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Pauline Adoption: a Sociological Approach

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Introduction

The expression *huiothesia*, 'adoption as sons,' is unique to the corpus Paulinum (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph.1:5), occurring nowhere else in the biblical (including the LXX) or Jewish literature of the period. It is a term, which has often been researched along more traditional lines such as Christology[1] (i.e. 'in what way is the sonship of Christ different to the Christian's adoption as son?', Gal. 4:4,5), soteriology[2] (i.e. 'how is the death of God's Son related to the believer's adoption as son?', Gal. 4:5) and eschatology[3] (i.e. 'what is the relationship between the two eschatological gifts of adoption and the Spirit?', Rom. 8:15). Undoubtedly such questions are important, but it is a matter of debate as to whether our understanding of this important Pauline expression is *fully*[4] exhausted by these conven-

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1   e.g. J. I. Cook, 'The Concept of Adoption in the Theology of Paul'. in J. I. Cook (ed.), *Saved by Hope: Essays in honour of Richard C. Oudersluys* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1978), 131-44 (esp. 141ff.)

2   e.g. S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981, 315-19 and 329).

3   e.g. J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975, esp. 307-17); see also the present author's article, 'Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8', EvQ 70 (1998), 311-24.

4   As long ago as 1923 T. Whaling lamented the fact that '*a complete and well-rounded* . . . presentation of the biblical meaning of *υἱοθεσία* or of the . . . significance of adoption is still a desideratum' (emphasis added); see 'Adoption', *Princeton Theological Review* 21:2 (1923), 223-35. More recently N. R. Petersen (*Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative Thought World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 275 n.25), who focuses on the fictive-kinship relations between Paul, Philemon and Onesimus, echoes this same sentiment when he states, 'Commentators usually observe that this. . . term is used "religiously", but I know of no study that has dealt with adoption in terms of its *full role in Paul's thought*' (emphasis added).

tional approaches.

In addition to the above issues are the equally pressing, and so far as we are aware overlooked, social questions which need to be asked in relation to this term. Given the fact that 'Paul's theology was inextricably related to social reality'[5] and that adoption was a *socio*[6]-legal practice of the Graeco-Roman[7] world in general and Roman law[8] in particular, what *social* changes resulted when a person left one family and became a member of another family? And how, if at all, has this influenced Paul's metaphorical usage of his adoption term? For instance, does the apostle employ his adoption term in order to

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5   A. J. Malherbe, 'God's New Family in Thessalonica', in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honour of Wayne A. Meeks* (eds.) L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 53-66.

6   In the past Roman law scholars were solely interested in the legal background to this term. Whilst adoption is a legal procedure, it invariably affected social relations and we are more concerned with the social questions and implications of this procedure; indeed, increasingly scholars are relating these laws to the broader social context in which they applied. For example, J. A. Crook, *Law and Life in Rome* (Thames and Hudson: London), 1967, 7, states that the laws' purpose is 'to enlarge our understanding of the society and [to bring] the evidence of the *social*. . .facts to bear on the rules of the law' (emphasis added).

7   Some scholars regard Greek law as a more relevant socio-legal milieu for our understanding of adoption, but it ought to be pointed out there was no such thing as a coherent body of Greek law which could be consulted because Greek civilisation consisted of city-states, each with its own individual legal system. Such fragmentation meant that there was no one single body of legalised adoption procedures in operation. Furthermore, through time *property* and not the family became a major consideration in Greek adoption procedures. Adoption may have begun as a device to ensure continuity of the family cult, but it increasingly became more popular as a device to ensure an estate continued within the family. Also, there is no need to consider the OT social background because there is no mention of adoption as a Jewish practice and it is absent from biblical law. Further, it is debatable whether the instances of Abraham's slave Eliezer (Gen. 15: 2-3), Moses (Ex. 2: 10) and Esther (Est. 2: 7) are bona fide cases of adoption and, even if they were, it is instructive to note that they took place on *foreign* soil where different laws were in operation. Other devices such as polygamy and the levirate marriage obviated the need for adoption in Israelite society. Paul explicitly refers to the *nation of Israel* as God's adopted son (*huiothesia*, Rom. 9:4) and any proper understanding of the Old Testament background needs to *begin* with this text.

