Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ.

David B. Garner. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2016, xxx + 366 pp., $24 paper.

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David Garner's in-depth monograph is the latest evidence that the doctrine of adoption is enjoying something of a golden age, at least in evangelical and Reformed circles. *Sons in the Son* indicates that the zeal for the recovery of adoption, dating back to the mid-twentieth century, shows no signs of abating. Quite the contrary! Interest in the doctrine has become multidisciplinary, and is beginning to reap dividends. Thus far, our knowledge of the theological history of adoption has grown beyond anything understood, or at least published, previously. Studies of the Biblical and theological use of the adoption motif (*huiothesia*) are forsaking unsubstantiated assumptions of the Biblical data, notably the conflating of Paul's model of adoption and John's model of the new birth. Applications of adoption to Christian living and mission are increasingly obliged to understand that adoption is from slavery rather than orphanhood.

Garner's volume, then, does more than replicate prior studies such as those of Candlish (1864), Houston (1872), Girardeau (1905), or Webb (1947), add to the stock of Biblical studies (e.g. Byrne, Scott), or echo the sociocultural approach (e.g. Lyall, Mawhinney, and Burke). Rather, he has, to quote Sinclair Ferguson's Foreword, "garnered" the fruit of both the emergent Reformed Biblical Theology and renaissance in Calvin studies, to formulate a fresh top-down, redemptive-historical approach (pp. xxii, 78). Methodologically sound and exegetically thorough, it claims to "blaze[] new trails concerning filially framed contours of Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology" (p. xix).

A SUMMARY

In his first of three parts, Garner considers the hermeneutics, history, and etymology of adoption. Recognizing Paul's exclusive use of *huiothesia*, and rightly noting how his five references sketch the history of redemption from the first to the last things (Eph 1:4–5; Gal 4:4–6; Rom 8:15–17, 22–23, 9:4), Garner lays a sure foundation for his theology of adoption. Initially, the foundation serves to expose the underplaying of the doctrine in historical theology, and to occasion discussion as to whether Paul was also influenced by societal adoption. While Greek adoption predated Paul, Garner believes—following Scott—that Paul filled the Hellenistic term *huiothesia* with Old Testament covenantal and messianic content now being realized in Christ (p. 49). Yet, into this redemptive-historical approach Garner encourages the sowing of lessons drawn from the Roman practices of *adoptio* and *adrogatio*. These he later applies not to the sons of God, but uniquely and chiefly to the Son (cf. pp. 37ff. and 209ff.; cf. p. 85fn.9).

In Part Two—An exegetical and Theological Survey of the Key Texts—Garner unpacks the redemptive-historical contours of Paul's five uses of *huiothesia*, affirming, contrary to Scott *et al.*, the Pauline authorship of Ephesians (pp. 57–60). Indeed, he begins with Ephesians 1:5, expounding it under the title "Adoption Purposed" (Ch. 4), followed by "Adoption Accomplished" (Gal 4:4–7 [Ch. 5]), culminating in "Adoption Applied" (Rom 8:15–17, 8:22–23, and 9:4–5 [Ch. 6]). Clearly, Garner supports the view of Calvin, Ridderbos, and others, that adoption is, fundamentally, a coherent category of the *historia salutis* with theological implications for the *ordo salutis*. Thus, his latter headings echo John Murray's *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, although he rightly breaks from Murray's inherited conflation of the filial language of John and Paul.

Instead, in Part Three—Adoption in Biblical and Systematic Theology—Garner offers his take on the redemptive-historical approach. Embracing a high Christology—one from above accepting the eternal and preexistent divinity of God's Son—Garner focuses *via* Romans 1:3–4 (especially) on the progressive and functional dimension of Christ's Sonship (p. 177ff.). Contra high Christologian Donald Macleod, who understands Christ's appointment to his Sonship in power as declarative of his exaltation, Garner follows Geerhardus Vos and Richard

Gaffin. Christ's appointment constituted a change in his functional Sonship, which was rewarded him on account of his filial fidelity to the Father in his testing, maturing, and perfecting. Thus, qualified for his resurrection, Christ is constituted adoptively in power and holiness "the covenantally proven and eschatologically excellent Son" (p. 214). He is enabled thereby to bring every soteric benefit to sinners, including adoption.

