THE METAPHORICAL IMPORT OF ADOPTION: A PLEA FOR REALISATION[1]
I: THE ADOPTION METAPHOR IN BIBLICAL USAGE

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After a careful perusal of Philip Schaff's three volumes on *The Creeds of Christendom*[2] it is almost unbelievable to discover that after nearly two thousand years of theological reflection the church has in its possession possibly only six confessions which include a chapter on the doctrine of adoption. We say 'possibly' for Schaff by no means quotes all the confessions in full. That said, the discovery not only stands but is also substantiated by the fact that two of the chapters – in the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) respectively – were derived from a seminal chapter in the mother of seventeenth-century confessions in the English-speaking world – the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

A study of the Westminster Confession (WCF) reveals that the twelfth chapter on adoption derives its uniqueness almost solely from the fact that it is there! While this factor ought not to be underestimated the chapter is, nevertheless, the shortest chapter in the Confession:

> 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 eternal salvation.[3]

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2 P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., sixth edition, 1931 (Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1990).

3 The Shorter and Larger Catechisms, having also been compiled by the assembly of divines at Westminster, slightly supplemented the teaching of the Confession. Both Catechisms ask the question 'What is Adoption?' The former replies (Q.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'; while the latter replies (Q.74) '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

Of the Westminster standards Robert Candlish in his significant but controversial Cunningham Lectures on the Fatherhood of God declared: '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.'[4]

The fourth of our six chapters is found in the Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1925) – a confession described by Schaff as 'the boldest official attempt within the Presbyterian family of Churches to restate the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century'.[5] The fifth in our list is entitled 'Of Justification and Sonship' and forms Article XI of the Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada (1925):

> 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 as sons, with a right to all the privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship.[6]

The sixth and last is entitled 'Of Sonship in Christ' and is included in the XXIV Articles of the Presbyterian Synod of England (1890):

> 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.[7]

Over these two millennia very little has been written exclusively on the theme of adoption.[8] There are, of course, many exegeses of the relevant biblical passages,[9] but few writers have realised the import of the

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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.'

4 R.S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, 5th edit. (Edinburgh, 1869), p. 194; *cf.* T.J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God Considered in its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement*, 2nd edit. (Edinburgh and London, 1867), pp. 443-50; H. Martin, 'Candlish's Cunningham Lectures', *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 14 (1865), p. 724.

5 Schaff, *Creeds*, vol. III, p. 924.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 936.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 918.

8 The New Testament, it seems, speaks of a filial relationship to God brought about by other means than adoption and this is reflected, for example, in Article XI of a 'Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith' (1902) prepared by a committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America entitled 'Of the New Birth and the New Life' (*ibid.*, pp. 919-24).

9 For example Silverio Zedda has given us a comprehensive history of the

several texts mentioning adoption (*huiothesia*) for an understanding both of Paul's theology and of biblical and systematic theology in general. Consequently, in perusing the literature one is not only staggered by the lack of attention adoption has received, but also by the silence about this inattention! As a matter of fact adoption has rarely been thoroughly considered as a doctrine in its own right. Of late, however, there have been important New Testament studies of the theme of adoption and of sonship in general as found in both the Pauline and Johannine corpora. This interest in adoption and its cognate themes has yet to show itself in the fields of biblical and systematic theology.[10]

In making these assertions we realise that it could be argued that a scarcity of literature on any one particular theme does not of itself constitute a neglect. It is conceivable that a doctrine of secondary importance, having received attention commensurate with its status in Scripture, only appears to have been neglected. A first glance at the lexicographical data would seem to suggest this is the most likely solution. First of all, only Paul uses the term *huiothesia*. Secondly, he does so on only five occasions (Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:15, 23, 9:4, Ephesians 1:5). Thirdly, of these texts Ephesians 1:5 is by many considered to be the work of a pupil of Paul, rather than of the apostle himself, while some textual witnesses omit the word in Romans 8:23. Fourthly, there is no corresponding use of *huiothesia* in the LXX or in other Jewish sources.[11] Fifthly, it is only one of the terms that Paul uses to denote a filial relationship between believers and their God.[12] Sixthly, the translation of *huiothesia* as 'adoption' is itself a matter of debate.

Consequently, it is our task in pleading for the recognition of the doctrine's importance to prove from Scripture its weight. Only then can a conclusive deduction be made whether in fact adoption has suffered

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exegesis of Gal. 4:6, *L'Adozione a Figli di Dio e lo Spirito Santo, Storia dell'Interpretazione e Teologia Mistica di Gal. 4:6* (Rome, 1952).

10 For such NT studies see J.M. Scott, *Adoption as the Sons of God. An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen, 1992); A. Mawhinney, '*Huiothesia* in the Pauline Epistles: Its background, use and implications' (Ph.D thesis, Baylor University, Waco, TX, 1983); M. Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings* (*Analecta Biblica* 72; Rome, 1977); B. Byrne, *Sons of God – Seed of Abraham. A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background* (*Analecta Biblica* 83; Rome, 1979).