8   It is significant that Paul only employs his adoption term in letters to churches which were under Roman rule and law (cf. F. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1984], 82-3). Moreover, E. M. Lassen ('The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor', in *Early Christian Families: Social Reality and Metaphor* [Routledge: London, 1997], 103-20) clearly demonstrates how, at the beginning of the Christian era, the Roman family – as ideal and metaphor – had a remarkably strong impact on society. More important, Christianity 'grew up' in this general social milieu, hence making familial metaphors – including that of adoption – readily accessible and meaningful but also, at times, contentious to the Roman way of life (see later discussion).

describe the *re-socialisation* which the early Christians experienced as a result of their conversion-initiation?[9] And what were the consequences of such a re-alignment? Were there conflicts for these early Christians *vis-à-vis* their loyalty to the natural family and this 'new family' into which they had now entered? Moreover, is there any evidence in those letters where Paul employs his adoption metaphor to suggest that he viewed these early Christians' re-socialisation as having taken place within the context of the *ekklēsia* as a 'new family of God'?[10] We will examine the apostle's letter to the Galatians to test this hypothesis. But firstly let us turn to the Roman socio-legal practice of adoption. This social context is important not least because many of the notions associated with adoption in ancient society find no parallel with adoption procedures in our twentieth-century western civilisation. It is not necessary for us to give a detailed discussion of the Roman family but to consider pertinent aspects which are relevant to our enquiry.

I. Adoption: a *socio*-legal practice of the Roman world

The term 'adoption' is, in essence, a part of the ancient familial-matrix and any proper understanding of it must be viewed against the wider picture of the Roman 'family'.[11] According to Roman tradition, the family was the fundamental bedrock of society; indeed family membership was the primary context of social, religious, eco-

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9   Commentators rarely, if at all, recognise the fact that adoption is a conversion term. That this is so is clear from the two main contexts where it is employed. In Gal. 3:26-4:7 Paul mentions adoption alongside the initiatory rite of baptism. In the case of Rom. 8:15, most scholars (e.g. J. M. Scott, 'Adoption, Sonship', in G. F. Hawthorne *et al.* (ed.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 17) view the phrase 'you received a Spirit of "adoption as sons" as recalling or referring back to conversion/baptism (see later discussion). Further, as W. A. Meeks (*The Moral World of the First Christians* [London: SPCK, 1986], 13) points out, the early believers employed an array of metaphorical nomenclature to describe what it meant to become a believer: 'The Christians could speak of their *initiation* variously as a dying and rising with Christ, as a second birth, as *adoption*. . . .' (emphasis added).

10   Meeks, *Moral World*, 129.

11   J. A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome*, 98. Indeed to speak of 'the Roman family' may sound presumptuous as if one sterotype existed. R. Saller ('*Familia, Domus*, and the Roman Conception of Family', *Phoenix* 38 [1984], 336-55) has demonstrated that the Romans had no term equivalent to 'father-mother-triad of the "nuclear family". To be sure, the nuclear family existed but it 'does not seem to have functioned as a social unit in isolation, and therefore, it had no nomenclature' ; see C. Osiek, 'The Family in Early Christianity: "Family Values" Revisited', *CBQ* 58 (1996), 1-24; P. Lampe, '"Family" in Church and Society of New Testament Times', *Affirmation* [Union Theological Seminary in Virginia] 5 (1992), 1-20.

nomic and political security and fulfilment.[12] However, the Roman concept of *familia* was much wider than our twentieth-century western understanding of the term family, i.e. the nuclear family. In relation to large and rich households the family consisted of a man, wife, their unmarried children, together with the slaves and possibly freedmen and foster-children living in the same household. In addition, the Roman *familia* also included those who were sons by reason of being adopted.[13] Given the fundamental importance of the family to Roman society, adoption was a lifeline 'for a family in danger of dying out'.[14] This was usually due to a *paterfamilias* (head of the household) being unable to have children of his own, or because his own children had failed to live to adulthood, and so, in order that he might have an heir, recourse was made to adopting a son[15] from another family.[16] Adoption was a relatively well-known practice of the Roman aristocracy.[17] In contrast to contemporary society where childlessness is one of the main reasons for embarking on such a course,[18] the

12 See E. A. Judge, (*The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century* [London: Tyndale Press, 1960], 30-2) for a discussion of how ancient society was a delicately balanced one in which religion, occupation, civic affairs, politics and family were inextricably linked together; to upset any one of these brought changes to all the others.

