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IS THERE ROOM IN THE INN?: VISITING ADOPTION IN HERMAN BAVINCK'S *ORDO SALUTIS*

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ABSTRACT: In the theological retrieval of neo-Calvinism, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) is the golden child, but does he ere? This article explores a misnomer in Bavinck's theology, that of adoption within the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). Bavinck's doctrine of adoption seems to be misplaced because he writes of adoption as *juridical* (*RD* IV, 219, 226-227), a term that belongs properly to justification. Yet he draws upon adoption to illustrate sanctification. The two doctrines, justification and sanctification, are of course intimately linked in his system, but Bavinck either misdeploys or mis-categorizes adoption. In light of Bavinck, placing it in the *juridical* category, but drawing upon it to illustrate sanctification it remains unclear why it remains *juridical*. First, the article explores the main contours of Bavinck's *ordo salutis establishing* the main categories and ordering, this will lay hold to the problematic placement of adoption. From there, a constructive alternative is set forth, that of the category of *relational*.

KEYWORDS: Ordo Salutis, Adoption, Herman Bavinck, Relational

Introduction

This issue of *Perichoresis Theological Journal* seeks to highlight the burgeoning field of Bavinck studies and draw attention to the developing breadth of the field. In this issue readers will find the work of Jessica Joustra, Gayle Doornbos, Sarah Killam Crosby, Israel José Guererro Levia, and Alec Simpson, alongside our own contributions. While not the cornucopia of Barth studies, Bavinck studies has cultivated its own feast in recent years. The main impetus for this rich harvest appears to be— on

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the side of Bavinck— the generative nature of Bavinck's organic-yet-mechanical, reformed-yet-orthodox, and irenic-yet-whetted theology and — on the side of publishing — the extension of Bavinck via translation in recent years (most prominently Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish).

Jessica Joustra's contribution considers Bavinck's approach to incorporating the imitation of Christ into his ethics, particularly in his unfinished *Reformed ethics*. Bavinck's distinct understanding and application of Christ's imitation is interpreted and illuminated alongside his contemporary, Wilhelm Geesink (1854-1921). Despite both Bavinck and Geesink crafting Reformed ethics with shared methodological commitments an analysis of their views on the first commandment reveals nuanced differences. Joustra reveals that Bavinck and Geesink diverge in their reliance on the imitation of Christ as a guiding principle for Christian living. Through an exploration of Bavinck's ethical methodology and an examination of both Bavinck and Geesink's exposition of the first commandment, this essay underscores the pivotal role of the imitation of Christ in Bavinck's ethics as a norm, setting his application of the commandment's duties apart from his contemporaries.

Gayle Doornbos' article importantly expands on the work of Nathaniel Sutanto and James Eglinton by exploring two less-explored aspects within Bavinck's articulation of the *vestigia*: encompassing the importance of triads in his assimilation of the *vestigia* tradition and a succinct analysis of how Bavinck aligns his *vestigia* utilization with his broader comprehension of creation as divine, relative self-communication. Although key aspects like the Creator/creature distinction and Bavinck's doctrine of divine incomprehensibility are acknowledged in contemporary discourse, prior analyses has passed by or simplified the doctrines Bavinck uses to carefully avoid equating God with creation. This essay builds importantly on pre-existing scholarship and demands careful attention be paid to primary, in addition to secondary sources on Bavinck.

Israel José Guerrero Leiva's contribution introduces the theology of a somewhat overlooked figure in the nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed tradition: Jan Bavinck (1826-1909), who happens to be the father of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). The exploration of his theology revolves around his definition of piety (*vroomheid* or *godzaligheid*), a foundational theme in the Reformed tradition. To underscore the relevance of piety, a brief overview of its role in the theology of John Calvin (1509-64) and the *Nadere Reformatie* is provided, and establishes the case for delving into Jan Bavinck's insights on the nature and application of godliness. Following an analysis of some primary sources, the argument put forth is that Jan Bavinck's theology of piety can be characterized as experiential and holistic. In this sense, it serves as a connective link between the *praxis pietatis* of old Calvinism, exemplified by Calvin and

the *Nadere Reformatie* theologians, and the neo-Calvinism embodied by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and his son Herman.

Sarah Killam Crosby's article demonstrates that Bavinck aimed to present his theological understanding of Christ's work as a corrective to the prevailing approaches to atonement theology during his era. She contends that Bavinck endeavored to offer an interpretation that mirrors the "multifaceted" nature of Scripture and aspired to recover and extend historical Christian theology, particularly the insights of figures such as Anselm and Calvin. Killam Crosby's examination of Bavinck's atonement doctrine enriches our understanding of his theology and its relevance to conceptualizations of Christ's person and work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, demonstrating Bavinck's resonance and fruitfulness for modern constructive approaches to atonement.

