

Heirs with Christ

Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption

Joel R. Beeke



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for their divine benediction

—◆◆—

“We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.”

– Thomas Watson
A Body of Divinity
(London: A. Fullarton, 1845)

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Foreword

Earthly adoption is *horizontal*. It is one human being establishing a relationship with another human being. Heavenly adoption is *vertical*. It is the eternal God graciously establishing a relationship with fallen human beings, creatures who are by nature “children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2) or “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

God is an adoptive Father. Jesus, our Elder Brother, is God the Father’s eternal, only-begotten, natural Son. We believers are His children through adoption. This identity is central to who we are. As adopted children, we enjoy all the rights and privileges of the relationship that God the Father enjoys with His eternal Son. This is an amazing reality and eternal privilege.

Adoption is heavenly before it is earthly. One is what God does; the other is what we do. Adoption is something God has done and is doing before it is something we have done and are doing. Adoption was invented by God even before He created the world. Adoption is how God brings us into His family.

If adoption is first heavenly before it is earthly, why do we Christians so often think of earthly adoption before we think of heavenly adoption? Why do we think horizontally before we think vertically? I think one reason for this is the neglect of the doc-

trine of adoption in the history of the church. In his massive, 2,600-page work *The Creeds of Christendom*, the church historian Philip Schaff only includes six creeds that contain a section on adoption because they are the only ones he could find while scouring almost 1,900 years of church history.

The early church was primarily concerned, and rightly so, with the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ because those doctrines were being attacked within the church. The Reformation and post-Reformation church necessarily focused on defending the doctrine of justification. These battles were all essential for the church to fight in the defense of Christian truth, but unintentionally they resulted in the church's failure thoroughly to develop Scripture's teaching on adoption.

Even though adoption has been relatively neglected in the history of the church, the Puritans have not contributed to that neglect. To my knowledge, no tradition in the history of the church has rejoiced in and proclaimed the truth of adoption as have the Puritans. Though the Puritans, as of late, have received bad press in their treatment of this great doctrine, their writings demonstrate that they esteemed nothing higher than the incomparable privilege of being God's children through adoption.

Dr. Joel Beeke offers a great service to the contemporary church by examining the Puritans' substantial and worship-filled treatment of the believer's adoption by God. Beeke does a masterful job of setting

the record straight on behalf of the Puritans. He has extensively studied the Puritans and is uniquely qualified to write on this most important subject.

The church today should richly benefit from this exposure to Puritan teaching on the biblical doctrine of adoption. If we as Christians even begin to approach the Puritans' love of heavenly adoption, we will be spiritually richer for it. Therefore, I highly recommend Dr. Beeke's book *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*.

—Dan Cruver
Co-Founder of Together
for Adoption

Acknowledgments

I owe thanks most of all to the glorious God and Father for adopting me:

- decretally, from eternity;
- meritoriously, based on the justifying power of Christ's death and resurrection;
- objectively, through regenerating me in Yellowstone National Park in the summer of 1967;
- consciously, through a pastoral visit by Rev. Arie Elshout to our family in 1969 that the Spirit used to assure me of spiritual freedom; and
- daily, loading me, despite my sinfulness, with the unspeakably powerful comforts of His adopting benefits and grace.

I am deeply grateful to the Puritans who showed me the theological riches and beauties of adoption as no other writers have done. This study of Puritans on adoption has blessed me more than any other, except perhaps my study of the assurance of faith.

I offer heartfelt thanks for my wonderful family and the love that we share. That love moves me to contemplate my spiritual adoption with tears. I often ask my children, "Do you know what your dad thinks of you?" When they respond with cheerful confidence, "You love me," I ask God for grace once again to approach Him likewise as my heavenly Father. Sometimes I pester my children further, asking, "But

how do you know?” I want to hear them say something like this: “You tell me and you show me, so I know it and I feel it.” “Lord,” I then cry out, “Thou dost tell me in Thy Word, dost witness to my heart, and dost show me in a thousand ways Thy paternal love toward me. *Soli Deo Gloria!*” Just as I don’t deserve my special wife, Mary, or such special children as Calvin, Esther, and Lydia, how much less do I deserve such a God as my heavenly Father is to me in Christ Jesus. I am unworthy of my God and my family, but that indebtedness makes me appreciate the doctrine of loving adoption more than ever.