13 There were, in antiquity, different kinds of adoption procedures (e.g. adoption of relatives, adoption between agnates etc.) but the normal working definition of adoption is the bringing of someone from outside the family group and making him legally part of it; see J. F. Gardner, *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998) esp. ch. 2 'Into the *Familia*: The Practice of Adoption'.

14 Crook, *Law and Life*, 135. Crook tells us that this 'was the primary purpose of the institution'.

15 According to Lassen ('The Roman Family', 114), 'The Romans seemed to have viewed themselves as, above all, a society of *fathers* and *sons*' (emphasis added).

16 Serial marriages, in order for the *paterfamilias* to have an heir, were another possible option.

17 Adoption was practised more by Roman aristocracy and was less likely among the lower classes given the fact that the latter 'had little property to bequeath, and little need for formal *patria potestas*' (see B. Rawson 'Children in the Roman Familia', in B. Rawson (ed.), *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (Croom Helm: London and Sydney, 1986), 196; M. Horvat ('Les aspects sociaux de l'adrogatio et de l'adoption à Rome', in *Studi in onore di Guiseppe Grosso*, [Giappichelli: Torino, 1974] vol. VI, 45-53) also writes, 'L'adoption fut alors pratiquée par les riches familles romaines, parce que les pauvres paysans oppressés par les dettes n'avaient pas besoin ni de l'adrogation ni de l'adoption' (53).

18 M. Corbier, ('Divorce and Adoption as Familial Strategies (Le Divorce et l'adoption "en plus")', in B. Rawson (ed) *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* [Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1991], 63) writes, 'In contrast to adoption at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century, it was not conceived as a humanitarian solution to the large-scale abandonment of children. . .. Neither, in contrast to contemporary adoption, was it a standard response to a couple's sterility.'

Roman conception of adoption was rooted in the old religious basis of the Roman family where each family had its own cult or *sacra* ('sacred things'). It was paramount that the family worship should continue and where this was threatened, or in doubt, due to a lack of persons to carry it on, adoption was called into practice.[19] Again, unlike society today where children are adopted, the normal subjects of adoption in the Roman world were already adults, by which time the chances of survival were greater and the adopting father could see what he was getting as a son and heir.

Essentially two adoption procedures were followed, both of which were dependent upon the status of the adoptee: in the first instance a person who was independent of a father's control, i.e. *sui iuris*, was adopted by a procedure known as *adrogatio*. In such cases a preliminary investigation was carried out to ensure the suitability of the family interested in adopting as well as the security of the family about to lose a member.

More important, was a second procedure known as *adoptio* where a son, still under the *patria potestas*, was conveyed into the *potestas* of his adoptive father by a pretended sale. The whole procedure – which may sound alien to modern ears – involved, in the first instance, the severing of the old potestas followed by the the establishing of the paternal authority of the new father. This was carried out by the *paterfamilias* selling his offspring into civil bondage (*in mancipio*) thereby making him a slave. On the release of his son the latter was still the property of the father and could by right be sold into bondage by him again and again. In order to avoid the son becoming a familial football a law was laid down in the Twelve Tables (established by the second Decemvirate c. 450 B.C.) which stated that when a son was sold three times by his father the latter ceased to have any authority over him. It was from this law that the *adoptio* procedure was derived.[20] The father would sell his son who upon his release was returned to his father's control. The son was then sold a second time and again freed to return to his father's authority. On the third sale the patria postestas was finally removed and the adoption would follow.

Generally speaking, adoption changed hereditary succession and the adoptee's legal position and privileges were the same as that of a legitimate biological son. But, even though adoption was a legal procedure of the Roman world it inevitably proved to be an event of such

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19 Crook, *Law and Life in Rome*, 135.
20 See the following two articles: A. Berger and B. Nicholas, 'Adoptio', 8-9; B. Nicholas, 'Emancipation', 521-22, in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (eds.) N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

life-changing proportions that it brought changes to every area of the adoptee's life. From a social perspective, adoption primarily and fundamentally constituted on the one hand, a break with the old family ties and on the other, a commitment to a new one with all its attending privileges and responsibilities.[22] In short, it involved a whole new way of life.