11 See Scott, *Adoption*, p. 175.

12 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, p. 69. Vellanickal lists five terms used by Paul, including *huiothesia*. The other four terms are as follows: (i) *huioi tou theou* (Rom. 8:14, 19, 9:26, 2 Cor. 6:18, Gal. 3:26, 4:6f). (ii) *tekna tou theou* (Rom. 8:16-17, 21, 9:8, Phil. 2:15). (iii) *tekna epangelias* (Rom. 9:8, Gal. 4:28). (iv) *thugateres* (2 Cor. 6:18).

neglect. In actuality, such is the evidence for the doctrine's importance that it cannot all be included in the arguments that follow. A full-scale defence would include both the metaphorical and the doctrinal reasons. In this two-part study, we have confined our discussion to a consideration of adoption's importance as both a biblical and a theological metaphor. We hope to set out the doctrinal reasons at some later date.

The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage: Its Unique Importance

The case for the uniqueness of adoption centres around that fact that *only* Paul in the whole of the Scriptures has used the term *huiothesia.* Far from being an argument in favour of the doctrine's minimal importance, this is actually indicative of the metaphor's significance, as will gradually become clear. In the meantime it appears plausible to argue that Paul's sole usage of *huiothesia* does not of itself prove the metaphor of adoption to be unique. This is especially so when it is realised that not all concur that *huiothesia* should be translation as 'adoption'. Some favour a more general translation suggestive only of a filial status as opposed to a translation more particularly denotative of the process through which sonship is received. If this line of reasoning is correct then the probability of *huiothesia* possessing unparalleled significance is substantially reduced.

For instance, the New International Version translates *huiothesia* as 'adoption' on only three occasions (Rom. 8:23, 9:4, Eph. 1:4-5), whereas the more 'formal-equivalent' translations tend to give the translation 'adoption' in each case. According to James Hester, 'it must be argued that in both Galatians 4:5 and Romans 8:15 *huiothesia* should be translated "adoption". "Sonship", the other possible translation, does not convey the total idea behind the word. In Paul's teaching the Christian's sonship is dependent on his adoption. Only Jesus is God's son by natural right. Every other man is His son by adoption. Therefore, "adoption" is the idea which best fits in each context.'[13] Hester thus restricts the necessity of an 'adoption' translation to just Galatians 4:5 and Romans 8:15. Others such as Byrne argue that *huiothesia* could mean both the act of adoption and the ensuing filial status. He argues that *huiotes*, later found in Christian authors, was not available to carry the meaning of sonship and so *huiothesia* may have carried the ideas of both adoption and sonship.[14]

Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers is seemingly ambiguous on this matter. In the verses where *huiothesia* occurs the new

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[13] J. Hester, *Paul's Concept of the Inheritance. A Contribution to the Understanding of Heilsgeschichte* (*SJT Occasional Papers* 14: Edinburgh, 1968), p. 61.

[14] Byrne, *Sons of God – Seed of Abraham*, p. 80.

Luther translation always uses a word possessing the stem *Kind* (child). So in Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:23 and 9:4 we find the term *Kindschaft*, while in Romans 8:15 we find *kindlichen Geist* and in Ephesians 1:5 merely the status *Kinder*. The problem is that *Kindschaft* is an ambiguous term.[15] While *Kindschaft* can certainly mean 'adoption' it is not compelled to carry that translation. Whereas adoption refers purely to the process of entrance into sonship, *Kindschaft* can refer to both the process and the subsequent status. Thus these alternative translations, namely 'sonship' in English and *Kindschaft* in German, are more general terms. Were these better translations, then *huiothesia* would lose much of its perceived uniqueness and would become considered merely another general term used, in this instance, by Paul to convey the idea of family membership; such a perception would not necessarily tell us anything specific about the nature of entrance into sonship.

Yet, even assuming the validity of these alternative translations, a viable claim for the unparalleled significance of *huiothesia* could still be made. Such a claim would then be dependent on the contexts in which *huiothesia* is found. The less likely the translation 'adoption' in any given text, the more dependent this translation would be on compelling contextual arguments for a rendering such as 'sonship by adoption'. In other words, even if *huiothesia* meant 'sonship' rather than 'adoption', there could still be instances where, in a given context, the most appropriate translation of *huiothesia* would be 'sonship by adoption'.

A Semantic Uniqueness

The rationale behind this assertion is derived from James Scott's convincing case for an 'adoption as son' translation of *huiothesia*.[16] He argues that the use of *huiothesia* in the Hellenistic period must be seen against the background of the forms of adoption practised in Graeco-Roman institutions. By the time of the New Testament era the influence of these institutions still lingered, as did the semantic field of *huiothesia* which, by then, had evolved into six word-groups – *eispoiein; ekpoiein; tithesthai; poieisthai; huiopoieisthai* and *huiothetein*.