I thank Jay Collier for his detailed work with the manuscript that turned into this book; Dan Cruver, for his foreword; Phyllis TenElshof, Kate DeVries, and Martha Fisher for their editing; Linda den Hollander for her typesetting; and Amy Zevenbergen for her work on the cover.

If this little book, with the blessing of the Spirit, helps God-fearing believers more fully lay hold of the Father’s love to them in Christ Jesus, my reward will be multiplied. I believe that if God’s people were conscious every day that they are adopted by the Father, Spirit-worked revival would break out and the exquisite delight believers would have in their Father in heaven would move the world profoundly.

Heavenly Father, stir up Thy people to understand, believe, receive, and taste with delight Thy amazing Fatherhood.

—Joel R. Beeke

CHAPTER ONE



Introduction:
Correcting a Caricature

Reformed theologians in general, and the Puritans in particular, have gotten a bad press for their supposed lack of teaching on adoption, that is, the biblical doctrine that every true Christian is God's adopted child. In his otherwise excellent chapter titled "Sons of God" in the classic, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes, "Adoption has been little regarded in Christian history. Apart from two last-century books, now scarcely known (R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, R. A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*), there is no evangelical writing on it, nor has there been at any time since the Reformation, any more than there was before.... The Puritan teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, was notably deficient [on adoption], which is one reason why legalistic misunderstandings of it so easily arise."¹ As recently

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 207.

as 1993, Douglas Kelly concurs: “As James I. Packer noted several years ago in *Knowing God*, Reformed Christians have failed to work through the doctrine of Adoption.”² Statements such as these promote the familiar comment that adoption is *the* neglected aspect in the Reformed *ordo salutis*.

Such generalizations have found a degree of confirmation in the minimal attention that many Reformed systematic theologies give to adoption. For example, George Hill, Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, Robert L. Dabney, Louis Berkhof, and G. Henry Kersten, devote only one or two paragraphs to adoption at best. But this is by no means universally the case.³ William Ames, Francis Turretin, John Brown of Haddington, James Boyce, A. A. Hodge, and Robert Reymond provide a more ample treatment of adoption (4–6 pages).⁴ Better yet, Thomas Watson,

2. Douglas Kelly, “Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards,” *Reformed Theological Review* 52 (1993): 111.

3. Erroll Hulse exaggerates when he asserts that most systematic theologians have ignored adoption (“Recovering the Doctrine of Adoption,” *Reformation Today* 105 [1988]:10).

4. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 164–67; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1994), 2:666–69; John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002), 393–97; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (reprint, Hanford, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, n.d.), 404–409; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (reprint, Edinburgh:

Samuel Willard, John Dick, Timothy Dwight, John Gill, James Boice, and Wayne Grudem provide rather full treatments ranging from 6–20 pages.⁵ Most thorough, however, are Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God & Man* (28 pages), and Robert Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered* (25 pages)—in fact, Breckinridge devotes more pages to adoption than to any other aspect of the *ordo salutis*.⁶ And, of course, let us not forget John Calvin, whose repeated references to adoption permeate his entire theology and “the whole

Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 515–19; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 759–62.

5. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity in a Series of Sermons on the Shorter Catechism* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), 155–60; Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969), 482–91; John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (Philadelphia: J. Whetham & Son, 1841), 2:224–33; Timothy Dwight, *Theology: Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons* (Middletown, Conn.: Clark & Lyman, 1818), 3:181–93; John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (reprint, Paris, Ark.: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1987), 201–203, 518–25; James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 441–48; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 736–45.

6. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (reprint, Kingsburg, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:441–68; Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 178–202.

ethos of the Christian life,” despite his lack of apportioning it a specific section in the *Institutes*.⁷

In addition to systematic theologies, the subject of adoption has been addressed from a Reformed perspective at length in several nineteenth-century treatises in addition to Candlish and Webb, mentioned by Packer above. Thomas Crawford’s *The Fatherhood of God* responds to Candlish’s denial of the universal paternity of God.⁸ In his *Discussion of Theological Questions*, John L. Girardeau devotes nearly one hundred pages to the doctrine of adoption—first

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship,” in *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75th Birthday*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1986), 84. For a thorough study of Calvin on adoption, see Tim J. R. Trumper, “An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2001), 38–214.