The legal and hence social implications of adoption, according to Roman law, are well highlighted by Lyall:[23]

> The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and was placed in a new relationship of son to his father, his new *paterfamilias*. All his old debts were cancelled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family. From that time on the *paterfamilias* had the same control over his new "child" as he had over his natural offspring.

II. Adoption as a re-socialisation in conversion

If the social reality and practice of adoption in the Roman world was such that it brought about a change in the adoptee's status, name, responsibilities etc. it is also a very apt metaphor for Paul's understanding of what happens when a person embraces the gospel. Indeed, a similar experience of *re-socialisation* was also shared by the early Christians whose conversion experience Paul depicts by the use of his adoption term – '*to become a Christian* was to be *adopted* into a new family'.[24] For the apostle, adoption is not just a metaphor but a 'sociological metaphor'[25] and one which, according to Wayne Meeks, graphically describes what was happening to the early Christian converts:

> the image of the initiate being adopted as God's child and thus receiving a new family of human brothers and sisters is a vivid way of portraying what a modern sociologist might call the resocialisation of conversion. The natural kinship structure into which the person had been born and which previously defined his place and connections with society is here

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21 A. Berger and B. Nicholas ('Adoptio', 9) write, 'The effect of both *adoptio* and *adrogatio* was to place the adopted person for all legal purposes in the same position as if he had been a natural child in the *potestas* of the adopter. The adopted son took his adoptive father's name and rank. He acquired rights of succession on death in his new family and lost all such rights as he had in his old family.'

22 M. Horvat, 'Les aspects sociaux', 45-53. Gardner (*Family and Familia*, 190) also states, 'adoption involved the breaking apart of the structure of the original *familia*, reshaping it and also forming new *familiae*'.

23 F. Lyall, 'Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption', *JBL* 88 (1969), 456-68.

24 W. A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 171.

25 Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 157.

supplanted by a new set of relationships.[26]

As a conversion term, Paul's talk of adoption was something which for these early Christians was profound and thoroughgoing – it speaks of a real experience of sharp displacement which many of his new converts would have felt because it brought about a radical change to basic relationships, attitudes, and perceptions similar to those acquired by a child growing up within a family.[27] In the circumstances, such a seismic shift in allegiance was probably not always viewed in a positive light.[28] For example, the patriarchal household of the Graeco-Roman world and the *paterfamilias* in particular, were well known for stern discipline[29] and absolute power, and one can easily see how such authority especially in circumstances where a conversion took place without, or even against his will, could, present a challenge to his authority.[30] For these early Christians, and the Pauline communities in particular, their adoption/conversion was perceived as belonging to the divine family where a new loyalty had replaced all others, one in which '*God* acts as a proper, well-to-do *paterfamilias*'.[31]

Allied to this was the more serious accusation brought by the Roman authorities against these early Christians whose adoption would have been viewed as causing disruptions to existing households.[32] As we have already noted, socially, the Roman *familia* was a force for coherence and stability; it was a focus of loyalties for both present and past members, and also a means of exercising control

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26 W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1983), 88.

27 Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 13; P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 176-77.

28 Lassen ('Roman Family', 115), informs us how the use of familial metaphors like adoption made Christianity understandable to the Romans. But, there was a 'down' side as well and as Lassen continues: 'the *new Christian family of metaphors*, must have. . . been *often surprising*, or even *shocking to the Roman ear*' (emphasis added).

29 This stern authority of the Roman father in the late Republic must be viewed alongside the new,benign picture, which has recently emerged. Recent studies and the primary evidence both depict fathers in the ancient world as capable of manifesting paternal affection; see S. Dixon, 'The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family', in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* B. Rawson (ed.) (Clarendon Press; Oxford, 1991), 99-113; E. Eyben, 'Fathers and Sons', in *ibid.*, 114-143.

30 Although churches, in many instances, began with the conversion of the *paterfamilias* (followed by the rest of his household), this was not always the case (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:13).

31 Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 170 (emphasis added).