Naturally, then, Garner turns from Christ's resurrection-adoption to the *ordo salutis* (Ch. 7), wrestling first with how Biblical Theology questions the legitimacy of the *ordo salutis*, its fixation with the forensic, and its stirring of reactions in the forms of the "new perspective" and Federal Vision. Garner attributes the fixation to the reading of adoption through human legal practices, and to its subsuming under justification (Turretin and Dabney). He counters the fixation by seeking, through his redemptive-historical reading, to connect more explicitly the benefits of salvation to the Savior (Ch. 8). The Spirit, he emphasizes, unites believers to the Son in a union which, neither an absorption nor a fiction, constitutes a real solidarity in which soteric benefits flow from the resurrected-adopted Son to the adopted sons. Thus, "To insist that *huiothesia* is soteriological and not Christological predicates that the believer receives a benefit from Christ not attained by him" (p. 203).

This adoption in Christ was anticipated in Adam and typified in Israel (Ch. 9). Although Adam failed his probation, broke the covenant of works, and missed out on the inheritance of an inviolable sonship in a glorified body, God continued his pursuit of a holy son (p. 258). He therefore granted Israel at Sinai, a typological, corporate, and minority sonship (Rom 9:4). Israel, however, lacked ability to be the holy son, and followed in macrocosm Adam's failure. At last, God's procurement of a family of faithful sons found fulfillment in the eschatological adoption of the resurrected Son of God, the true Israel. In him, the sons of God transition redemptive-historically into the eschatological age he inaugurated, receive personally their vindication, as also their power to combat sin (p. 267). Now freed from slavery, God's sons are empowered for filial obedience. Although consequential upon the obedience of their Elder Brother, the sons' obedience fulfils God's purpose in Christ's resurrection-adoption, namely that in "the grand finale" they should not only be declared justified or legally sons, but be conformed to the image of the Son.

Garner's emphasis on adoption in Christ brings him back to the *ordo salutis*. The union, he clarifies, is not with the Son in his eternal, pretemporal divinity, but with him as he became incarnate, a creature in our nature as sons of Adam. Since this union is filial, how, Garner asks, are we to understand Calvin's limitation of its benefits to justification and sanctification (regeneration)? This *duplex gratia Dei*, he fairly deduces, is included by Calvin under the overarching redemptive-historical scope of the grace of adoption. Likewise, Princetonian A. A. Hodge: Adoption speaks of believers in both their new creation (regeneration and sanctification) and new relation (justification), and comprehends both. Garner therefore rejects versions of the *ordo salutis* forensically driven through the medium of justification (Piper, Horton, and McCormack), or by the heritage of Turretin and Dabney (*et al.*), who, understanding adoption to complete justification, "merely warm[ed] courtroom speech with familial features and relational benefits" (p. 302). The Westminster Standards on adoption (WCF 12; WLC 74; WSC 34), read in light of the WLC's Q and A 69, are closer to the Pauline understanding, argues Garner, since the distinctive treatment of adoption draws on union with Christ (as does that of justification [WCF 11] and sanctification [WCF 13]).

Garner, though, does not merely juxtapose adoption, justification, and sanctification. This arrangement would contradict Paul and Calvin and "misalign" the filial grace of adoption (p. 304). Rather, adoption is the highest privilege the gospel offers (Packer) and is the zenith of union with Christ (Murray), since the resurrection-adoption of Christ was the culminating event of his work, and the adoption of believers its culminating purpose. Adoptive sonship is, accordingly, *the* benefit of union—not because of its warm familial tones (p. 311), but because it overarches justification and sanctification. Adoption, then, must no longer be overshadowed by the forensic, or subject to the "benefit conflation" of today's "new perspective" and Federal Vision (p. 306). Rather, it is the supreme benefit, marking "the comprehensive attainment of [our] Elder Brother, who is himself, as adopted Son of God, the very 'life' of the redeemed sons (Col. 3:4)" (p. 311).

<div align="center">A CRITIQUE</div>

In review, Garner's advocacy of the Pauline and the redemptive-historical approach is highly commendable. His scholarly contribution aids significantly the doctrine's profile, the

Biblical-theological (i.e. top-down, redemptive-historical) understanding, and the defense of the theology of Reformed orthodoxy. Given, however, the inflated claim made of Webb's *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* when it was first published (namely, that it would defeat liberalism), a more measured appreciation of Garner's study is warranted. Here are some reasons why.

