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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

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ADOPTED BY THE TRIUNE GOD THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION FROM A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE¹

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ADOPTION: TOWARDS A RESURGENCE OF THE DOCTRINE

What is the doctrine of adoption? In adoption, God takes sinners like you and me, grants us a new birth as his children, translates us from darkness into his family and bestows new rights and privileges on us. That is an important and glorious doctrine. Theologians generally agree to that. German Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg writes in his *Systematic Theology*: 'Being God's children is thus the essence of the Christian life.'² J. I. Packer adds that adoption is truly 'the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification'.³ According to John Owen, adoption is the Christian's 'fountain privilege'.⁴

However, the doctrine has received relatively little attention until now.⁵ A glance at the theological history of adoption shows an apparent disregard for the topic.⁶ The authors of systematic theologies generally tend to view adoption as an appendix of justification (with adoption being the 'positive side' of justification). The doctrine is also very rarely expressed in historic creeds and confessions (with the exception of its treatment in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). Clearly, the doctrine is

¹ Originally presented as a Lecture at the *Seminario Biblico de Colombia* (Medellin, Colombia), 7th May 2009.

² W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. 3. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1993), p. 212.

³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004) p. 232.

⁴ J. Owen, quoted in Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 241.

⁵ Compare for an overview: D. F. Kelly, 'Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards' *Reformed Theological Review* 52.3 (1993).

⁶ See T. J. R. Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20.1 (2002) and 'The Theological History of Adoption II: A Rationale' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20.2 (2002).

a neglected doctrine that needs urgent recovery. My aim in this paper is to draw attention to the doctrine of adoption and perhaps to spread a passion for its proclamation in academia as well as in the pulpit.

ADOPTION: A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

The doctrine of adoption is extremely wide-ranging, touching many different levels of the *ordo salutis*. Redemptive adoption originates in the eternal decree of God, whereas its actual fulfilment was realised with the first coming of Christ, who procured sonship for everyone who believes, and it extends until the *parousia*, when the children of God will be glorified. In this brief presentation, I intend to focus on one important aspect, namely, how the triune God acts in adoption. Donald Macleod states that we can understand adoption 'properly only in the light of the Trinity'.⁷ In order to grasp the full meaning and implications of adoption we need a Trinitarian viewpoint.

The one God who is 'simultaneously one and three'⁸ adopts us. The revelation of the Trinity is closely related to our experience of adoption. Redemptive adoption is accomplished by the one God, but within that, we find the three persons of the Trinity fulfilling roles that correspond to the order within the divine being. The Triuneness of God in his eternal being (ontological Trinity), is mirrored by the dispensation of adoption (the economic Trinity). That is, the three persons act in a way that reflects their eternal, ontological distinctives; the Father as the *principium*, the Son, who is eternally begotten, and the Spirit as eternally proceeding. God, the Father, adopts through his Son Jesus Christ and sends his Holy Spirit of adoption into the adoptee. Always keeping the unity of God in adoption in mind, how do the persons of the Godhead work distinctively?

Regarding adoption, the Apostle Paul describes God, the Father, as electing (Eph. 1:3-6), Jesus Christ as redeeming (Eph. 1:7-12) and the Holy Spirit as sealing (Eph. 1:13-14). Sinclair Ferguson writes in this context, 'The Father destines us to be his children; the Son comes to make us his brothers and sisters; the Spirit is sent as the Spirit of adoption to make us fully aware of our privileges.'⁹ Each person of the Trinity has therefore

⁷ D. Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's People* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1994) p. 86.

⁸ P. D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002) p. 232.

⁹ S. B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) pp. 4-5. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 519 notes: 'This adoption proceeds according

a special role in the concerted process of adoption: The Father elects human beings unto adoption, the Son mediates the adoption and the Spirit communicates it. I will examine each role in the following paragraphs.