32 Meeks, *Moral World*, 129.

over them.[33] Moreover, one of the features of the early Christian movement was that from the outset it was marked out as a familial community to which loyalty above everything else was owed. Although, religiously speaking, the Graeco-Roman religion(s) were essentially syncretistic and readily tolerated and assimilated other gods into their religious system, the family was the one area which remained sacrosanct, so much so that the break-up of the natural household was tantamount to the rejection of the social order.[34] One can easily see how talk of being 'children of God' and belonging to the 'family of God' would have been viewed with distrust by pagan opponents. As a result, Roman society was deeply suspicious of the Christian movement; pagans were sometimes known to register their displeasure about the excessive intimacy of other related familial nomenclature such as 'brother' and 'sister'.[35]

These same tensions are clearly manifested in the Synoptic gospels which suggest that when Jesus called the first disciples to follow him there was a conflict of loyalties between the natural family and the new eschatological family of brothers and sisters. For instance, 'For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law' (Matt. 10:35; Lke. 14:26; Mk. 3:31-33). A recurring pattern in the synoptics is that one's natural family ties are subordinate to the authority of the newly inaugurated family of the last days.[36]

There is also evidence in Paul's writings (1 Cor. 7:12-16) and other sources outside the New Testament (Tert. *Apol.* 3.4; Justin 2 *Apol.* 2) to suggest how Christians upon conversion related to their natural families; at times the early believers showed little regard for their natural families. As John Barclay has recently pointed out, this is no more clearly portrayed than in their attitude to the family cult:

> There was a strong sense of betrayal. Family members who broke with ancestral traditions on the basis of their new-found faith showed an appalling lack of concern for their familial responsibilities. Christians

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33 J. D. Gardner, *Being a Roman Citizen* (London: Routledge, 1993), 83.

34 R. Greer (*Broken Lights and Mended Lives*, 103) writes 'The Roman world rightly saw that one possible implication of Christianity was a rejection of the social order. . ..' Greer also informs us that 'the rejection of the family that often characterised Christianity. . . often carried the notion of the Church as a new and true family'; N. T. Wright (*The New Testament and the People of God* [London: SPCK, 1993], 448) also writes, 'If one belonged to it [i.e. the natural family], one did not belong anymore, not in the same way, to one's previous unit, whether familial or racial'.

35 For example, Lucian *Peregrinus* 13, and the pagan views reflected in Minucius Felix *Octavius* 9.2; 31.8; Tertullian *Apology* 39.

36 see Stephen C. Barton's monograph (*Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) on this theme.

deserted ancestral practices, passed on since time immemorial, for a novel religion (if such it could be called) of recent manufacture.[37]

This jettisoning of ancestral practices by these early Christian converts in favour of new religious practices may provide an overlap – between social reality and metaphor – as far as Paul's adoption term is concerned. For example, in relation to the former, we know that upon adoption the adoptee became a stranger to his agnatic family and 'renounced the worship of the gods of that family' and 'took over the new gods' [and] passed into the worship of the new family'.[38] Metaphorically speaking these early believers who perceived their conversion in terms of adoption into God's new family had the entire focus of their worship reoriented through an awakening that their 'new god' is '"Abba", Father' (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).

All these associations, and more, go some way towards explaining how a metaphor like adoption would have been heard and perceived within a Roman social context.

One other point, however, needs to be noted at this juncture. If, as we have seen, these adopted sons of God claimed to find a 'new home' within the Christian family, the corollary of all this was that these early Christians often found themselves alienated and isolated by those *outside* the community. This sense of alienation was compounded by the fact that Christianity, like other sects, participated in specific initiatory rituals which marked converts out as 'outsiders'. Adoption, for Paul, describes these early Christian's conversion but it also a term of conversion-*initiation*; indeed it is instructive to note the way in which Paul, in the two main adoption pericopes (Gal. 3:26-4:7; Rom. 8:15), mentions *baptism* alongside adoption.[39] If adoption is a sociological metaphor it is significant that the apostle Paul brings it together with baptism, a 'social expression'[40] of the internalisation of the decision of faith which identifies the new status of the son of God. Rituals can create as well as reflect social reality[41] and baptism, like adoption, is also a boundary-marker – a dramatic enactment of the break with the past which separates the baptizand from the outside world. From Paul's argument in Gal. 4:6 we can deduce that the early

37 John M. G. Barclay, 'Conflict in Thessalonica', *CBQ* 55 (1992), 512-30.
38 J. Goody, 'Adoption in Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11 (1969), 55-78.
39 See footnote 9.
40 B. Byrne, *Sons of God – Seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians Against the Jewish Background* (Analecta Biblica 83. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1979), 169 n. 126.
41 Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* 2nd. ed. (London: Barries & Jenkins, 1973), 42, 78.

ritual prayer/cry 'Abba, Father' at baptism signified the moment the initiate was integrated into the new community/family of God.