The final article, by Alec Simpson., considers critiques of Protestantism articulated by Romanian Eastern Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae, emphasizing the presence of over-generalizations in his assessments. Through a critical examination of Staniloae's contentions in conversation with neo-Calvinist theologian Bavinck, this essay seeks to unveil potential misinterpretations in Staniloae's evaluations, particularly regarding Protestant soteriology. Staniloae posits that Protestantism embodies dualism, anthropological pessimism, sacrament denigration, and a certain indifference to sin, among other concerns. The argument presented here suggests that some of these claims expose a lack of serious engagement with, and perhaps understanding of, the diverse spectrum within the Protestant tradition. Conversely, the paper also assesses some of Bavinck's assertions related to Palamist thought. In the end, the analysis affirms that several of Staniloae's criticisms of Protestantism are misinformed, just as Bavinck's critiques of Palamist thought lack the necessary nuance and depth. By fostering a theological dialogue between these two scholars, this paper aspires to cultivate a deeper appreciation for both traditions and stimulate further meaningful discourse.

In our own contribution, we strive to highlight what we consider to be a misstep in Bavinck's system. Bavinck's treatment of adoption introduces an intriguing nuance that warrants careful consideration. The point of interest is in relation to Bavinck's positioning of adoption as an aspect of justification. The intriguing connection we bring out is that Bavinck views adoption as both *juridical* (fitting with justification) and *ethical* (out of accord with his understanding of justification). In his articulation, adoption is categorized as *juridical* (Bavinck 2008: 219, 226-227). Curiously, he leverages the concept of adoption (our status as children of God) to illustrate sanctification even while categorizing it is an aspect of justification. Within Bavinck's overarching framework, the interplay between justification and sanctification is undeniably inter-

connected, yet there emerges a somewhat confusing deployment and categorization of adoption. This divergent placement seems to misalign adoption's essence.

This juxtaposition prompts a query: if adoption is primarily harnessed to illustrate sanctification, why persist in its classification as juridical? To unravel this oddity, this article embarks on a journey through the primary contours of Bavinck's *ordo salutis*, which endeavors to establish a solid foundation for the primary categories and their sequential arrangement, therefore casting a spotlight on the intriguing placement of adoption. Through this process, an alternative proposition emerges — one that seeks to introduce a constructive shift in categorization for neo-Calvinists emulating Bavinck. This proposal entails recasting adoption within the *relational* sphere. By realigning adoption as a *relational* concept, it resonates more harmoniously with its role in illustrating sanctification, while also maintaining the legal and *juridical* overtones offering a potential resolution to the conundrum previously presented. By embracing an alternative approach that positions adoption within the relational context, we pave the way for a more cohesive interpretation, one that seamlessly dovetails with its function in elucidating the transformative journey of sanctification and the significant legal implications of justification.

Justification in Bavinck's *Ordo Salutis*

In neo-Calvinist arrangements of the *ordo-salutis* the ordering typically receives second-shrift to the main attraction of the grace of Jesus Christ (see Parker 2023: 110-120). The *ordo salutis* refers to the proper theological ordering of the benefits of Christ. Bavinck's exploration of the *ordo salutis* commences with a fundamental acknowledgment of the Triune nature of salvation. This construction is not out of accord with other theologians. Like Bavinck, Turretin saw adoption as an aspect of justification. Even closer to Bavinck's time, Abraham Kuyper saw adoption as a subset of regeneration and justification (Kuyper 1900: 361-366). While in Reformed circles there are only slight differences in the ordering of the *ordo*, this essay will explore one that we believe is significant, namely the location of "adoption" in the *ordo*. For Bavinck, adoption fall into the category of justification. This is not uncommon in the Reformed tradition.

Although other thinkers have collapsed adoption into justification, one has to wonder if there is a better way to approach the doctrine of adoption. The Heidelberg catechism has a specific question related to adoption (Q 33). The Westminster Confession of Faith has a chapter on the doctrine of adoption (WCF XII). Does placing adoption as little more than a subset of justification in the *ordo* do justice to the doctrine? We want to suggest that, in fact, adoption deserves its own consideration in the *ordo* even while it may not fit neatly into the *ordo* logically. To that end, we will offer a reconstructed view of adoption's place in the *ordo* that both engages Bavinck's

understanding but also critiques it. In order to make this argument, we will consider justification and then move to adoption. What will be shown is that while justification deals with a legal question in our redemption, adoption considers the relational problem in our redemption. It will also be shown that reordering the *ordo* this way allows the problem of guilt and isolation due to sin to be more clearly addressed.