Having systematically investigated each of these word groups, Scott makes five assertions. (i) *huiothesia* is one of the most common terms for adoption in Hellenistic Greek. While it is rare in non-Christian literary sources, it is very frequently found in the Greek inscriptions. (ii)

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15 See J. Grimm and W. Grimm, *Deutches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1873) vol. V, p. 771. It is a pity that other German terms of greater precision (such as *die Annahme* and its verbal form *annehem, an Kindes statt annehem* to adopt could not have been used, as in *Die heiligen Schrift des Alten und des Neuen Testaments*, Zürich, 1993, where the translation *die Annahme* is consistently used in all five texts.

16 Scott, *Adoption as Son of God*, p. 55. For the whole of the argument see pp. 13f.

Paul's religious application of *huiothesia* is unparalleled when compared with the theological usage of some of the other terms. For example, *poieisthai* is used by Plutarch to refer to 'adopted' truth as truth derived second-hand; *ekpoiein* refers to a moral transformation effected by divine punishment; *huiopoieisthai* refers to divine adoption; *eispoiein* refers to fraudulent adoption levelled at Alexander the Great and Solon who claimed to be the adopted sons of Ammon-Zeus and of Fortune. (iii) Most of the word-groups (except *huiopoieisthai*) were also used of Roman adoptions as well, but not of Roman adoptions *alone*. (iv) Yet the fact that most of these Greek terms were used for Roman *adoptio* at all is evidence that they are terms of adoption. (v) There exists synonymity between the various terms used, thus confirming that the most faithful translation of *huiothesia* must be 'adoption as son' and not 'fosterage' for instance.

Establishing that *huiothesia* means 'adoption' is of no small significance as there is no other filial term in either Pauline or biblical usage which has the same connotations as adoption. Thus Paul's usage is most distinctive, as can be seen from a comparison with the relational terminology used by John.[17]

There are three reasons why we ought to investigate the Pauline / Johannine diversity: first, the major place which the Pauline and Johannine literatures occupy in the New Testament. As Stuhlmacher observes, 'The Pauline epistles and John's Gospel belong without doubt to the main writings of the New Testament';[18] secondly, the fact that 'In the Johannine writings, both in the gospel and also in the epistles, the perception of the Christian's sonship [*Gotteskindschaft*] and the fatherhood of God has become completely central';[19] thirdly, the frequent tendency for reflections on the relational or filial terminology of Scripture to conflate the varying terminologies of the Pauline and Johannine corpora. Assuming the substantiation of Paul's unique usage of *huiothesia*, we need to examine how the meaning of his terminology varies from that of the Johannine – *tekna theou* and *gennethenai ek tou theou*.

Yet, before we outline the contrasting perspectives of the two authors, several comparisons can be made. In the first place, both Paul and John

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17 W. Twisselmann's work ('Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament', *Beiträge zur Förderung Christlicher Theologie*, 41, 1939) is significant in that it highlights the concept of sonship in the Synoptics, Paul, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter and John, concluding with a helpful comparison, summary and assessment. The same can be said in relation to the Fatherhood of God of W. Marchel's *Abba Vater! Die Vaterbotschaft des Neuen Testaments* (Düsseldorf, 1963).

18 P. Stuhlmacher, *Wie treibt man Biblische Theologie?* (*Biblisch-Theologische Studien* 24; Neukirchen – Vluyn, 1995), p. 40.

19 Twisselmann, 'Die Gotteskindschaft', p. 77 (my translation).

use the term 'children of God' (*tekna theou*). While Paul uses it twice (Rom. 8:16, Phil. 2:15), John uses it in John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1, 2, as well as 'children of God' (*ta tekna tou theou*) in John 11:52, 1 John 3:10, 5:2. It is most obvious, therefore, that one of the main ways in which both writers perceived the gospel was in terms of a filial relationship. Secondly, both John and Paul used the terminology metaphorically. Vellanickal points out that in total John uses *tekna* on fifteen occasions, of which seven are metaphorical (that is, when physical descent is not in view) and are followed by a genitive of a noun such as *theou* (John 1:12, 11:52, 1 John 3:1, 2, 10), *Abraam* (John 8:39) and *diabolou* ('devil', 'slanderer', 1 John 3:10).[20] As for Paul, we have already noted his fondness for the metaphorical usage of filial terminology. Thirdly, whatever the differences of meaning behind their filial terminology, both authors speak of the same paternal God, [21] the same gospel and the same Christians who constitute God's unique family.[22] To claim, therefore, that the Pauline and Johannine usages of filial terminology must be understood separately should not be regarded as forfeiting the unity of the Scriptures.

