12 carries a judicial tone similar to that found in Paul's adoption term. This judicial tone of John 1:12 gives way to the new birth in John 1:13, a theme to which John returns later in his Gospel (John 3).

But it is unlikely that the evangelist would mix his familial metaphors in such a short space. Indeed, the context suggests that John's main point is that believers are *born* from above and that this is unattainable by human means, a point he repeatedly emphasizes in John 1:13b: 'children *born* not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but *born* (*egennēthēsan*) of God' (my emphasis).[14]

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[11] It is worth mentioning that Dr Packer in a personal correspondence to me when I first began to research this metaphor was of the view 'that the theme (of adoption) is unduly neglected'.

[12] With regard to the importance of adoption, Ridderbos (1977: 199) states, 'Undoubtedly the adoption as sons can be put on a level and mentioned in one breath with justification.'

[13] Other proponents of this view are Candlish 1869: 146; Murray 1976: 277; Ferguson 1981: 83; Beasley-Murray 1987: 13. Stibbe (1991: 152) in relation to another text in John's Gospel writes, 'Both ideas, that of succession and that of *adoption*, are present in 19.25–7' (my emphasis).

[14] Carson (1991: 126) distinguishes between the Johannine and Pauline use of family language here: 'The language is *unlike* that of Paul, who describes . . . the believer as "son" of God but believers are "sons" only by adoption' (my emphasis).

Again, in relation to 1 John. 3:1–3, a passage Peterson entitles 'The Source of Adoption – God's Love', he says, '[to] ''be called children of God'' by God the Father is to be adopted by him' (2001: 53). Once again, in 1 John 3:1–3 the issue to the fore is the amazing grace of God in our becoming his sons, which comes about when we are *born* (*gegennēmenos*, 3:9) into the family of God. Thus regeneration, a Johannine term, delineates the imagery of *natural birth*, which the author uses to emphasize the fact that Christian sonship is not our native condition: a person needs to become a son of God by *spiritual* rebirth.

Adoption, on the other hand, is a forensic term (more on this later) and denotes a legal act[15] or *transfer*[16] from an alien family (cf. Eph. 2:2, lit. 'sons of disobedience') into the family of God.[17] 'Not birth but adoption is Paul's analogy for the manner in which childhood begins in the believer' (Schlatter 1995: 181). Moreover, as we have already noted, *huiothesia* is an expression peculiar to the Pauline corpus and is not employed by any other New Testament author, including the writer of the Fourth Gospel. Thus Paul and John use two very different metaphors to express ways by which the Christian becomes a member of God's family. Berkhof (1981: 516) therefore is right when he sounds the caveat 'sonship by adoption should be carefully *distinguished* from . . . sonship by regeneration' (my emphasis).

As Jeanette Stevenson-Moessner (2003: 99) rightly points out, the differences between these two expressions have not been appreciated:

> To read Scripture and highlight passages on adoption is to read it through a different lens . . . The fact that we always assume the

[15] Whaling (1923: 228) states, 'Regeneration . . . is a creative act, while adoption is a legal and forensic [*sic*].' Peterson (2001: 109) puts it nicely: 'Adoption is a legal action, taking place outside of us, whereby God the Father gives us a new status in his family. Regeneration is a renewal of our nature, occurring within us, in which the Father imparts spiritual life to us.' Of course, within the *ordo salutis* adoption always presupposes regeneration. Interestingly, the Christian church – especially in evangelical circles in the United States and in parts of the United Kingdom – has long emphasized the theological concept of regeneration but has unfortunately overlooked the Pauline theme of adoption. Sermons have been preached from pulpits on the theme of regeneration, and Sunday school curriculae and theological college syllabi demonstrate a greater familiarity with this theological expression than with Paul's adoption metaphor.

[16] Whereas justification emphasizes the penal aspect of salvation, redemption emphasizes deliverance, and propitiation emphasizes the cultic, Paul's adoption term underscores the notion of transference from one family to another.