It's crucial to grasp that salvation is the work of the Triune God, in both the acquisition and application of redemption. While the entire process is the divine operation of the one true God, the corollary to this doctrine is that it is appropriate to ascribe particular actions to each member of the Trinity (Vidu 2021, 91-125). The *ad extra* missions mirror the *ad intra* processions of the Trinity, just as the Word precedes the Spirit in both the acts of creation and re-creation. As Bavinck highlights that dogmatics unfold the *ordo salutis* as outlined by God's word, a pivotal point emerges: the benefits of salvation stem from the covenant of grace, firmly established in the covenant of redemption, yet actualized in time (Bavinck 2022: 109-111).

The initial facet of the work of redemption begins with the Father's election (Bavinck 2006: 523). Bavinck is careful to note that in the Reformed tradition, all the benefits of grace are realized only in so far as there is a bond between the mediator and 'those who were given by the Father in eternity, in election' (Bavinck 2006: 523). Bavinck's point here is that all the benefits of grace which are communicated to the elect are theirs because those benefits are grounded in the *pactum salutis*. For Bavinck before one can begin to consider an *ordo*, attention needs to be paid to the mystical union between Christ and the elect. It is the presupposition of this union that leads to imputation and the granting of the other benefits of grace. This union is objectively established in the *pactum salutis*. It becomes the Christian's possession subjectively in their own time. Bavinck explained it this way:

> He could do this precisely because he already was in communion with them and was their guarantor and mediator. And the whole church, comprehended in him as its head, has objectively been crucified, has died, been resurrected, and glorified with him. All the benefits of grace therefore lie prepared and ready for the church in the person of Christ. All is finished: God has been reconciled; nothing remains to be added from the side of humans. Atonement, forgiveness, justification, the mystical union, sanctification, glorification, and so on—they do not come into being after and as a result of faith but are objectively, actively present in Christ. They are the fruits solely of his suffering and dying, and they are appropriated on our part by faith (Bavinck 2006: 523).

Bavinck's concern is for one to recognize first that Christ is the justified one. The Christian's justification is grounded in Christ's justification. This role extends from

his prophetic, priestly, and kingly activities, continuing post-exaltation as the Father and the Son send the Spirit to bestow the benefits of communion with the Triune God. The *ordo salutis* culminates in the 'applicatory grace of the Holy Spirit' with the acquisition of redemption previously accomplished (Bavinck 2006: 572). All the blessings applied by the Spirit, originating from Christ's acquisition, can be encapsulated in the term "grace." Grace is the thread through which the intricate tapestry of salvation is woven from, through, and to God (Bavinck 2022: 145). The treasures of grace are innumerable as the believer communes with Christ.

The entire spectrum of Christ's benefits unfurls within the Church through the Holy Spirit's application. Bavinck addresses the divine interplay of Word and Spirit; Christ, the Mediator, encapsulates all blessings within himself, requiring a profound connection to commune with these benefits, and the Spirit follows after applying and drawing from the abundance of Christ. Christ acquires all the benefits of the one true God and the Holy Spirit distributes them. God's children are then brought into most intimate communion with the Father on account of the Son through the Spirit.

Bavinck underscores the organic interconnection of these benefits, meticulously distributed in a theologically sequential manner. The ensuing benefits are grouped according to the effects of sin: guilt, pollution, and misery. These are counterbalanced by restoration with God, renewal in God's image, and preservation unto our inheritance, which is also mirrored for Bavinck by Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. The Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, lives out this threefold office in union with Christ. Bavinck's narrative occasionally oscillates between Christ's person and the Holy Spirit's application. The first set of benefits, illuminated by the Holy Spirit and embraced through faith, directs our focus to the historical Christ and the restoration of his people Christ's act as prophet. The second set, guided by the Spirit's regenerative work, draws our gaze to the exalted Lord in heaven, who intercedes as the high priest renewing us in his image. The third set, propels our anticipation of Christ's, even now, and then greater, triumphant rule over his kingdom as we are preserved by the Holy Spirit.

In Bavinck's treatment he closes considering four clusters: calling (which includes regeneration, faith, and repentance), justification (which includes adoption), sanctification, and glorification (cf. Bavinck 2022: 146). Bavinck carefully navigates theological nuances, and he articulates an intriguing integration of Christ's threefold office as a framework for comprehending not only Christ's work but also the benefits imparted to believers with a profound connection to Christ's person and mission.

Bavinck offers an integrative analysis of the person and work of Christ and soteriology. He is able to bring together both the objective and subjective experience of redemption by connecting it to a wholistic Christology. Thus, in his exploration

of justification, he is able to deal with both the objective fact of justification and the subjective experience of it. After developing these theological connections, Bavinck turns his attention to the subjective experience of justification in the believer. In Bavinck's construction, the righteousness of Christ is presented as an objective gift. He confirms then here righteousness as a gift which puts on display, what Calvin called the "gratuitous" nature of God (Bavinck 2008: 200). Following this he transitions to considering the subjective acceptance of this gift of righteousness.