1. *The Father elects*

We start with the Father. He is pre-eminent in the process of redemptive adoption, as Murray notes: 'It is specifically God the Father who is the agent of this act of grace'.¹⁰ Why does the Father predestine sinners unto adoption? The ultimate reason is his love. Sovereign love is God's motive in electing sinful people to become beloved adoptive children. In 1 John, God's love is identified as the main cause of redemptive adoption (3:1). God is by no means compelled to love and adopt sinful people. He is not at all obliged to adopt sinners into his household. Yet, out of his sovereign love, a love that is only bound to his own name, he freely and graciously adopts us. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes that 'our adoption is the highest expression even of God's love'.¹¹

The sovereign love of God manifests itself in his will. Because God is love, he wills adoption. Paul the apostle writes: 'he predestined us for adoption [*huiothesian*] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will' (Eph. 1:5).¹² God's eternal will is the effective cause of adoption. It is not the human subject that generates adoption but the sovereign God who predestines unto adoption according to his will. 'No other cause makes us God's children but only his choice of us in himself',¹³ writes John Calvin. Consequently the adoptive child remains passive. As orphans do not have any influence on their adoption, so does our spiritual adoption depend exclusively on God, the Father. Adoption is through predestination. This close connection between adoption and election led Calvin almost to equate the two doctrines.¹⁴

to the eternal purpose of the Father, upon the merits of the Son, and by the efficient agency of the Holy Ghost.'

¹⁰ J. Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955) p. 136.

¹¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose - An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 [1978]) p. 112.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from: *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Crossway Bibles, Good News Publishers, 2001.

¹³ J. Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, 4.

¹⁴ Compare H. Griffith, "'The First Title of the Spirit": Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology', *Evangelical Quarterly* 73.2 (2001) p. 138.

2. *The Son mediates*

It is important to note that the Father's predestination unto adoption is made in Christ. The children of God are adopted through Christ (*dia Iesou Christou* in Eph. 1:5). He is the mediator who enables the adoptive act. Without Christ's mediation, adoption would be unthinkable and impossible. Redemptive adoption is therefore essentially christocentric: only through, by, and in Christ adoption is conceivable and accomplishable.¹⁵

Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfil his Father's will to transform a fallen people into sons and daughters of God, as we read in Galatians 4:4-5: 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.' The only-begotten Son was sent by the Father in order to break the curse of the law and to offer life and sonship through his death and resurrection. Through substitutionary atonement, Christ mediates adoption for everyone who believes. J. I. Packer speaks thus of 'adoption through propitiation'.¹⁶

What kind of sonship does Jesus Christ mediate? Sonship through redemptive adoption is not a mere re-establishment of pre-fall sonship. The new sonship through Christ entails much more, as James Orr notes: 'Christ does not merely bring us back to the creation standing. He introduces us into the far higher, nobler, diviner relation to the Father.'¹⁷ Jesus therefore does not only restore (pre-fall) sonship but establishes a glorious new-covenantal standing for redeemed sinners as the blessed children of God. Redemptive adoption mediated by Christ leads to an unequalled sonship.

As we noted earlier, adoption is possible only in Christ. That is, adoption works only in union with Christ. The adoptee must have communion with Christ in order to receive full spiritual and legal sonship. The adoptive child is united with Christ in a threefold way: through a natural union (due to Christ's incarnation and his consequent community of nature with his human brothers and sisters), a spiritual union (by grace through faith in Christ who indwells the adoptive child), and a federal union (with Christ as the head).¹⁸ The unifying element on the individual's side is faith

¹⁵ Calvin notes in his commentary on Second Corinthians 1.20 that 'the cause and root of adoption is Christ', see his *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans., J. Pringle, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), pp. 137-8.

¹⁶ Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 241.

¹⁷ J. Orr, *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine*, (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.) p. 158.

¹⁸ In orthodox Reformed and Lutheran circles, this union is also sometimes referred to as a *unio mystica*. Thus, the adoptee has to be in the *Christussphäre*

(as a gift from God, Eph 2:8), issuing from election. It is faith *in* Jesus Christ (John 1:12-13; Gal. 3:26) that unites the believer with Christ and elicits adoption (Gal 3:25). Faith in Christ can be illustrated as the canal through which union with Christ and consequently adoption flows. Of course, this faith is not a self-evoked, psychological exertion, but rather a supernatural faith, attributable only to God as the initiator.