8. Robert S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1865)—see also his *Discourses bearing upon the Sonship and Brotherhood of Believers and other kindred subjects* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1872); Robert S. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947)—see also his *Christian Salvation: Its Doctrine and Experience* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1921), 391–405, and “The Fatherhood of God,” *Presbyterian Quarterly* 5 (1891):56–70; Thomas Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God Considered in Its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement with a Review of Recent Speculations on the Subject*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1868).

responding to the Candlish-Crawford debate, then setting forth his own understanding.⁹ In my opinion, Thomas Houston's *The Adoption of Sons* is superior to all of these volumes and has been unduly ignored in secondary literature on the subject.¹⁰

The twentieth century saw a burst of evangelical writings on adoption, including several popular books by solidly Reformed men such as Sinclair Ferguson, Mark Johnston, and Robert Peterson.¹¹ Scores of articles in academic journals were published on adoption,¹² and at least seven Ph.D. and Th.M. dis-

9. John L. Girardeau, *Discussion of Theological Questions*, ed. George A. Blackburn (reprint, Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 428–521. For an able exposition of Girardeau's views, see Stephen R. Berry, "Sons of God': An Examination of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Thought of John Lafayette Girardeau" (unpublished paper submitted to systematic theology department, Reformed Theological Seminary [Jackson, Miss.], 1994). Berry also addresses the views of Candlish, Crawford, and Thornwell.

10. Thomas Houston, *The Adoption of Sons, Its Nature, Spirit, Privileges, and Effects: A Practical and Experimental Treatise* (Edinburgh: Alex. Gardner, Paisley, 1872).

11. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989); Mark Johnston, *Child of a King: The Biblical Doctrine of Sonship* (Fearn, Rosshire: Christian Focus, 1997); Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2001) — see also his "Toward a Systematic Theology of Adoption," *Presbyterion* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 120–31.

12. E.g., James Barr, "Abba Isn't Daddy." *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988): 28–47; Trevor J. Burke, "Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8," *Evangelical Quarterly* 70 (1998): 311–24, and "The Characteristics of Paul's Adoptive-Sonship (*Huiothesia*)

sertations contributed substantially to the subject.¹³

Motif,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 17 (1995): 62–74; Herbert Donner, “Adoption oder Legitimation? Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament auf dem Hintergrund der altorientalischen Rechte,” *Oriens Antiquus* 8 (1969): 87–119; Samuel Feigin, “Some Cases of Adoption in Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 186–200; W. A. Jarrel, “Adoption Not in the Bible Salvation,” *The Review and Expositor* 15 (1918): 459–69; S. A. King, “The Grace of Adoption,” *Union Seminary Magazine* 22 (1910): 30–35; Francis Lyall, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 458–66; Allen Mawhinney, “Baptism, Servanthood and Sonship,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 35–64—also “The Family of God: One Model for the Church of the 90s,” *Presbyterion* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 77–96, and “God as Father: Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988): 181–89; Birgit Stolt, “Martin Luther on God as Father,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (1994): 385–95; James Swetnam, “On Romans 8:23 and the ‘Expectation of Sonship,’” *Biblica* 48 (1967): 102–108; Daniel J. Theron, “‘Adoption’ in the Pauline Corpus,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 28 (1956): 6–14; Tim J. R. Trumper, “The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation I and II: The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 14 (1996): 129–45; 15 (1997): 98–115; Nigel Westhead, “Adoption in the Thought of John Calvin,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 13 (1995): 102–115; Thornton Whaling, “Adoption,” *Princeton Theological Review* 21 (1923): 223–35; G. A. Wilterdink, “The Fatherhood of God in Calvin’s Thought,” *Reformed Review* 30 (Autumn 1976): 9–22; Bernard Woudenberg, “Eternal Adoption,” *The Standard Bearer* (September 1, 1990), 475–77.

13. Frank J. Ebel, Jr., “The Christian’s Filial Relationship to God” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957); T. Scott Franchino, “*Yios* and *Teknon* in the Doctrine of Adoption: Romans 8” (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1984); Allen Mawhinney, “*Huiothesia* in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use, and Implications” (Ph.D. dissertation,

Already in the present century two major Ph.D. dissertations on adoption have been completed.¹⁴

But what about the Puritans? Is it correct to assert that “the Puritans did little in exploring this truth apart from a few paragraphs here and there”?¹⁵

The evidence suggests that adoption, though not developed as thoroughly as several closely knit doctrines such as justification, sanctification, and assurance, was certainly not a neglected topic among the Puritans. Treatment of the topic in the systematic theologies of William Ames, Thomas Watson, Samuel Willard, and Herman Witsius has already been noted. William Perkins, often denominated the father of Puritanism, addresses various aspects of adoption at some length in at least nine different

Baylor University, 1983); Keith Alan Mosebrook, “The Pauline Doctrine of the Adoption of Believers” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981); Robert Lee Riffe, “A Study of the Figure of Adoption in the Pauline Epistles” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981); Charles A. Wanamaker, “The Son and the Sons of God: A Study in Elements of Paul’s Christological and Soteriological Thought” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1980); Robert E. Wermuth, “The Doctrine of Adoption in Paul’s Ephesian Letter” (Th.M. thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, 1985).