This gift, however, is received by faith. That is to say that faith is the subjective side of the justification. Whereas justification is objective it is God's gift of Christ righteousness, faith is subjective it is our receiving and resting in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. Bavinck defined faith as: 'not merely an intellectual act of accepting the witness of the apostles concerning Christ, but also a personal relation, a spiritual bond, with Christ who is now seated at the right hand of the power of God' (Bavinck 2008: 121).

In this definition, it is important to note two things: (1) that Bavinck perceives a "relational" component to the subjective experience of justification, and (2) that Bavinck does not articulate an *ethical* aspect to justification; it is *forensic* or *juridical*. God acts as judge. As judge, God condemns the guilt and acquits the righteous. In Bavinck's account of justification, the righteousness of God is revealed in Christ, the righteous one. That righteousness is put in contrast to person's own righteousness (this righteousness is "works" for Bavinck). Those that put their faith in the righteousness of God as seen in Christ receive justification as a gift from God because God put forward Christ as an atoning sacrifice. The righteousness that is revealed in Christ not just a judiciary righteousness but also an acquitting righteousness for all those who have faith in Christ. Faith, however, is not the grounds of justification but the tool. The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ (Bavinck 2008: 209-211). Therefore, justification according to Bavinck:

> [B]rings out that God, though according to the law he had to condemn us, yet in Christ has had different thoughts about us, generously forgives all our sins without charging us with anything, and accords to us divine compassion and fatherly sympathy in place of wrath and punishment. Justification, therefore, is not an ethical but a juridical (forensic) act; nor can it be anything other than that because all evidence of favor presupposes favor, and every benefit of grace presupposes grace. (Bavinck 2008: 206)

It is important to keep in mind that Bavinck saw justification as *juridical*. Additionally, above he straightforwardly denies that justification is ethical. To add to this

confusion he writes of the relational nature of justification. This brings to the surface the inconsistency when considering how he deals with adoption.

Having explored Bavinck's doctrine of justification and faith, it is important to note that Bavinck sees justification as objective and definitive. It is a gift. It is also intimately connected to the covenant of redemption. The Christian is a justified because the Son is the justified one. Faith for Bavinck is the subjective aspect to justification. It is the Christian's receiving and resting in the work of Christ. This is not the grounds of justification but the instrument. It is a tool in the hand of God to justify; the organ not the source (Bavinck 2003: 565). Faith is the spiritual bond that connects us to the Christ, the justified one (Bavinck 2003: 614). These distinctions are important to consider as the essay now moves to considering the doctrine of adoption. It is here that we will develop the argument that properly speaking, the doctrine of adoption deserves its own place in the *ordo* and functions better as the hinge between justification and sanctification rather than as a subordinate aspect of justification.

Adoption in Bavinck's *Ordo Salutis*

Thus far, we have examined Bavinck's location of the adoption as a subset of justification. Then we examined Bavinck's discussion of justification noting particularly that for Bavinck all the benefits of salvation are objectively secured in the covenant of redemption. In justification, Christ is united to his people and in him God forgives their sins and imputes Christ's righteousness. This is a *juridical* act not an *ethical* one. It has also been shown that while the work of Christ on behalf of the Christian is objective, it is received subjectively by faith. Faith is not a work that grounds redemption, but the tool which God uses to justify sinners. In this section we turn our attention to adoption. We will first show that Bavinck's position of adoption, as a subset or element or benefit of justification, is incongruent with Bavinck's own reasoning concerning justification. Then we will argue that the connection between justification and sanctification is clarified if one gives adoption a distinct place in the *ordo*. Finally, in the conclusion we will consider a few theological implications for placing adoption as the hinge between justification and sanctification.

Before critiquing Bavinck's positioning of adoption as an "element" of justification, it is important to note the ways in which Bavinck's explication of the doctrine is helpful. Early in his reflections he mentions that while the Old Testament already has a concept of "sonship," the New Testament deepens this understanding. The New Testament brings out the fatherhood of God to believers 'not in a theocratic but in an ethical sense' (Bavinck 2008: 226). That is to say, in the New Testament the idea of God's fatherhood and the believers' sonship is tied to the hope that one day believers will see God and be perfected. Bavinck indicates that as adopted sons of God, believers enjoy a new relationship with God. Their position is the same as that of Christ's,

they are sons. This adoption in Christ is sealed by the Spirit, who is the guarantee of their redemption and of the inheritance promised to them (Bavinck 2008: 227). Bavinck continues that this adoption brings with it the fatherly love of God (Bavinck 2008: 227). It must be made clear that regarding the content of Bavinck's theology of adoption, we have no issue. The issue comes in the place that Bavinck has located it.