Note, first, Garner's brief forays into historical-theology. The statement that "the church fathers show little attention to *huiothesia*, with the notable exception of Irenaeus" (p. 21), needs nuancing as the study of adoption in the Greek and Latin fathers of the AnteNicene, Nicene, and PostNicene periods develops. Likewise, we are learning restraint in dismissing the relevance of the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages (pp. 22, 25). Of the two best-known theologians of the period, Anselm says nothing of adoption in his extant writings, but Aquinas' discussion "Of Adoption as Befitting to Christ" in his *Summa Theologica*'s "Treatise on the Incarnation" is, presently, the earliest distinct treatment of adoption known of in the annals of historical theology. Furthermore, while it likely remains true to say that the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) is the first to include a distinct chapter on adoption, Craig's Catechism of 1581—a staple in Scotland prior to the Westminster Catechisms—has two (admittedly lightweight) sections on adoption: "The Certainty of Adoption" and "The Trial of Our Adoption."

Generally, though, Garner's exposition is somewhat detached from the theological history of adoption. Mention of the Candlish/Crawford debate of the 1860s over the original sonship of Adam and the nature of the believer's union with Christ would have been appropriate. Edwin H. Palmer's treatment of the Roman Catholic Granderath/Scheeben debating of the formal cause of adoption also raises relevant issues. Given current discussions of deification (*theosis*), Garner's statement that union relies "on [Christ's] condescension and accommodation, not the believer's elevation and deification" (p. 289), requires explanation. Most relevant is Aquinas' denial that Christ as man was the adopted Son of God.

Second, Garner forgoes discussion of Biblical language. At one level, we may sympathize, for while Calvin, sensitive to Scripture's divineness and humanness, mentions metaphors, figures, similitudes, *etc*, his view of the language of adoption is unclear. Puritan and

Presbyterian systematics, focusing on the divineness of Scripture and the unity of its system of truth, pay scant attention to the authorial diversity of the New Testament and its rich variety of figures of speech. Garner offsets the historic conflation of the New Testament's filial models (robust metaphors) by highlighting the Pauline and redemptive-historical features of adoption, yet, not defining his terms, he variously describes it as a concept (pp. 35, 36, 52, 138fn.77), metaconcept (p. 19), a metaphor or a model (pp. 40, 207, 211, 235, 250). When referring to Pauline and Johannine "sonship models" (p. 144) he misses the distinctive structure of John's new birth model, wherein *tekna* is consistently used, except significantly in Revelation 21:7, to distinguish Christ's Sonship from the childhood of the regenerate. By jumping over the thorny question of how Biblical language functions, Garner overlooks a significant argument for the importance of adoption and the discussion of how Biblical models may substitute or supplement the *ordo salutis* (cf. Brenda Colijn, Michael Bird).

Third, and related, Garner meshes two models of Biblical Theology. Making much of redemptive history (Calvin, Vos, Ridderbos, Gaffin) he weaves in another, what Brevard Childs calls "Biblical theology within dogmatic categories." This is fair enough, since models of Biblical Theology are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Garner, however, uses the meshing to "complete" Paul's adoption model by referencing nonPauline sources and systematic categories not demanded by the model (e.g. Adam and the covenant of works [pp. 6, 79, 263, and 284 especially]). This "dogmatic construal" (Childs) Garner justifies by warning repeatedly of the word-concept fallacy. Sometimes this is reasonable enough (p. 62), but at other times we ask at what point does the omission of a theological term from a given text or context bespeak the absence of the idea (p. 202). Thus, while Garner draws on theologians of adoption such as Calvin, Ridderbos, and Murray (who, to varying degrees, drew dogmatic categories from Biblical Theology), his method is, in part, more Klinian (Biblical Theology within dogmatic categories).

Fourth, Garner's disputed claim that Christ's resurrection was his adoption bears too much weight. Since Aquinas denied that Christ could have two Sonships (the one natural the other adopted) on the basis that sonship adheres to the person and not the nature, when do the Vosian-Gaffinesque-Garnerian two dimensions in Christ's Sonship (the one static the other

progressive) constitute two sonships—the one static, the other progressive? While Scott argues the case for Christ's resurrection-adoption from the 2 Samuel 7:12, 14/Romans 1:3–4 connection, Calvin's treatment of the latter makes no such connection. Accordingly, Garner's describing of the absence of *huiothesia* in Romans 1:3–4 "a word-concept fallacy," his assumption that 2 Samuel 7:12–16 and Romans 1:3–4 require Christ's adoption, and his strong critique of Macleod's and Burke's traditional view that Paul refers to Christ's exaltation (pp. 183ff., 202ff., 281–282) all await adjudication.