A Comparative Uniqueness

All the same, it is only when we come to the contrasts that the uniqueness of adoption really comes to the fore. John, it must be stressed, does not use the term *huiothesia.* With the exception of 'Father', the most common relational term that he uses is *tekna.* Etymologically, the nearest he comes to the use of *huiothesia* is in his use of *huios*, but this term he reserves for Christ himself (Rev. 21:7). Vellanickal writes: 'Unlike John, Paul uses both *huioi* and *tekna* to express the divine sonship of man, while John reserves the term *huios* for Jesus;'[23] and again:

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20 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, pp. 91-2. 1 John 5:2 is an eighth instance of Johannine metaphorical usage with the genitive of the noun.

21 We are not overlooking the maternal aspects of God's love. Rather we are seeking to deal specifically with the biblical terminology at hand. Hence, for instance, we have omitted interaction with Jürgen Moltmann's portrayal of the Holy Spirit as 'the Mother of life', a teaching which Moltmann regards as suggested by John's portrayal of the Spirit's role in the new birth. Enough to say that any 'de-patriarchalization of the picture of God' must be commensurate with the terminology of Scripture when legitimately expounded (J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life, A Universal Affirmation*, London, 1992, pp. 157-60).

22 Neither are we overlooking the concept of 'kingdom' in John's theology. However, the relationship between paternity (as well as maternity in Moltmann's case) and filialism in regard to the concept of kingdom is beyond the scope of this current investigation.

23 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, p. 69.

> we have to exclude from *tekna theou* a meaning that is equal to *huios theou*. The very Johannine usage of the terms favours this exclusion. The Evangelist, who, on the one hand, speaks of the divine sonship both with regard to Christ and with regard to men, on the other hand, carefully makes a clear distinction between them. The exclusive use of *huios* for Christ and *tekna* for men is expressive of this distinction.[24]

Our task is to focus on these main strands of divergence in the Johannine and Pauline literature. Whereas Paul made use of the idea of adoption into the family of God resulting in a new status accompanied by freedom from slavery, John deliberately used *tekna* because of its root meaning. *Tekna* comes from the root *tiktein* – to beget, engender, procreate, give birth to. The *tekna* 'receive Christ and believe in his name' (John 1:12) because God has caused them to be born again, whereas Jesus, the *huios*, has 'a natural and essential relationship with the Father. He is *eis ton kolpon tou patros* (in the bosom of the Father) and, according to a strongly attested reading of the same verse, can even be called *monogenes theos* (only begotten God) because he partakes of the being and nature of God (John 1:18).'[25]

The emphasis then is upon origin, the resultant translation being 'child' with implications of family likeness. *Teknon / tekna* refers therefore to birth into the family, but without reference to gender.[26] Furthermore, with the exception of Revelation 12:4-5 (where *teknon* refers to Christ), all the references are plural, denoting descendants or posterity, an understanding derived from the Hebrew equivalent *benê* denoting 'peoples' or 'tribes'. What is important here is that in the Hebrew usage *benê* is joined to the name of the progenitor. For instance, *benê yi'sra'el* (Gen. 42:5, 45:21, 46:5, Ex. 1:1) and *benê yehûdâ* (Gen. 46:12, 1 Chron. 2:3, 10; 4:1 *etc.*) for the Israelites.

Therefore, when John uses *tekna* with *theos*, it is with this etymological background in mind. The idea that the *tekna* are the offspring of the progenitor is present throughout (*cf.* Matt. 3:9, Luke 3:8, John 8:39). Accompanying this metaphorical notion of birth, however, is the idea of similarity of nature. As Vellanickal puts it:

> *teknon* is used with a noun in the genitive to show that somebody bears a perfect likeness or a similarity of nature to some other person, to whom for the same reason some relation of paternity is attributed. In this expression is implied the derivation of a person's nature, and following therefrom, his character and belongings, though sometimes the one and sometimes the other element is prominent.[27]

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24 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

25 T.A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London, 1980), p. 143.

26 See Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, p. 90; J. Murray, *The Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 226; Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, p. 143 (see also pp. 62-4).

27 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, p. 91.

Thus we can see that the soteriological idea of *huiothesia* is significantly different from that of *tekna tou theou* in the Johannine writings. The latter involves the idea of birth into the family/kingdom, with its closely connected concept of family likeness, while the former involves the idea of adoption into the family and focuses more on the status and freedom of an adopted son or daughter within the family.

While endeavouring to establish the differences between the Johannine and Pauline usages of filial terminology, our aim is not to absolutise them, but to show that they reflect differing emphases. For example, although John majors on the idea of birth and family likeness, we must not rule out the fact that involved in his concept is the notion of status. Having been born into the family one receives the status of child. This comes out most clearly in 1 John 3:1 where John makes a rare and uncharacteristic reference to the status of the children: 'Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God [*tekna theou*], and we are!' Thus while John and Paul employed substantially different metaphors, their soteriological implications vary more in degree than kind.