Having been united with Christ by faith in him, we enjoy the blessed state of God's adoptive children. We possess special privileges already and in the age to come. We share, for instance, Christ's position and eminence (Gen. 1:26; John 14:3; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Heb. 2:6-9). As children of God we are called into the community of the Son. We have, like Jesus, the right to call God 'Abba', as the ultimate expression of intimacy and love. Moreover, adopted children of God are also partakers of the same love that God has for his Son Christ (John 17.26).¹⁹ Donald Macleod clarifies: 'In adoption, believers become sons and daughters of God, which means that they come to share in the very relationship with God enjoyed by Jesus.'²⁰ Though we were sinful individuals, through adoption, we may enjoy the same relationship with God that Christ has.²¹ Macleod even goes so far as to say that 'the relationship itself is essentially the same.'²² God's children are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and they share

in order to receive adoption. This union is mystical because it rests on God's unsearchable riches of grace and the mystery of grace itself.

¹⁹ J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003), p. 689 writes: 'By your being united to Christ, you will have a more glorious union with and enjoyment of God the Father, than otherwise could be. For hereby the saints' relation to God becomes much nearer; they are the children of God in a higher manner than otherwise could be. For, being members of God's own Son, they are in a sort partakers of his relation to the Father: they are not only sons of God by regeneration, but by a kind of communion in the sonship of the eternal Son... [s]o we being members of the Son, are partakers in our measure of the Father's love to the Son, and complacency in him.'

²⁰ Macleod, *Shared Life*, pp. 86-7.

²¹ Nevertheless, there is a difference in the way we become children and Jesus is Son. An individual becomes a child of God through regeneration whereas Jesus was eternally God's only begotten Son. Writes Smail, T. A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), p. 144: 'It is he who in the uniqueness of his resurrection is designated the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4) while we are sons through an act of huiiothesia (adoption, son-making) which Paul always relates to the...finished work of Christ...Thus the distinction between Jesus and us needs to be carefully observed. The language of incarnation belongs to him, and the language of adoption to us.'

²² Macleod, *Shared Life*, pp. 86-7.

their destiny with Jesus (John 14:3; 17:24, 22). Concerning the *eschaton*, adoptive children are promised an inheritance (Rom. 8:17), a new name (Rev. 3:12), and a crown of gold (Rev. 4:4; 14:14). They will receive bodies identical with the resurrection body of Christ (Phil. 3:21), and God will one day completely transform their characters and personalities into Christ's image (Rom. 8:29).²³

3. *The Spirit communicates*

The Father elects, the Son mediates, and finally, the Holy Spirit communicates. The Holy Spirit is a principal agent in redemptive adoption. He is also called the 'Spirit of adoption', which emphasises his distinct involvement in the adoptive process. A clear understanding of the Spirit's work in adoption is imperative, as Packer notes: 'a recognition that the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of adoption is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for integrating all that the New Testament tells us about his ministry to Christians.'²⁴ Paul the apostle describes the role of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:15-16: 'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.' What did Paul intend to convey with the title 'Spirit of adoption as sons' (*pneuma huiiothesias*)?

Theologians come up with different answers. Some say that the Spirit anticipates adoption in an eschatological sense ('the Spirit who anticipates adoption').²⁵ Others assume that the Spirit is the causer of adoption.²⁶ That is, however, unlikely in the light of our discussion above, for we showed that God, the Father initiates the adoption process. Most likely, the title

²³ As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* declares (answer 87): 'The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body', see, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, ed., R. S. Ward (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2000), pp. 84-5.

²⁴ Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 249.

²⁵ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: A. & C. Black, 1962), p. 163.

²⁶ P. Von der Osten-Sacken suggests that it is about 'a Spirit that causes sonship', see his *Römer 8 als Beispiel paulinischer Soteriologie*, vol. 112, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 135, author's translation. A similar view is provided by Cranfield who speaks of 'the Spirit who brings about adoption', see his *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ed., J.A. Emerton and C.E.B. Cranfield, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1975), p. 397.