[17] See further Garner 2002: 126–156. It needs to be noted that Paul like John also uses the expression 'sons of God'; however, in this study I am more concerned with the narrower focus of what it means to be an adopted son, an expression John does not employ.

family is biologically knit reveals our prejudice in favor of biological 'seed' and our elevation of physical progeny. It is to miss the family of faith.[18]

And, we might add, to miss Paul's unique emphasis that believers become members of this divine household by adoption.

To summarize this brief discussion so far, it should be noted that Paul's adoption term is not only related to, but is also distinct from, other theological terms and merits a more significant place in Pauline Christianity. Adoption describes aspects not found in any other of the above soteriological terms Paul uses. With this in view, my thesis in this monograph is as follows: if adoption is important and distinct enough from other soteriological terms in the thinking and theology of Paul, then it is worthy of greater consideration. Rather than adoption being regarded as on the periphery of Paul's theological agenda, it should occupy a more vital role in our theological reflection and understanding.

In the light of the above misunderstandings a fresh inquiry and *theological* appraisal of this important metaphor is long overdue. Despite being mentioned only five times by the apostle (four of which occur in Paul's capital epistles), adoption, as I hope to demonstrate here, possesses an importance far exceeding the number of references to it in the Pauline letters.[19] Moreover, according to Ryken et al. (1998: 15), the 'significance [of adoption] is great because of its conceptual and emotive power and its relationship to many other familial ideas' (e.g. 'father', Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15; 'sons', Gal. 4:6–7; Rom. 8:14; 'slave', Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:15; 'heir(s)', Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17). And, most important to this investigation, while many agree that adoption is a legal term, this juridical perspective alone truncates our understanding of the expression and isolates it from its full theo-logical scope. This scope is wide-ranging and includes other branches of theology, including eschatology, Christology, pneumatology and

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[18] The title of her book, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family*, might lead one to think that it deals primarily with the genitival construction *pneuma huiothesias*, 'Spirit of adoption' (Rom. 8:15, NIV margin). However, the author's generally stated aim is to 'support families in adoption and to formulate a theology of adoption that is applicable to Christian churches' (2003: 8). Stevenson-Moessner's book is both stimulating and pastorally sensitive, and includes an informative chapter entitled 'A Theology of Adoption'.

[19] It is worth recording that 'adoption' (*huiothesia*) is in fact mentioned more times in the New Testament than 'regeneration' (*palingenesia*; cf. John 3:3; Titus 3:4–6), yet the former description comes much more readily to the minds of Christians when asked to describe the meaning of 'salvation'.

ethics/morality,[20] all of which impinge directly upon Paul's adoption term. The theological importance of adoption has been rightly stressed by James I. Cook (1978: 139–40):

> *huiothesia* is for Paul ... a *theological* confession. All too frequently overlooked is the fact that ... he always uses it to describe what may be termed theological adoption, that is, the placing of persons into sonship to God!

In the light of Cook's observations and the considerable theological confusion surrounding Paul's adoption term in the past, this book will mainly focus on addressing the theological importance of the adoption metaphor within the context of our exegesis of the relevant texts (Rom. 8:12–17, 18–23; 9:4; Gal. 4:1–7; Eph. 1:1–6).

Interests in adoption have been too narrowly focused

In recent years there have been some green shoots of recovery (Westhead 1995: 102) as far as interest in Paul's adoption term is concerned: unfortunately, scholarly research had been too one-sided, focusing mainly on the background. Most notable is the important monograph *Adoption as Sons of God: An Investigation into the Background of HUIOTHESIA*, by James M. Scott (1994b), who addresses the most likely milieu, Graeco-Roman or Jewish, from which Paul was drawing in order to give theological expression to this term. Scott is not only of the view that there are bona fide cases of adoption in Israelite society (e.g. Exod. 2:10; Esth. 2:7; Gen. 48:5–6),[21] but he also attempts to situate the background of *huiothesia* against a *single* Old Testament text, 2 Samuel 7:14 (see discussion in chapter 3). Other New Testament scholars such as Alan Mawhinney (1982), however, have arrived at a different conclusion and, along with the majority of scholars today (including Lyall 1969: 456–468), posits a Graeco-Roman background.[22]

The debate about background needs some re-evaluation and is one

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[20] For a brief summary of how adoption elucidates these theological themes see Burke 1995: 64–65.