Recall Bavinck has already noted that justification is a *juridical* act not an *ethical* one (Bavinck 2008: 206). The incongruence that Bavinck develops is in this area. If justification is not ethical, then adoption/sonship cannot be ethical either. If adoption/sonship are elements of justification it would follow that they too must be *juridical* and not ethical.

To draw out the incongruence we attend to the three places where Bavinck attends most explicitly to adoption in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (for passing references see Bavinck 2003: 243, 473, 592-594, 596 ; 2004: 147, 274, 312, 347, 353, 540; 2006: 392, 451-452, 457, 469, 522, 552; 2008: 89-90, 179, 186, 196, 224, 226-227, 235, 242, 251, 253, 451, 494, 721). In the first instance, the various treasures of Christ are placed into categories, and therein adoption finds its home. The benefits are listed as *juridical* (forgiveness of sins, justification, adoption as children, the right to eternal life and inheritance, and redemption), *mystical* (crucified, buried, raised, and seated with Christ in heaven), *ethical* (regeneration, being made alive, sanctification, being washed, cleansed, sprinkled in body, soul, and spirit), *moral* (imitation of Christ), *economic* (fulfilment of the Old Testament covenant, inauguration of the new Covenant, freedom from the law, the cancellation of debt, the breaking down of ethnic walls, unity in Christ), and the *physical* (victory over the world, death, sin, and Satan) (Bavinck 2006: 451-452). Initially, the reader is introduced to adoption as a *juridical* benefit.

The second instance occurs in the section engaging with the doctrine of justification (Bavinck 2008: 223-227). In this section, Bavinck narrates what "elements" belong to justification. In his narration, he links forgiveness of sins and adoption as children with justification. He notes that some such as Francis Turretin include adoption along with justification (cf. Turretin 1994, 666-669), some such as Peter M. Vermigli prefer to consider adoption as 'a fruit of justification' (Bavinck 1911: 239; Bavinck 2008: 224; cf. Vermigli 2003, 187). Bavinck reasserts that forgiveness of sins — past, present, and future — belongs properly to justification despite the objections of Rome and antinomianism. It is obvious that Bavinck sees this problem because he stated, 'this ethical "sonship," especially as it occurs in John, does not belong in this chapter but must be discussed in connection with regeneration and sanctification' (Bavinck 2008: 226). It appears Bavinck may consider "sonship" to be an element of sanctification, while adoption is an element of justification. Although nowhere does

he divide or categorize adoption/sonship like so. However, this does not solve the issue. Bavinck already says that adoption/sonship are elements of justification. How can they be elements of justification and maintain an *ethical* edge when the ethical belongs to sanctification?

From here Bavinck returns to the second element linked with justification that of adoption as children (see also Bavinck 2022: 163). He cites Galatians 4:5, Daniel 9:24, Acts 26:18, and Revelation 1:5-6 as reasons for linking adoption to justification. However, his next theological maneuver introduces confusion. He argues that God is now the Father of believers in an *ethical* sense and as such believers are and become the children of God. (Bavinck 2008: 225-226). Following this, he returns to his assertion that adoption is *juridical*.

The most significant line occurs in the next paragraph: 'Justification is able to produce all these splendid fruits because along with active justification it includes passive justification, and by the testimony of the Holy Spirit gives believers the consciousness and assurance that their sins are personally forgiven them (*fides specialis*)' (Bavinck 1911: 243; Bavinck 2008: 227). In this sense, adoption is the result or fruit of justification. This language of "fruit" should recall for us the language Bavinck uses to describe Vermigli above, that certain benefits flow out or properly follow justification. In other words, the individual is now the son of God experientially, as a benefit of justification. There is a subjective element to justification that is captured by adoption.

In the first instance Bavinck, seems to have in mind adoption as *juridical*, and in the second instance adoption as a fruit of justification. In the third instance, Bavinck picks up describing adoption's *ethical* sense. He states, 'We are children of God not only by adoption, but also by regeneration (John 1:12-12; 1 John 1:3)' (Bavinck 2008: 235). This appears to be a distinct kind of adoption. After all, Bavinck categorizes regeneration under the ethical (see Bavinck 2006: 451-452). Herein we have conceptual space for talking about adoption in a different manner. In third instance, then Bavinck facilitates space for talking about being children of God by or as the result of regeneration.