III. Adoption and the *ekklēsia*: God's new family in Galatia[43]

Given the fact that religious conversion can be viewed from the standpoint of a re-socialisation in behaviour[44] and that Paul's adoption term can be viewed from such a perspective, it is appropriate that we pursue how, or in *what context*, such a re-socialisation takes place. Having discussed this, we will then relate this to Paul's view of community – in this case Galatians – and investigate whether or not it can be understood along the lines of a family/household. But before we investigate how such a process of re-socialisation occurred, we need to reflect on what is meant by basic socialisation.

Primary socialisation occurs in the raising of all children through incorporation into family life and society. An integral part of any child's development includes the process of becoming aware of self and establishing one's identity in the family and society. Through time the child grows and becomes aware of and enters new sub-worlds and is confronted with the process of secondary socialisation such as school, friends etc; indeed it is quite often the case that as a child grows in adulthood socialisation becomes more radical with the person experiencing changes to his/her identity and way of life.

Now conversion – in Pauline terminology adoption – as we have

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42 A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 49, states 'The baptismal language in Gal.3:26-4:7 represents the convert's initiation into the Christian community as an adoption by God through which the convert is admitted into the new family. . .. *Baptism thus consciously brought about a change in social relationships* as well as self-understanding, in both of which the Christian community were contrasted with "outsiders"'. W. A. Meeks (*Origins of Christian Morality*, 49) also writes 'The formulas of their baptismal ritual proclaimed that they had taken off their "old human" and put on "the new", that the old connections had been replaced by a new family of the children of God'; *idem.*, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *HR* 13 (1974), 165-208.

43 Whilst we are addressing the issue of what it means to be adopted into *God's* family, there are other ways of looking at family relations in this letter. For example, Gal. 3:16 is a pivotal text which Paul uses to develop the point that the Galatians through Christ, the seed of Abraham, are also sons (Gal. 3:7) and seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). Again, Paul identifies himself as parent to his Galatian children (Gal. 4:19-20). And again, the Galatians are referred to as children of the promise made to Sarah (Gal. 4:21-31); cf. P. S. Esler 'Family Imagery and Christian Identity in Gal. 5:13 to 6:10', in H. Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (Routledge; London, 1997), 121-149.

44 Berger and Luckmann, *Social Reality*, 176ff. The discussion, which follows, is based upon Berger and Luckmann's theory.

already noted is an obvious instance where there is a radical separation from one group and incorporation into another group. More specifically, according to Berger and Luckmann, in order for such a re-socialisation to 'succeed' there needs to exist the proper social conditions, one[45] of which is that *the new social setting into which the new convert is received should, as far as possible, replicate the setting of the child's upbringing.* In sociological terms, if the conversion is going to continue it will do so in an environment and atmosphere which *resembles* that of 'a family-like fellowship'.[46] In the words of Berger and Luckmann:

> It is only within the religious community, the *ecclesia*, that conversion can be effectively maintained. To have a conversion is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of plausibility. *This* is where the religious community comes in. It provides the indispensable plausibility structure for the new reality. In other words, Saul may have become Paul in the aloneness of religious ecstasy, but he could *remain* Paul only in the context of the Christian community that recognised him as such and confirmed the "new being" in which he located this identity.[47]

It is precisely this kind of familial community which Paul's adoption metaphor evokes and that these early Christians regarded themselves as having entered.[48] Moreover, when we examine Paul's letter

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45 The other social condition which does not directly concern us here is that of there being 'significant others' i.e. the importance of leaders (i.e. a Paul) in the new group and their influence upon the new convert; see Berger and Luckmann, *Social Reality*, 177-78.