14. Tim J. R. Trumper, “An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition” (University of Edinburgh, 2001); David B. Garner, “Adoption in Christ” (Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002).

15. Erroll Hulse, “Recovering the Doctrine of Adoption,” *Reformation Today* 105 (1988): 10.

places in his works.¹⁶ William Bates, Hugh Binning, Thomas Brooks, Anthony Burgess, Stephen Charnock, George Downname, John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, Ezekiel Hopkins, Edward Leigh, and John Owen all provide some treatment of the subject.¹⁷ Other Puritans, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Cole, Roger Drake, Thomas Hooker,

16. *The Workes of that Famous and VVorthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: Iohn Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 1:82–83, 104–105, 369–70, 430; 2:277–80; 3:154–55, 138, 205, and 382 of 2nd pagination.

17. William Bates, *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates, D.D.*, ed. W. Farmer (reprint, Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1990), 4:299–301; Hugh Binning, *The Works of the Rev. Hugh Binning, M.A.*, ed. M. Leishman (reprint, Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 253–55; Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 4:419–20; Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 237–43; Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 3:90; George Downname, *A Treatise of Iustification* (London: Felix Kyngston for Nicolas Bourne, 1633), 239–42; John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 6:197–99; Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:83–102; William Gouge, *A Guide to Goe to God: or, An explanation of the perfect Patterne of Prayer, The Lords Prayer*, 2nd ed. (London: G.M. for Edward Brewster, 1636), 10–21; Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, ed. Charles W. Quick (reprint, Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:120–21, 569–76; 3:198–99; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1646), 510–11; John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 2:207–22; 4:265–70; 23:255–76.

Thomas Manton, Stephen Marshall, Richard Sibbes, John Tennent, and John Waite, wrote one or more sermons on adoption.¹⁸

So significant was the Puritan emphasis on adoption that the Westminster Divines were the first to include a separate chapter on the subject of adoption in a confessional statement: the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter XII). The Larger Cate-

18. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness, Delivered in Divers Lectures on the Beatitudes* (reprint, Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988), 193–202; Thomas Cole, *A Discourse of Christian Religion, in Sundry Points... Christ the Foundation of our Adoption, from Gal. 4. 5* (London: for Will. Marshall, 1698); Roger Drake, “The Believer’s Dignity and Duty Laid Open, in the High Birth wherewith he is Privileged, and the Honourable Employment to which he is Called,” in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London* (reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:328–44; Thomas Hooker, *The Christian’s Two Chief Lessons* (reprint, Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 2002), 159–73; Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 1:33–57; 10:116–21; 12:111–39; Stephen Marshall, *The Works of Mr Stephen Marshall, The First Part, [section 2:] The High Priviledge of Beleevers. They are the Sons of God* (London: Peter and Edward Cole, 1661); Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 4:129–49; John Tennent, “The Nature of Adoption,” in *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, Ill.: International Awakening Press, 1994), 233–50; John Waite, *Of the Creatures Liberation from the Bondage of Corruption, Wherein is Discussed... [section V]: And lastly is discussed that glorious libertie of the sonnes of God into which the creature is to be reduced* (York: Tho: Broad, 1650).

chism (Q. 74) and the Shorter Catechism (Q. 34) also addressed it, as have numerous commentators of the Westminster standards ever since.¹⁹ Most important,