This incongruence in Bavinck's thought is not a major critique of Bavinck's *ordo* it just leads to questions. It seems that there is a sense in which Bavinck does not have a proper place, or at least an organized place, for adoption in his *ordo*. He does a form of double-talk, while he says that it is an element of justification, he recognizes that the ethical implications make this untenable. On the other hand, he wants to deploy adoption under the ethical, while maintaining its *juridical* categorization. This conclusion leads him to say that the ethical implication of adoption/sonship is not part of justification but are considered connected to regeneration and sanctification. This

is the ethical nature of adoption. Briefly, Bavinck understands sanctification to be twofold, it is a gift in which the believer is passive (we are children of God), but it is also gift, by which the believer is active (we *become* the children of God) (Bavinck 2008: 255, 287; see also Bavinck 2022: 174).

Perhaps an alternative reading of Bavinck could be that he is splitting adoption and sonship in two and considering them as two distinct graces of redemption and therefore categorize it as both *juridical* and *ethical*, a minor overstep that could have been corrected in Vol. III. This is the solution of Berkhof's with moral sonship (*ethical*) and sonship by adoption (*juridical*) (Berkhof 2012: 515-516). We envisioned the potential of this above with "sonship" as an element of sanctification and "adoption" as an element of justification. However, this seems odd, as it would create a break between two concepts that are themselves inextricably linked. In that all sons of God, apart from th Second Person of the Trinity, are adopted sons of God. Thus, sonship and adoption are two ways of speaking about the same thing. The Christian is a son by grace, not by nature. Thus, in the *ordo* one cannot make a distinction between sonship and adoption. Bavinck's approach to adoption/sonship demonstrates an underdeveloped aspect of his *ordo*. It is our contention that it would be better to consider adoption as a distinct *loci* that functions as the hinge between justification and sanctification.

Re-constructing Bavinck's *Ordo Salutis:* Adoption as the *Relational* Hinge Between Justification and Sanctification

J.I. Packer is famous for having stated that 'adoption is… *the highest privilege that the gospel offers*; higher even than justification' (Packer 1988: 230). Adoption is 'the apex of grace and privilege' (Murray 1955: 144). It could be said that, for Paul, adoption is the pinnacle of the Christian life. Whereas in justification God acts toward people as judge, in adoption God acts toward people as Father. In adoption, Christ becomes the Christian's brother and they are able to call out to God with the same words as their elder brother, 'Abba, Father' (Mk 14:36; cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

There is a wrong-headed sense in which one can approach the doctrine of adoption/sonship as little more than an analogy or metaphor for redemption. However, Sanders is right when he notes that adoption is based on a reality. 'The Christian experience of adoption to be children of God is founded on reality' (Sanders 2017: 265). This truth harkens back to Bavinck's assertion that all the benefits of redemption find their grounding in the covenant of redemption. Because in the covenant of redemption, believers are already in communion with Christ, the natural Son of God, and their adoption is secure in this mystical union. Because Christ the natural Son of God by eternal generation, the believer can be a son of God not by nature but by grace.

The Heidelberg Catechism notes this in question 33: 'Why is Christ called the "only begotten Son" of God, since we are also the children of God? A. Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for his sake.' Calvin's *Geneva Catechism* (A.46) states it similarly:

> That we are the sons of God we have not from nature, but from adoption and grace only, in other words, because God puts us in that place (John 1:1), but the Lord Jesus who was begotten of the substance of the Father, and is of one essence with the Father, (Ephesians 1:3,) is by the best title called the only Son of God, because he alone is his Son by nature, (Hebrews 1:1.)

It is the reality of the sonship of the eternal Son which extends to the reality of the believer's sonship. All of this is why Paul in Eph 1:3-6 can say that the believer is predestined in love before the foundation of the world for adoption.

Bavinck is right to note the *juridical* (forensic) nature of adoption. It is a legal moving from one family to another. In the language of Calvin, 'God puts us in that place.' The key that distinguishes adoption from justification is that while the metaphor of justification is a penal one, the language of adoption is *familial*. This distinction is significant and cannot be minimized. Burke observes that it is this concept of transfer from one family to another that allows adoption to take on a subjective aspect. Whereas justification or propitiation are primarily objective aspects of redemption in Christ, adoption emphases a subjective aspect. 'But if certain metaphors, such as propitiation, underscore the objective side of salvation, other metaphors, including *huiothesia*, tend to focus more on what happens to us – that is, they look at salvation from the *subjective* or experiential side and focus more on the result of what is achieved for the people of God' (Burke 2006: 40). Calvin acknowledges this subjective aspect in his Catechism (A.365) when tending to the distinction between baptism and the Lord's Supper: 'By baptism the Lord *adopts* us and brings us into his Church, *so as thereafter to regard us as part of his household*. After he has admitted us among the number of his people, he testifies by the Supper that he takes a continual interest in nourishing us.' As those who are adopted, God takes a particular interest in nourishing his church as members of his household.