46 K. O. Sandnes, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons.* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 91 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 14.

47 Berger and Luckmann, *Social Reality*, 177-78.

48 T. Smail, *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), 146, states in this regard, '*The church is* not God's incarnate Son, but the *family of his adopted sons* who are the body of Christ'. Sandnes, (*The New Family*, 14) rightly recommends 'that ecclesiology should be seen from the standpoint. . . of a family'. He also states: 'there is a firm basis for saying that in Gal. 3:28 Paul is depicting the family of God. . .. this is proved by [the] related Pauline sayings [in] Gal. 4:1-7' (p. 78). It is also worth mentioning here the debate concerning the importance of the metaphor of family vis-à-vis our understanding of Pauline ecclesiology. Is it the root or the controlling metaphor? In our view, it is striking to note that of all the ecclesiological metaphors that Paul had at his disposal (e.g. body, building, etc.) the most pervasive, across the Pauline corpus, is that of the family. An equally contentious point among scholars is how we are to understand the structure of the early Christian communities? – should they be viewed in patriarchal or egalitarian terms? My present research, in 1 Thessalonians, is in this area.

to the Galatians we are given an indication of the 'social insecurity'[49] of the Galatian believers whose conversion to Christianity involved not only social but *familial* dislocation.[50] Having embraced the gospel message, the Galatian Christians had forsaken their former worship of pagan deities (Gal. 4:8-11) which had far-reaching implications in that to sever one's links from 'the worship of family and community deities would entail a serious disruption in one's relationships with family.'[51] Alongside this is the fact that the apostle Paul in this letter expressly underscores the new sense of belonging by identifying the new community as a '*household/family* of believers' (*oikeioi tes pisteōs*, Gal. 6:10).[52] Familial images fill the landscape of this letter and the fact that the apostle Paul is aware of that such a process of re-sociali-sation has taken place is evident from the internal evidence in which he reminds his readers that he had undergone such an experience himself (cf. Gal. 1:13-16).[53]

This is a family in which God functions as the 'Divine Parent,'[54] a point Paul strikes three times at the very outset of the letter ('Father,' Gal. 1:1, 3, 4) which comes full circle in the adoption pericope ('"Abba", Father', Gal. 4:6).[55] As sons who have been 'adopted by God', Paul's *huiothesia* term also underscores the sense of community and, as such, has a corporate dimension – 'the adopted child is not

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49 See John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 58.
50 Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, 58.
51 Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, 58.
52 J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, rep.1990), 256 n. 147, writes, 'In Galatians, the underlying concept of the household is evident, for instance, in the identity of the children of God (3:26-4:7) with the "household of faith" (6:10)'.
53 Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* [Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 77, states, 'A careful sociological analysis of what happened to Saul on the Damascus Road would have to conclude that *he underwent a thorough resocialisation.*'
54 Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 171; see also John L. White, 'God's Paternity as Root Metaphor in Paul's Conception of Community', *Foundations and Facts Forum* 8.3-4 (Sept-Dec. 1992), 271-95, who writes: 'Paul's Conception of God as father is the root metaphor on which he grafts his entire system of communal images'.
55 S. Joubert, 'Managing the Household: Paul as *paterfamilias* of the Christian Household group in Corinth', in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (London: Routledge, 1995), 213-23, states, 'Sociologically the image of God's fatherhood helped to shape the Pauline house-hold group's corporate identity'.