'Spirit of adoption' emphasises the communicative role of the Holy Spirit in adoption. That is, as the context suggests ('the Spirit bears witness'), the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates to the adopted child that he is really adopted.²⁷ 'The Spirit himself assures our spirit that we are children of God,'²⁸ notes Hendriksen. This rendering is probably very close to what Paul intended to say. Similarly, Martin Luther interprets in terms of an official recognition when he notes that the Spirit 'certifieth our spirits that we are the children of God'.²⁹ Therefore, we would conceive of the Spirit's witnessing work as imprinting his testimony on the adoptive child's heart and mind. The Spirit testifies, that is, shows to be true, gives evidence in support of, informs, educates, and teaches the believer's spirit in regard to adoption.³⁰

As the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our adoption, we are prompted to cry 'Abba, Father'. Enabled by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15), through Christ's Spirit (Gal. 4:6), we are encouraged to approach God as *abba*, the beloved and trustworthy Father. That we may address God as *abba* is a remarkable privilege. Only in New Testament times was the Aramaic word *abba* introduced as an address to God, as Joachim Jeremias observes: 'Jesus dared to use 'ABBä as a form of address to God. This 'ABBä is the *ip-sissima vox Jesu*.'³¹ When Paul writes to the Galatians, 'And because you

²⁷ Instead of communication, H. Bavinck in *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 465, prefers to speak of awareness: 'By means of this Spirit we are made aware of our adoption.'

²⁸ W. Hendriksen, *Romans*, NTC, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 260.

²⁹ M. Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1953), p. 366. D. Moo and Calvin use a similar terminology. Writes Moo: 'Paul involves our own spirit in the very process of testifying to us that we are "children of God"', see his *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed., G. Fee, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 504. Calvin notes that 'the Spirit of God affords us such a testimony that our spirit is assured of the adoption of God, when He is our Guide and Teacher. Our mind would not of its own accord convey this assurance to us, unless the testimony of the Spirit preceded it...[w]hile the Spirit testifies to us that we are the children of God, He at the same time pours this confidence into our hearts so that we dare invoke God as our Father', Calvin, quoted in Griffith, "'The First Title of the Spirit'", p. 148.

³⁰ Habermas writes accordingly: 'Romans 8:16 characterizes the Holy Spirit's testimony as a personal, firsthand communication with the believer's spirit, informing the Christian of his familial relationship to God', see his 'The Personal Testimony Of The Holy Spirit To The Believer And Christian Apologetics' *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1.1 [1997], p. 54.

³¹ J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 66.

are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “*Abba!* Father!”” (Gal. 4:6), it becomes clear that the adopted child may cry *Abba* as Jesus himself did.³² In recent decades, there has been considerable discussion about the invocation, ‘*Abba*, Father’. The question was whether *abba* relates to today’s ‘daddy’ or not. This sparked a keen disagreement between James Barr and Joachim Jeremias. Barr doubted that *abba* could signify ‘daddy’, arguing that *abba* was rarely used,³³ and that it was by no means a children’s form of address³⁴ but was rather used by adults.³⁵ Jeremias, in contrast, holds that *abba* was used more frequently by the Jews.³⁶ He points out that *abba* was a well-known expression and therefore often used, especially by little children as a babbling sound (*Lallwort*)³⁷, comparable with daddy, but also by adults³⁸ (though not in relation to God³⁹).⁴⁰

³² J. M. Scott is right when he notes that believers ‘participate in the sonship of the messianic Son of God to such an extent that they address God with the *ipsissima verba* of the Son’, see his *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiiothesia in the Pauline corpus*, WUNT 2.Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992) pp. 182-3.

³³ Writes Barr: ‘It is not clear that all cases of “*Abba*” in the New Testament came from Jesus’ speech, or that Jesus in addressing his Father always used “*Abba*”’, see his “‘*Abba*, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech’ *Theology* 91 [1988]: pp. 173-9.

³⁴ “‘*Abba*, Father’”, p. 175. Barr further notes: ‘The Greek word used in the New Testament is always the adult word *patēr* and never a diminutive or a word that particularly belongs to the speech of children’ (p. 176). He concludes: ‘But in any case it was not a childish expression comparable with “*Daddy*”: it was more a solemn responsible, adult address to a Father’, see his “*Abba* isn’t ‘*Daddy*’”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 [1988], pp. 28-47.