The experiential side of that forensic transfer from one family to another connects adoption closely to justification. Therefore, Bavinck is right to see the connection between justification and adoption — there is a *juridical* sense to adoption. Just like with justification this is not a legal fiction. The Spirit genuinely gives the title of son to all whom the Father adopts in the Son. Once again this is not a sonship 'by natural descent or merit,' but is 'a sonship always dependent on God's free grace' (Schweizer 1972: 8:399). There is a sense in which what adoption does is address both the fo-

rensic and the subjective aspect of salvation in Christ. It engages the "psychological aspect" of dogmatics. Adoption answers Bavinck's call that 'we may acknowledge that dogmatics, especially in the *ordo salutis* ("order of salvation"), must become more psychological and must reckon more fully with religious experience' (Bavinck 2018: 168). As Calvin states (A.250), "…if we are sons, God animates and instigates us by his Spirit, so that we doubt not to betake ourselves to him in a familiar manner, as to a father." The subjective aspect of salvation is captured in adoption.

The aspect of adoption that allows it to function as the hinge between justification and sanctification is that aspect that makes it sit awkwardly in Bavinck's articulation of the *ordo salutis*. It is our contention that adoption ought to be envisioned as straddling and facilitating the relationship between justification and sanctification, Ridderbos is right when he says, 'this adoption of sons must make believers live in the true relation of sonship. They must put aside slavish fear of God (Rom. 8:15), and ever and again may call on him as their Father in the communion of the Spirit (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6)' (Ridderbos 1975: 201). It is the work of the Spirit in guiding the adopted sons of God in their relationship that leads to them to put to death the deeds of the flesh and living as sons of God. '*The guidance the Spirit provides is that of clear-cut opposition to sin*. To claim to experience the ministry of Spirit of adoption and yet to dally with sin is to be utterly deceived. The Spirit of adoption is the same Person as the Spirit of holiness of whom Paul had earlier spoken (Rom 1:4). *His presence brings a new attitude to sin*. Where that new attitude is present, he is present' (Ferguson 1981: 88).

This ethical edge to adoption, thus, firmly moves it out of the realm of justification, but the *juridical* side places it outside of sanctification. Adoption sits between these twin graces. Interestingly, this is what the Westminster Confession of Faith does with the doctrine. Adopted sons of God are removed from one family and placed in a new family. Or as Calvin states (A.262), 'God regards us as sons… as we are members of Christ.' This new family bears with it not only privileges but also responsibilities. Thus, adoption is not merely forensic but also *ethical*. Burke says it well, 'While as God's adopted sons we might still bear some of the marks of what we once were, it is with the help of the Holy Spirit that we must daily and continually starve the sinful nature' (Burke 2006: 146).

We have shown that adoption is both *forensic* and *ethical*. However, we stated at the beginning of this essay that it is also *relational*. Putting forth, adoption/sonship as its own distinct relational category within the *ordo salutis* makes conceptual space for the benefit to be equally levied in relation to justification and sanctification. Flowing out of justification the *juridical* character of adoption/sonship might be acknowledged — while not capitulating justification into the *ethical*. On the other side, the

ethical implication of adoption/sonship can likewise be established as the benefit of adoption is levied in relation to sanctification. Nonetheless, as its own category within the *ordo salutis* we may avoid envisioning the *ethical* output of sanctification as having to do with our justification before God. Moreover, it allows for a more proper balancing of the objective and subjective experience of redemption in Christ.

This gets at the heart of Bavinck's interpretative lens, which may be spotted in *Magnalia Dei* (Bavinck 1909: 527-528). There he notes how the Gospel of John speaks of sonship in the vein of becoming like God (*ethical*), while the Paul speaks of adoption with legal overtones (*juridical*). This blessing belongs to God's people as a covenant benefit and is acquired by Christ and applied by the Spirit:

> But now Christ has come in the fullness of time, placed Himself under the law, and bore its curse, so that He might redeem those who were under the law, and that we might receive adoption as sons, 4:4, 5. Christ has redeemed us from the bondage of the law and sin through His death, so that we now belong to another, namely, Him who has been raised from the dead, Rom. 7:1–4, and have been adopted by God as His children and heirs, Gal. 4:7. As such, they have also received the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit that befits this sonship; through that Spirit, they are conscious of their sonship, receive the boldness to address God as their Father, and are continually led, Rom. 8:14–16, Gal. 4:6. Indeed, just as this adoption as sons is rooted in God's eternal purpose, Eph. 1:5, it also extends far into the future; for although believers are already children and have all the rights of heirs, Rom. 8:17, Gal. 4:7, they still eagerly await, along with all creation, the revelation of the children of God, the freedom of their glory, the adoption as children, namely, the redemption of their bodies, Rom. 8:18–23. It is only in the resurrection of the dead, when the body will be completely redeemed, that the adoption as children will be completed (Bavinck 1909: 528).