This distinction between the Johannine (birth and nature) and Pauline (status and freedom) perspectives can be seen at three levels. First of all, John's emphasis on birth and likeness of nature appears in the distinction between *tekna theou* and *huios theou* (Son of God). The former refers to our sonship, while the latter to Christ's. This is verified by the fact that *monogenes* (only begotten/only born) is used by John only of Christ, and points to his unique relationship to the Father – the generation of the *huios theou*. Christians, conversely, in becoming children of God had to be born into God's family (John 1:12-13). Yet Jesus was, and remains, the only begotten son of God. Thus John wants to draw a distinction between the way that God is father to his *monogenes* and the way that he is father to his *tekna*. The difference is between Christ's natural sonship and ours which is dependent upon regeneration. Conversely, Paul wants to identify Christ's sonship with ours, for it is through participation in Christ's sonship that we are adopted. Sonship, *huiothesia*-style, is only realised through union with Jesus Christ. Thus Paul is keen, while not forgetting the distinctions between Christ's sonship and ours, to draw the parallels that can be drawn. John, on the other hand, desires to make distinctions between the sonships to highlight the uniqueness of Christ's natural sonship. Arguably, this becomes clear in John 20:17 where Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene: 'but go to my brothers (*tous adelphous mou*) and say to them "I am ascending to my Father (*ton patera mou*), and your Father (*patera humon*); and to my God (*theon mou*) and your God (*theon humon*)".' This text provides us with an inbuilt paradox. On the one hand, Christ and Christian believers are brought together by virtue of having the same father, and yet the distinction between Christ's sonship and ours is made clear by the *ton patera mou/patera humon*

dichotomy. The title *ho pater* is the link in the context between the two forms of sonship.[28]

Secondly, John draws a distinction between *tekna tou theou* and *tekna tou diabolou* (1 John 3:10). Whose child one is is made manifest by the doing of justice. Only in 1 John 3:8-10 and John 8:44 does John speak of a father/son relationship with the devil and in both cases the imagery conveys likeness of character. Whereas in 1 John 3:8-10 the emphasis was on the doing (or not doing) of justice – the implication being that those doing justice are *tekna tou theou* because God himself acts justly – so in John 8:39 the 'children of Abraham' are said to be those who do the works of Abraham. That is, they portray their likeness to Abraham. Furthermore, parallel to the *tekna tou theou/diabolou* dichotomy are the phrases *einai ek tou theou/diabolou* (to be from God/the devil) used by John in these passages (John 8:41-7 and 1 John 3:1-10),[29] hence furthering the distinction between those who are of the world and those who are of the devil.[30] Vellanickal outlines this distinction:

> It is the devil who gave the first impulse to human sinning or who sins from the very beginning (*cf.* Jn. 8:44, 1 Jn. 3:8b) and who always gives fresh impulse to it (*cf.* Jn. 13:2). So directly or indirectly all human sins may be described as the work of the devil, to destroy which the Son of God appeared (*cf.* 1 Jn. 3:5, 8 cd). Thus the devil becomes the father of those who commit sin, by determining their nature of sinning, expressed in the phrase *einai ek tou diabolou* (*cf.* 1 Jn. 3:8, 12; Jn 8:44). In the same way God becomes the father of the believers, by determining their nature, their

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28 The meaning of John 20:17 has been historically disputed. For instance, in the short-lived Candlish/Crawford debate of the 1860s Candlish insisted that it taught the identification of Christ with his brothers (*Fatherhood of God*, pp. 117f). In his reply Crawford argued that Candlish went against most of the distinguished commentators of church history, including Augustine who perceived Christ's view of sonship in John 20:17 as 'Mine by nature, yours by grace' (Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God*, pp. 281f.). Crawford argued that the omission of 'our Father' is most decisive: 'It then appears that our Lord in His address to Mary Magdalene is *so far from identifying* His own sonship with that of his disciples, that *He most significantly and emphatically discriminates them from one another*' (p. 283). Of late Smail has argued that in John 20:17 there is to be seen both Christ's identification of himself as the Son with the sons and also his distinguishing himself from them (*The Forgotten Father*, p. 142).

29 John uses *einai ek tou theou* on 13 occasions, while outside the Johannine writings it is used only in Acts 5:39.

30 Again *einai ek tou theou* is never used of Christ. Instead John uses *einai para tou theou* exclusively of Christ (John 6:46, 7:29, 9:16, 33). *Ek tou theou* is used of Christ when speaking of his coming into the world or his temporal generation.

manner of thinking and acting expressed in the phrase *einai ek tou theou* (*cf.* Jn 8:47, 1 Jn.3:10, 4:4, 6; 5:19; 3 Jn.11).[31]

Thirdly, these indications of the Johannine idea of birth and nature become clarified when we examine his usage of *gennethenai ek theou*. In the LXX this verb *gennao* refers more to a mother's giving birth than to a father's begetting (*gennao* translates *yalad* and is used 228 times in a maternal context but only 22 times in a paternal context!). The use of *gennao* in the NT may refer to the beginning or the end of the pregnancy (Matt. 1:20 and Luke 1:35 respectively). However *tikto* normally refers to the giving birth while *gennao* includes the act of conception.[32] Of 99 uses of *gennethenai* in the NT 28 are found in the Johannine writings. Vellanickal is of the opinion that the use of *gennethenai* does not make a clear distinction between conception (which is active, aorist and refers to the male involvement) and giving birth (which is passive, perfect and refers to the female involvement); but rather 'what really matters for John is the idea of an origin from God through generation. He deliberately does not envisage the different moments of conception and birth.'[33] Thus, the fundamental difference between John's usage of *tekna theou* and *gennethenai ek tou theou* and Paul's use of *huiothesia* constantly remains in view. Paul, in contrast to John, focuses on redemption *from* bondage *to* sonship *by* adoption (through union with Christ) resulting in freedom for the grown-up sons and daughters of God.