[21] See the appendix for a discussion of some alleged cases of adoption.

[22] I tend to side with Lyall and Mawhinney; see Burke 1995: 62–74; 1998: 311–324; but also see the Old Testament background against Israel's and the Israelites' relationship with God as son(s). See chapter 3.

to which we shall return in the course of our inquiry. But it cannot be separated from the complexity of Paul's own background, which is a rich tapestry of Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures. To try to separate these in the quest to determine which one Paul was most likely to have used for his adoption metaphor is difficult and should not be simplistically reduced to an 'either or' conclusion. In order to resolve the issue of background to Paul's adoption term we need to consider carefully the various cultures prevalent in the ancient world and how, if at all, these influenced Paul and manifested themselves in the relevant texts.[23]

One of the consequences of this narrow agenda is that the majority of Pauline *commentators* confine their remarks on the adoption pericopae to the issue of background and little else, as if this were the only matter relevant to adoption. Undoubtedly, background is important, but other vital and fascinating aspects of adoption remain largely untapped and overlooked (e.g. the relationship between adoption and the Spirit, Rom. 8:15). What is required, and is still largely unexplored, is a *full-orbed* approach to this metaphor, a view shared by Norman R. Petersen (1985: 275 n. 25): 'commentators usually observe that this . . . term is used "religiously" but I know of no study that has dealt with adoption in terms of its full role in Paul's thought'.[24]

One of the main aims of this study on adoption is to attempt to widen the discussion and open up fresh areas of debate. For example, in view of the new and exciting insights classical historians have given us into the family in the ancient world, Pauline scholars are awakening to the usefulness of such insights in throwing fresh light on the New Testament text, especially Paul's use of an array of kinship terms, including adoption.[25] For example, given that honour in the ancient world was accorded to a son adopted into a new family, what can this tell us about those whom God has adopted as members of his household? Also, if adoption is another family expression Paul employs in his letters, what if anything can this tell us about his understanding of the nature of the church or community of believers?

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[23] Witherington (1998: 52–88) argues for a tricultural approach to the apostle's background.

[24] Whaling (1923: 235) also lamented as long ago as 1923 that 'a complete and well-rounded, and systematic presentation of the biblical meaning of *huiothesia*, or of *the theological significance of adoption is still a desideratum*' (my emphasis). See also Burke 1995: 62–74; 2001: 119–134.

[25] A fictive kinship term is one that describes the familial relationship that exists between people who are not necessarily related by blood. See Burke 2003a.

In the next chapter we begin our investigation with a brief discussion of metaphor and metaphor theory. Here it is worth reflecting on the fact that if the apostle Paul (or any other biblical author for that matter) had not employed metaphors as a vehicle of communication, then our understanding of God and the theological message of the Scriptures would be greatly impoverished as a result. Chapter 3 explores what is perhaps the most debated question in respect of adoption; namely, the most appropriate background(s) to this metaphor. In the light of the fact that God's very nature is relational and expressed in family terms as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,[26] the trinitarian implications of adoption are profound and thoroughgoing, as chapters 4 to 7 demonstrate. In chapter 4 we consider the role of God as Father ('*Abba*, Father', Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15) in adopting believers into 'this new "family of God"' (Meeks 1986: 129). This is followed in chapter 5 by a treatment of Jesus as God's Son and the Christological and Christocentric importance this has for the believer's adoption as son. Chapter 6 discusses the crucial role and relationship between the Spirit and adoption (*pneuma huiothesias*, Rom. 8:15) and the ensuing moral implications this brings. In chapter 7, and in the light of the fact that *adoption* is a family expression and that *honour* was a foundational value in ancient family life, we examine the interrelationship between adoption and honour. In chapter 8 we explore the eschatological tension between the 'now' (8:15) and the 'not yet' (8:23), and the consequences for God's adopted children who live in the intervening period between the present and the future.

But first we begin our inquiry with a brief discussion of metaphor theory.

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[26] See chapter 4 for a discussion of the 'personal/familial' characteristic and function of the Holy Spirit.