Through Christ's life and death, he liberated us from the law and sin, aligning us with Him who rose from the dead, and we are now acknowledged as God's children and heirs (Galatians 4:7) to live as those sons and daughters (John 3:5). This adoption, grounded in God's eternal plan, not only bestows current sonship but also anticipates the future revelation of the children of God in the Kingdom of God. As such, adoption is best suited as a *relational* category within the *ordo-salutis* that may be deployed toward both *juridical* and *ethical* ends.

Conclusion

In conclusion, neo-Calvinism's dogmatic golden child, Bavinck's placement of adoption within his *ordo* salutis is scrutinized above. While recognizing the richness of Bavinck's theology of adoption, particularly emphasizing the believers new rela-

tionship with God and the fatherly and familial relationship this entails, our critical exploration raises questions about Bavinck's *ordo salutis* categories. Bavinck's incongruence surfaces in his linkage of adoption with justification, *juridical* act, while also recognizing adoptions ethical implications. The ethical aspect of adoption creates tensions when justification is explicitly put forth as strictly juridical.

The proposal for a constructive alternative suggests placing adoption within the category of *relational*, which would sit then between juridical and ethical, seeking a nuanced understanding of adoption that facilitates both a *juridicial* and ethical reality as a hinge. Adoption, as a *juridical* and ethical reality, connects believers to the familial context of God's family. The ethical nature of adoption becomes crucial in bridging the gap between the objective aspects of justification and the subjective experiential aspects of sanctification. Moreover, this aligns with Bavinck's call for a more psychologically attuned *ordo salutis*. The article highlights both the objective and subjective aspects of redemption, emphasizing the experiential side of salvation.

It is to this relational side that many of the theological implications of adoption are connected. Adoption changes the Christian's relationship to God and God's vocation concerning the Christian. In justification God stands as judge. In adoption God's vocation toward the redeemed is as father. In adoption God becomes the father of the Christian and the Christian is no longer a stranger and alien, but an adopted son in the family of God. In the words of Calvin (A.12), "That each of us should set it down in his mind that God loves him, and is willing to be a Father, and the author of salvation to him.

It is this new relationship that ties to the ethical implications. First, as adopted sons, the New Testament authors call the Christian to be like their father, to grow in godliness (Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:4-6; cf. Ps. 68:5-6 and James 1:27). This call to be like their father is closely connected to the call to be like their elder brother, Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:20; Gal. 4:5-7; 1 John 3:2). Because the Christian has been adopted into the family of God, they are to bear a family resemblance. More than this, they are not to bear the name of God in vain. The Heidelberg Catechism notes this parallel on Lord's Day 12, Jesus is called "Christ" and the faithful "Christians" as those who share in his anointing. While the New Testament authors are quick to show how the Gospel deals with the shame of sin, they are also interested in showing that there is an appropriate place for shame in the Christian life. The deploying the concept of bringing shame on the name and thus, being shamed because not living in accord with the name that the Christian has been given is important (see also Bavinck 2019: 67-69 and Bavinck 2024: 105-106). However, the ethical drive of this is to neither be ashamed of the Gospel nor to have the Son ashamed to call the Christian a brother (Heb 2:11) is the flip side of this shame.

The second important relational implication of adoption is related to being brought into the family of God. From the very Old Testament to the New Testament, one can observe that God is the "father to the fatherless" and he "sets the lonely in families" (Ps 68:8). The implications of the relational aspect of adoption is that God is the father to those who are orphans. The church, therefore, is a family of families. It is a place where the waters of baptism are thicker than the blood that flows through our veins. There is a sense in which every person baptized into the church is not their own, but part of the community of people that cares for them and loves them as a brother or sister. The church, as God's family, should function as the paradigm for the ideal family (Eph 3:15). The church should be the place where the families learn what it means to be family. Added to this, in a time where loneliness has become an epidemic, because God is the father to the fatherless and sets the lonely in families, the church should offer an answer to the question of loneliness in society. It is the place where the lonely are set in families.

Third, and finally, the ethical implication of being adopted as sons of God is that the church, care for the orphan. Historically this has been a major point of emphasis in the life of the church. The church has cared for the orphans in society. James 1:27 asserts that caring for the orphan is an aspect of pure religion. However, the logic in this is stunning when one notices it. James makes this argument because God is the Father (v. 27) of those who he has brought forth by his word (v. 18) and this Father has given good gifts to them (v. 17). The reason that the Christian is to care for the orphan and widow is because before they were brought into God's family as his children, they were orphans, lonely, and vulnerable. This means that should do what they can to care for the orphan and the vulnerable.

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