It is important that the uniqueness of adoption be stressed because the doctrine has, as we comment yet again, so often suffered from a conflation with the Johannine doctrine of regeneration. The problem has been not just a question of the relationship between adoption and regeneration, but of the greater question lurking behind it, namely the relation of biblical theology to systematic theology.[34] Wherever the answer lies it must take into account both the uniqueness of the adoption metaphor on the one hand, and the oneness of the gospel on the other. Given the need for a more precise and thoroughgoing apprehension of adoption, the temporary isolation of the doctrine for the purposes of intensified study is warranted. However, the doctrine must not be left in isolation from other soteriological doctrines, or the unity of both the Scriptures and its message would be violated.[35] One thing is certain, that

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31 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, p. 97.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

34 See B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London, 1992), p. 89. Childs rightly recommends fruitful co-operation between biblical and systematic theology as the way forward. Were that to happen we would hope that the importance of adoption in redemption history would be realised, with all the implications such a discovery might have for the status of adoption in systematic theology.

35 The unity of the Scriptures is itself a subject of some considerable

these are not easy problems to solve, and were the solutions at our disposal we could present them here. What we can do is to illustrate how the unity of the gospel has been portrayed at the expense of the uniqueness of the Pauline metaphor.

An Overlooked Uniqueness

We illustrate the case by a selective investigation of the writings of the Reformed tradition. All the examples are taken from the Reformed tradition in order to show that even in that wing of the professing church which has, in the post-Reformation era, said more than any other about the doctrine a lack of clarity persists.[36] If we turn, in the first place, to Calvin we find the doctrine peppered throughout his writings – the *Institutes*, the catechisms and the commentaries – and although he never devoted a chapter of the *Institutes* to the doctrine, it can be traced through its multifarious contexts. Calvin, for whom adoption was so central, perceived the connection between adoption and the Fatherhood of God, predestination, covenant, the person and work of Christ, union with Christ, redemption, pneumatology, the Christian life, eschatology and the sacraments. The breadth of Calvin's doctrine is due to the closeness with which he followed the contours of Paul's thought and theology, and captured so many of its nuances.[37]

In spite of this, it is questionable whether Calvin, for all his faithfulness to Paul, really grasped that *huiothesia* was an unparalleled Pauline usage (in which case, it is the fact that he followed Paul's thought so closely which often hides this failure from view); or whether he had grasped the uniqueness of adoption to Paul but had omitted to work out a clear way in which to connect the doctrines of adoption and regeneration without blurring the distinctiveness of either doctrine.[38] The

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substance. Childs writes: 'The Christian church... remains existentially committed to an inquiry into [the Bible's] inner unity because of its confession of the one gospel of Jesus Christ which it proclaims to the world' (*ibid.*, p. 8).

36 Outside the Reformed tradition there was a nineteenth-century debate over adoption between the Roman Catholic theologians Matthias Joseph Scheeben and Theodore Granderath. See E.H. Palmer, *Scheeben's Doctrine of Divine Adoption* (Academisch Proefschrift; Kampen, 1953).

37 For a justification of this assertion see B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude, The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh, 1993), and R. Zachmann, *Assurance of Faith, Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis, 1993).

38 There is a third option. Irrespective of the differences between the Pauline and Johannine corpora, perhaps Calvin was reflecting untied ends in Paul's own epistles. Note, for instance, Paul's use of *tekna tou theou* (Rom. 8:16-17 and 9:8) in the context of adoption (see below).

following quotations from Calvin's commentary on John's Gospel illustrate the ambiguity:

> The enlightening of our minds by the Holy Spirit belongs to our renewal. So faith flows from its source, regeneration. But since by this same faith we receive Christ, who sanctifies us by His Spirit, it is called the beginning of our adoption.
>
> When the Lord breathes faith into us He regenerates us in a hidden and secret way that is unknown to us. But when faith has been given, we grasp with a lively awareness not only the grace of adoption but also newness of life and other gifts of the Holy Spirit.[39]

Common to both these quotations is the problem how regeneration can be understood in the light of adoption and *vice versa.* To read into the Johannine writings the adoption metaphor meant either that Calvin had not understood the uniqueness of the Pauline metaphor, or that he was conflating the Johannine metaphor of the new birth with the Pauline metaphor of adoption, or that he was providing both the exegesis and an attempted systematisation in one breath or movement.