³⁵ “‘*Abba*, Father’”, p. 175.

³⁶ Jeremias sees an underlying *abba* in other verses. Moreover, he points out that *abba ho pater* was widespread in the early church – as an echo of Jesus’ prayer. Therefore, Jeremias suggests that ‘*abba* underlies every instance of *pater (mou)* or *ho pater* in his words of prayer’ (p. 65).

³⁷ Writes Jeremias: ‘In origin, *abba* is a babbling sound...When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say *abba*’ (p. 66). Hendriksen agrees here with Jeremias: ‘A form of the word *Abba*, meaning “father”, was originally used by small children...In this word filial tenderness, trust, and love find their combined expression’ (Hendriksen, p. 259).

³⁸ Notes Jeremias: ‘By the time of Jesus, *abba* had long had a wider use than in the talk of small children. Even grown-up children, sons as well as daughters, now addressed their father as *abba*’ (p. 66).

³⁹ Writes Jeremias: ‘As we can learn from the Targum, Jews deliberately avoided applying the word *abba* to God even outside prayers’ (p. 65).

⁴⁰ ‘Palestinian Judaism does not use *abba* as a form of address to God. It was a children’s word, used in everyday talk, an expression of courtesy. It would

Therefore, Jeremias argues for the connotation of *abba* as 'daddy' (and Stein⁴¹, Lloyd-Jones⁴², as well as Morris⁴³ support Jeremias). However, Jeremias does not understand *abba* in a superficial, degrading sense, but rather in a reverent and respectful manner.⁴⁴ *Abba* denotes intimacy as well as respect.⁴⁵ I agree with Jeremias, as his analysis seems more convincing and more balanced than Barr's 'all-or-nothing' approach. If we, as God's children, approach God with reverence and respect, we are free to address him as *Abba*, our beloved and trustworthy Father.

We not only address God formally as *Abba*, Father, but we cry '*Abba*, Father' (Gal. 4.6). In this sense, the Holy Spirit awakens emotions in us regarding the quality of the fatherhood of God. '*Abba*, Father' is not a stoical statement, but rather an emotional cry expressed by the adopted child. 'The acknowledgment that God is our Father surely involved the emotions, for the experience of the Spirit in the earliest Christian communities was dynamic and vital. Acknowledgment of the Father was full of gladness and joy inexpressible,'⁴⁶ notes Schreiner. This is an important aspect of the work of the Spirit of adoption in our hearts. The '*Abba*, Father' cry is an intense cry from our heart, that is made aware of the glorious implications of adoption. Our 'awareness of God as Father comes not from rational consideration nor from external testimony alone but from a truth deeply felt and intensely experienced',⁴⁷ argues Douglas Moo. We must guard ourselves therefore from addressing God, our Father in a dispassionate manner. The emotions are meant to be involved; the '*Abba*, Father' address is both cognitive and emotional.⁴⁸

have seemed disrespectful, indeed unthinkable, to the sensibilities of Jesus' contemporaries to address God with this familiar word' (p. 66).

⁴¹ R. H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 82: 'It is evident...that *abba* was the word of a toddler whose first words were "Daddy" (*abba*) and "Mommy" (*imma*)'.

⁴² Compare Lloyd-Jones, *The Sons of God*, p. 240.

⁴³ 'The word is from the babbling of a little child (like "papa") and is the familiar term used in the home', L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 316.

⁴⁴ Jeremias, p. 68.

⁴⁵ 'Jesus' use of *abba* expresses a special relationship with God...an expression of obedient trust but also at the same time a word of authority', see J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p. 62.

⁴⁶ T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) p. 426.

⁴⁷ *Romans*, p. 502.

⁴⁸ Thomas Chalmers writes: 'I fear, that there are many...who could never allege of themselves at any time, that they had the spirit of adoption - with whom the sense of God as their reconciled Father, is as entirely a stranger to

From a Trinitarian viewpoint we now see clearly the involvement of all three persons of the Godhead in adoption. God, the Father, elects, the Son mediates, and the Holy Spirit communicates adoption.