Not only does Garner's theory rely for its unpacking on nonPauline passages, its claim in effect that Christ's resurrection-adoption alone retains the connection between Christ and his benefits is tunnel vision. Furthermore, the belief that, "A failure to understand the Father's adoption of the Redeemer will render misunderstanding of the Father's adoption of the redeemed. Such a consequence is simply unavoidable" (p. 195), recalls Galatians 4:4–5. There, it is Christ's death-redemption not his resurrection-adoption which secures the adoptive sonship of the redeemed. True, redemption could not be guaranteed without Christ's resurrection, either in the now or the not yet (cf. Rom 8:22–23), but Paul clearly links our adoptive sonship to Christ's redeeming of us from enslavement. Since, hermeneutically, we work from the clearer statement of Galatians 4:4–5 to Romans 1:3–4, it is odd that Garner makes Romans 1:3–4 the *locus classicus* of adoption. The issues remain complex for sure, but Garner's would not be the first theological theory, powerfully and beautifully advocated (p. 201), to lack Biblical warrant. States Garner: "What makes theological errors compelling is not their flagrancy, but their proximity to biblical truth and their captivatingly fresh redefinitions" (p. 190). Precisely!

Fifth, there are the sizable lacunae in Garner's exposition. Strangely, one is more conscious of "Christology," "pneumatology," "soteriology," and "eschatology," than of patrology. The Father elects and sends the Son and the Spirit, but it is Christ's qualification for his resurrection-adoption and the Spirit's uniting of the sons to the Son which predominate. In Garner's "filiocentric gospel" (p. 306) and "Spirit-wrought faith-enabled solidarity with the resurrected Son" (p. 252; cf. p. 271), the Father is more assumed than expounded. This is largely due to the minimal attention Garner affords the adoptive state. His typological reading of Israel's sonship places more emphasis on its corporate than minority character

(pp. 82–83). Galatians 3:23ff. receives insufficient attention, with its contrast between the filial experience of Israel under the old covenant and that of believing Jews and Gentiles under the new. Similarly, the state of our majority sonship under the new covenant is skated over. A methodical exposition of filial liberty, assurance, sustenance, obedience, and inheritance, stripped of its terminological overload, would have done more to resonate Paul's (and Calvin's) attention to both the adoptive act *and* state (pp. 24, 50, 310).

Finally, there is the "preachability" of Garner's treatment. Given the strong individualism of the West, advocates of the redemptive-historical approach have their work cut out persuading hearers of the relevance of Paul's panoramic understanding of adoptive sonship, and the healthy corrective it offers today's selfie culture. Yet, the terminologically laden weight Garner places on his central claim (Rom 1:3–4), and the underplaying of the adoptive state, limits the volume's usefulness for pulpit ministry. Certainly, advocates of the redemptive-historical method of preaching will find a feast here, but those regarding expository preaching as the true heir of the redemptive-historical model of Biblical Theology will feel shortchanged.

Garner's monograph will then, it seems to me, be remembered as an early rather than as a definitive study of the redemptive-historical kind. While his courageous and weighty endeavor raises the profile of adoption and offers a foundation which should withstand the test of time, its legacy is marred by Garner's decision to make Romans 1:3–4 rather than Galatians 4:4–7 the lynchpin of his exposition. Add to that the very real possibility that Garner has read too much into Romans 1:3–4 and we are left gleaning from the volume what we can.

In seeking to, there are questions Garner does not address. For example, how does Paul's reading of the Old Testament sonship tradition in terms of adoption comport with Old Testament references to Israel's birth (e.g. Exod 4:22–23)? What are the hermeneutical guidelines for mixing into Paul's redemptive-historical reading of adoption elements of the practice of Roman adoption (pp. 36ff., 41)? How does the adoption model function metaphorically if it bespeaks both a union and a forensic declaration (pp. 71, 99; Ch. 8)? Since adoption reveals the union to be filial, how do we do justice to other Pauline pictures of union

with Christ (e.g. Eph 5:22–33)? How may we maintain the integrity of justification and sanctification if they are but subsets of adoption (p. 306)? Is Garner's denial of the logical sequence of justification-adoption consistent with the Westminster Standards (p. 304)? If not, his methodological divergence from the Westminster Standards confirms that the new wine of the redemptive-historical approach to adoption calls for new wine skins (the methodological and attitudinal renewal of Puritan/Presbyterian systematics). Garner disavows this constructive form of Calvinism (p. 31fn.42), yet his volume, to a degree, presents the case for it, and supplies a springboard from which adoption may be recovered and Westminster Calvinism renewed.