Furthermore, when we glance at the *Institutes* 3:3:10 we find Calvin observing that 'the children of God (are) freed through regeneration from the bondage of sin'. This statement illustrates the problem. At face value it relates wholly to regeneration. However, two of its concepts, namely bondage and freedom, are more akin to what Paul writes of adoption (Gal. 3-4; Rom. 8). This ambiguity is reflected in Gerrish's analysis of Calvin's thought. Having claimed that Calvin defines the gospel as the good news of adoption, shortly afterwards he writes 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.'[40]

Secondly, we turn to the Puritans and there we find the further development of this ambiguity. In the biblical references belatedly added to the Westminster Confession, of twentyone for the chapter on 'Adoption' only nine come from Paul, another four from the OT, and eight from the other NT books of which one is John 1:12. (It may be claimed without exaggeration that a perusal of post-Reformation reflections on adoption leads us to believe that John 1:12 is the closest

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39 *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10,* transl. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1959), p.19.

40 Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude,* pp. 89-90. Similarly this ambiguity is reflected in Garret Wilterdink's *Tyrant or Father. A Study of Calvin's Doctrine of God* (Bristol, IN, 1985), vol.1, pp.37, 39. On the one hand Wilterdink writes, 'Related to our adoption, yet distinct from it, is our rebirth or regeneration as children of God' (p. 39). However, he has already drawn our attention to the fact that in his commentary on 1 John 4 'where the emphasis falls on abiding in God, Calvin interprets consistently in terms of adoption' (p. 37).

rival to Galatians 4:4-5 as the *locus classicus* of adoption.) This is not an exceptional case, but seems to be prevalent in Puritan treatments of adoption. In William Ames we have one such example. He lists 27 points under the heading of adoption.[41] Of these 27 points, eight have no cross references, six are supported solely by Pauline references and eleven in total have reference to the Pauline corpus: eight refer to the Johannine writings while four are solely reliant upon John. Of the other fifteen three are exclusively supported by references to Hebrews and Revelation. Thus, over half the points which 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.[42]

Thirdly, by the nineteenth century the terminological conflation of the Johannine and Pauline texts had become well established. It can be observed in McLeod Campbell's *Nature of the Atonement* but it was only with Candlish's lectures on the fatherhood of God that the issue arose for discussion. Of special relevance is Candlish's fifth lecture – 'The Manner of Entrance into the Relation: Adoption as Connected with Regeneration and Justification'[43] – in which he certainly showed some awareness of the distinctiveness of both the Johannine corpus and its substance. He noted 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 turn very much on regeneration',[44] *i.e.* the metaphor of new birth.[45] So far, so good.

Yet his exposition goes somewhat awry when he endeavours to prove that adoption had been excessively segregated from regeneration. To make amends he over-compensated by inserting adoption into the Johannine

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41 W. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology,* trans. from 3rd Latin edition of 1629, ed. J.D. Eusden (Boston, Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 164-7.

42 This opens up the whole question of Puritan exegesis. It would seem that their use of the *analogia fidei* had the capacity to lead them to conflate themes, which inevitably eroded the distinctive emphases of the various authors of Scripture.

43 Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, pp. 135f.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 151-8.

45 For instance, in 1 John 3:1 there is an emphasis on regeneration the exegesis of which, he writes, is determined by the term 'born of God' (2:29). John used *tekna theou* (as opposed to *huios patros*), which 'suggests something more than the legal and relational filiation; it points to communication of nature' (Candlish, *A Commentary on 1 John*, 3rd edit., Edinburgh, 1877, p. 228). This understanding of 1 John 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. To give but one example here: a sermon of the renowned nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Robert Murray McCheyne, *A Basket of Fragments* (rp., Lochcarron, 1979), pp. 40-43.

writings.[46] Consequently, because regeneration is often metaphorically expressed by John in terms of new birth, Candlish succeeded in marring the clarity of both metaphors:

> 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.[47]

To try to solve what Candlish perceived to be the one problem, he brought to light another. This difficulty, although most obvious, has been quite happily accepted since time immemorial. The unresolved enigma concerns the question how the two metaphors of adoption and new birth are to be connected to one another without robbing either of their clarity and, therefore, their usefulness. In effect what Candlish did was to make one double-sided metaphor out of the two earthly analogies. Believers are both born and adopted into the family of God while as the sons and daughters or children of God they have both family status and the family's characteristics. It sounds convenient. The two metaphors appear to dovetail together wonderfully, but they do not. A glance at the conflation quickly reveals that it is implausible. In fact, confusion reigns and becomes immediately apparent when we ask how someone can be both born and adopted (and that as a grown-up!) into the same family in one single unified movement. That is the problem that lies at the heart of the issue, and that is why we make this appeal for the distinctive treatment of both metaphors.