ADOPTION: SHARING IN THE TRINITY TO THE GLORY OF GOD

As we understand how the triune God works in adoption we could finally ask: Why? Why does the triune God adopt sinners like us at all? God adopts for his own God's glory. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (2.1) reads: 'There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection...working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory.'⁴⁹ Consequently, adoption serves to honor and glorify God.⁵⁰ In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes the purpose of God's gracious dealings with us crystal clear: the praise of God's glorious grace: 'In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved' (Eph. 1:4-6, emphasis added).

Adoption glorifies the gracious God who receives sinners and transforms them into beloved children. Adoption is therefore entirely God-centred and God-exalting. God glorifies himself in adoption as he invites and incorporates his children into his own, into his life. T. F. Torrance writes: 'The eternal communion of love in God overflows through Jesus Christ into our union with Christ and gathers us up to dwell with God and in God...[God] gives himself to us and adopts us into the communion of his divine life and love through Jesus Christ and in his one Spirit, yet in such a way that we are not made divine but are preserved in our humanity.'⁵¹ God 'called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through

their heart as is any mystic inspiration – who have a kind of decent, and in some sort an earnest religiousness, but have never been visited by any feeling bald so sanguine or ecstatic as this', see his *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1848), p. 55.

⁴⁹ Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ E. Sauer notes that 'the fact of the redeemed's being sons of God within the framework of creation, is completely beyond all that contemporary thought can comprehend. For all that, it is clearly taught in Scripture and it presents the highest unfolding of God's determination to glorify himself in love', see his *The King of the Earth - The Nobility of Man according to the Bible and Science* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1962), p. 147.

⁵¹ T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1982), p. 64.

them you may become partakers of the divine nature', explains the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Adopted children are therefore called to partake of who God is. John Calvin calls it 'a kind of deification' (*quasi deificari*).⁵² Adopted children, are 'admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity', as Edwards notes,⁵³ yet remain human. We belong to God by a 'kinship of being', as Barth writes.⁵⁴ Our incorporation into the life of God will result in joy beyond comparison.⁵⁵ Jenson puts it this way: 'our enjoyment of God is that we are taken into the triune singing'.⁵⁶ God is beauty, God is 'a great *fugue*',⁵⁷ and by enjoying our glorious God, we honour him.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to demonstrate that redemptive adoption is no isolated work of one person of the Godhead. Rather, adoption involves the whole Trinity: the Father, in electing and predestining children in love; the Son, as Mediator, in procuring sonship through propitiation, and inviting believers into unity with him through faith; the Spirit, as Spirit of adoption, who communicates the adoption and enables us to cry '*Abba, Father*'. The ultimate goal of adoption is the integration of justified sinners into God's holy life. God glorifies himself as he invites us to share in his being, as

⁵² C. Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002) p. 41.

⁵³ 'Christ has brought it to pass, that those whom the Father has given him should be brought into the household of God; that he and his Father, and his people, should be as one society, one family; that the church should be as it were admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity', *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, p. 689.

⁵⁴ 'The divine sonship of man is not his divinity. It is only ascribed to him, imparted to him, given to him. He is only received and adopted by God as his child. He is only instituted as such. But in it he belongs to God by a kinship of being', see his *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 600.

⁵⁵ Writes Edwards: 'Christ, who is a divine person, by taking on him our nature, descends from the infinite distance and height above us, and is brought nigh to us; whereby we have advantage for the full enjoyment of him. And, on the other hand, we, by being in Christ a divine person, do as it were ascend up to God, through the infinite distance, and have hereby advantage for the full enjoyment of him also. This was the design of Christ, that he, and his Father, and his people, might all be united in one', *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, p. 689.

⁵⁶ R. W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 235.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

ADOPTED BY THE TRIUNE GOD

he is everything for us in Christ and through his Spirit. This is a glorious doctrine. Let us teach about it and preach about it. Let us develop a passion for the proclamation of redemptive adoption.