19. For example, for the Westminster Confession, see Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896); 212–16; David Dickson, *Truth's Victory over Error* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 76–77; A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 191–93; Joseph A. Pipa, *The Westminster Confession of Faith Study Book* (Ross-shire, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 2005); Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (reprint, Inverness: Christian Focus, 1974), 137–41; for the Larger Catechism, see Thomas Ridgley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (reprint, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 2:131–37; Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2002), 164–66; and for the Shorter Catechism, see Thomas Boston, “An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion,” in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick* (reprint, Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 1:612–53; John Brown (of Haddington), *An Essay towards an easy, plain, practical, and extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849), 162–65; James Fisher, *The Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained, by way of Question and Answer* (reprint, Lewes, East Sussex: Berith Publications, 1998), 184–87; John Flavel, “An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism,” in *The Works of John Flavel* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 6:197–99; Matthew Henry, “A Scripture Catechism, in the Method of the Assembly's,” in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:209–10; Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly Explained and Proved from Scripture* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 96–97; Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 155–60. For

some Puritans wrote entire treatises on adoption, including:

- John Crabb, *A Testimony concerning the VWorks of the Living God. Shewing how the mysteries of his workings hath worked many wayes in and amongst mankind. Or, The knowledge of God revealed, which shews the way from the bondage of darkness into the liberty of the Sons of God.*
- Simon Ford, *The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption: Largely and Practically handled, with reference to the way and manner of working both those Effects; and the proper Cases of Conscience belonging to them both.*
- M.G., *The Glorious Excellencie of the Spirit of Adoption.*
- Thomas Granger, *A Looking-Glasse for Christians. Or, The Comfortable Doctrine of Adoption.*
- Cotton Mather, *The Sealed Servants of our God, Appearing with Two Witnesses, to produce a Well-Established Assurance of their being the Children of the Lord Almighty or, the Witness of the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit of the Beleever, to his Adoption of God; briefly and plainly Described.*
- Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit. Or, An essay towards a discoverie of the witnessings of the Spirit.*
- Samuel Willard, *The Child's Portion: Or the*

additional confessional statements that address adoption, see Trumper, "An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 5–10.

*unseen Glory of the Children of God, Asserted, and proved: Together with several other Sermons Occasionally Preached.*²⁰

Sadly, none of these books have been reprinted, which, in part, serves to promote the misrepresentation that the Puritans rarely addressed this subject.

Then, too, Scottish and Dutch divines of Puritan persuasion also wrote at length on adoption; for example, John Forbes, a Church of Scotland minister who spent most of his pastoral years in the Netherlands, wrote, *A Letter for resolving this Question: How a Christian man may discern the testimonie of Gods spirit, from the testimonie of his owne spirit, in witnessing his Adoption.*²¹ Thomas Boston devoted forty pages to the subject of adoption; Wilhelmus à Brakel, twenty-five pages.²² Even Anglican bishops wrote on the subject; for example, George Bull (1634–1710), bishop of St. David’s, who, though Arminian in

20. Crabb (London: John Gain, 1682); Ford (London: T. Maxey, for Sa. Gellibrand, 1655); M.G. (London: Jane Coe, for Henry Overton, 1645); Granger (London: William Iones, 1620); Mather (Boston: Daniel Henschman, 1727); Petto (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654); Willard (Boston: Samuel Green, to be sold by Samuel Phillips, 1684).

21. Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1616.

22. *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick*, ed. Samuel M’Millan (reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980, 1:612–53, 2:15–27); Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2:415–38; 3:486–87.

soteriology had some Puritan sympathies, wrote, *A Discourse Concerning the Spirit of God in the Faithful; how, and in what Manner it doth bear Witness with their Spirits, that they are the Children of God; and what Degree of Hope or Persuasion concerning their Adoption, this Witness of the Spirit doth ordinarily produce in the Faithful.*²³ It is surprising that the book is not very different in content from the Puritan treatises on adoption, except for a lack of emphasis on the wonder of adoption and a downplaying of the Spirit's direct witness to the soul.

The Puritan bibliographical materials recorded in this introduction amount to more than 1,200 pages of writing on the doctrine of spiritual adoption.²⁴ As far as I know, no one to date has recognized the significant amount of work done by the Puritans on this subject, nor has anyone ever done a study on it. When one considers that the Puritans regarded adoption to be the climax of the *ordo salutis*, and when one considers how extensively Puritan theology has been studied, it is astonishing that this subject has never been examined before. This little book only begins to redress this neglect by letting the Puritans speak for themselves, for the most part; perhaps the foot-

23. Reprint, Boston: sold by Thomas Fleet, 1740.

24. This number does not include material that could be included from Puritan commentaries and additional sermons that treat the main texts on adoption, nor additional commentaries on the Westminster standards.

notes will stimulate others to pick up where I have left off. Throughout, I show how Puritanism recognized adoption's far-reaching, transforming power and comfort for the sons and daughters of God.