The Johannine and Pauline metaphors are best treated separately for the simple reason that as vehicles of discovery they are not compatible. The same is certainly true for all metaphors that are used by the varying biblical authors, however similar they may appear. That is not to say that the truths lying beyond the metaphors are in conflict. They are not. They convey but differing perspectives on the same gospel. Therein lies both the unity and the richness of the gospel. It cannot be encapsulated by one or two metaphors or even more. The unity of the Scriptures hinges not on the compatibility of the gospel's metaphorical expressions, but on the gospel itself. Hence Twisselmann, having surveyed the various notions of *Kindschaft* in the New Testament, can do nothing else – and indeed nothing less! – than return in climax rather than anti-climax to a reductionist statement:

> It is history come to pass. God sent his Son in order that all mankind through the Holy Spirit with faith in him could have the forgiveness of sins and also become sons. That is the unique message of the whole New Testament and the only possible declaration (*Erklärung*) of Christianity.[48]

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46 Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, p. 151.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 146 (italics inserted).

48 Twisselmann, 'Die Gotteskindschaft', p. 105 (my translation).

Thus while we agree with Candlish's assessment that adoption has been under the shadow of justification for too long, we beg to differ from Candlish in seeking to bring regeneration as metaphorically expressed in the new birth into closer affinity to adoption.

Conclusion

To lay claim to the uniqueness of the adoption metaphor is one thing, but to solve the problems associated with the untangling of the Johannine and Pauline terminology is quite another. The question hinges upon the relation of biblical theology to systematic theology. While a satisfactory solution is awaited we can but suggest two ways forward. First, the major question is why Paul uses *tekna* four times in the context of passages that contain three uses of *huiothesia* (Rom. 8:16-17, 21, 9:8).[49] In concluding we may tender several moot suggestions: (i) Perhaps Paul was conscious of the gender-specific nature of the term *huiothesia* , and so used the genderless designation *tekna* (children). This would certainly square with what we find in Paul's use of the quotation in 2 Corinthians 6:18: *kai esomai humin eis patera kai humeis esesthe moi eis huious kai thugateras.*[50] (ii) As we know, in Romans 8, Paul was building upon what he had taught in Galatians 4, and so he still regarded the *huiothesia* as referring to grown-up sons (and daughters). It may well be therefore that he used *tekna* four times in Romans 8-9 to hint at the fact that although the church of the New Testament consists of mature sons and daughters of God, they never reach the stage where they become independent of the Father. He never grows old, although he is the 'Ancient of days'. He never becomes ill and frail, and ultimately dependent upon us; and, ultimately, he never dies.[51] He is for ever existing. There is a sense then in which even as mature sons and daughters of God of the New Testament era we will always remain *tekna*, ever dependent upon *Abba ho pater*!

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49 J.B. Lightfoot notes that 'In St. Paul the expressions, "Son of God", "children of God", mostly convey the idea of *liberty*, as in [Gal.] iv.6,7, Rom. viii, 14 sq. (see however Phil. ii:15), in St. John of *guilelessness* and *love e.g.* I Joh iii. 1, 2, 10. In accordance with this distinction St. Paul uses *huoii* as well as *tekna*, St John *tekna* only.' *St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London, 1892), p. 149.

50 Scott, *Adoption as the Sons of God*, ch. 4.

51 As Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (for whom the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God was a central theological theme) observed, 'A man ceases to be a Father when he dies himself, or when all his children are dead,' *The Works of the Rev. John Gambold, A.M., with an Introductory Essay by Thomas Erskine, Esq., Advocate* (Glasgow, 1822), p. vii. It is this point which Erskine made of the human sphere which we wish here to apply to the divine.

This anomaly must surely serve as the starting point for any discussion of the relationship between adoption and regeneration. If the problem can be understood within the corpus Paulinum then much ground would have been made. Only then can attempts be tentatively made to compare and contrast the Pauline understanding of adoption and regeneration with John's understanding of regeneration.

Secondly, in relation to Johannine theology we have another way forward. To proceed from the place where we have reached in this article we must return to John 1:12-13: 'But as many as received (*elabon*) him, to them he gave the authority (*exousian*) to become children of God (*tekna theou*), even to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' While John Murray wrongly includes these verses among his list of 'The most important passages in the New Testament bearing upon adoption', [52] in what follows he paradoxically highlights the uniqueness of adoption: 'it is quite apparent that adoption is quite distinct from regeneration. We may never think of sonship as being constituted apart from the act of adoption.'[53] The value of Murray's work, however, lies in distinguishing John 1:13, which speaks of regeneration in terms of birth, from John 1:12, which uses the term *elabon*, understood by Murray to reflect 'the bestowment of a right'.[54] This evokes a number of questions such as the meaning of *elabon*. Is the term an equivalent of being adopted (particularly if seen in the light of the children's status mentioned in 1 John 3:1)? If so, what does John mean by the term and how does his understanding relate to what he writes of regeneration in the next verse? We therefore suggest that any interested in these and other related issues begin here.

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52 *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 226.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 228.