an only child'[56] – where *'relatedness* itself is valued'.[57] But it is a relat-
edness one would not normally expect; sonship is all-embracing –
'you are *all*[58] sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:26),
the Son of God (Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:5). Given the composition of the
Galatian churches this is a quite staggering claim, because under the
old economy the title 'sons of God' was exclusively employed of Israel
(e.g. Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-2; Is. 1:2-4; Hos. 1:10) and not Gentiles who
were merely regarded as 'sinners' (Gal. 2:15). There was no more
long- standing racial, religious or sociological division which existed
than that between Jew and Gentile. But it is precisely these social bar-
riers, which have been removed, and where adoption, symbolised in
(Gal. 3:26-28) by baptism, is more far-reaching than normal Jewish
expectations – Gentiles are included as well. Fictive-kinship lan-
guage is particularly concentrated in the adoption pericope itself
(i.e. Gal. 4:1-7) where Paul narrates the story of Israel under law.[59]
During this period Israel was like an 'heir' (*klēronomos,* Gal. 4:1 cf.
4:7) but still a minor (lit. 'infant' *nēpios*). Despite the fact that Israel
was 'lord of all the property' (Gal. 4:1) Israel was in fact no different
to a 'slave' (*doulos,* Gal. 4:1). Until such times as the appointed period
of 'guardianship set by the father' is reached the 'heir' is under
'guardians and trustees' (Gal. 4:2). During this era, Israel was under
the supervision of a household-supervisor/guardian (*paidagōgos,* Gal.
3:24-25). But with the climactic unveiling of God's Son (Gal. 4:5) the
period of slavery is brought to an end and, not just Israel, but the
Gentiles too, are able to enter into the 'full rights as sons' (lit. *huio-
thesia,* Gal. 4:5). The pericope is brought to a close by Paul's repeated
use of familial terms which serve the purpose of underscoring for the

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56 A. Mawhinney, 'The Family of God: One Model for the Church of the 90s',
    Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 19:2 (1993), 77-96. However, Mawhinney, as
    the title of his essay suggests, is overly cautious regarding the importance of the
    family-metaphor for the church.

57 Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality,* 171.

58 The adjective *pantes* is in the emphatic position.

59 I am fully aware of the complexities of a passage like Gal. 4:1-7 where Paul com-
    presses many ideas into such a short passage and about which commentators dif-
    fer – for example, the term *huiothesia* is, at least, a more complex term for Jews who
    were already in some sense sons (cf. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth,* 96-7). My main aim
    here is to emphasise the prevalence of familial nomenclature in 3:26-4:7.
    Regarding our hermeneutic of 4:1-7, most commentators (e.g. J. D. G. Dunn, *The
    Epistle to the Galatians* BNTC [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson], 1993, 210ff.) accept the
    fact that Paul in vv1-2 is employing an *illustration* which he goes on to *apply* in vv.3-
    7. However, J. M. Scott (*Adoption as Sons: An Exegetical Investigation into the
    Background of* ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ [Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr {P. Siebeck, 1992}], chpt. 3)
    has recently argued that vv. 1-2 refer to Israel's redemption from Egyptian
    bondage as a type of the eschatological redemption wrought by Christ, the second
    Moses (vv. 3-7).

Galatians just what has taken place: 'you are no longer a slave (dou-
los), but a son (*huios*), and since you are a son (*huios*), God has also
made you an heir' (*klēronomos*, Gal. 4:7).

If we probe a little further, the parent-child relations between God
and this new family bring into play – or bring about[60] – another aspect
of family relations, namely, the intrafamilial bonds between siblings.
Galatians is a letter which is replete with Paul's favourite familial
appellation for the Christian, namely 'brother' (Gal. 1:2, 11; 3:15;
4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18).[61] This clearly distinguishes them from
the 'false brothers' (*pseudadelphous*, Gal. 2:4) who were in opposition
to Paul's message. As brothers, they were expected to give one
another 'the right hand of fellowship' (Gal. 2:9) as a sign of the famil-
ial bonds between them. In the event of a brother sinning the true
measure of consanguinity is manifested in the manner by which a
'brother' is restored: 'you who are spiritual should restore him gen-
tly' (Gal. 6:1).[62]

When considered together, the cumulative weight of all these famil-
ial metaphors becomes the means by which Paul develops and com-
municates a Christian theology *and* pattern of ecclesiology based on
the family – a family which to all intents and purposes was to be rad-
ical and different. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that Paul,
and these early Christians, viewed their adoption into the *ekklēsia*, i.e.

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60 Brotherly relations are a consequence of being the children of God. For example,
    C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*
    (Exeter: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 147, writes: 'As the
    metaphorical children of the one father Christians were themselves brothers and
    sister who were to behave toward one another as family members'; W. A. Meeks
    (*Moral World*, 129) also states, 'in the Christian community every member was a
    brother or sister, for all were 'children of God'.

61 According to B. Witherington (*The Paul Quest*, 77) 'Paul found himself part of a
    new family whose members he called brothers and sisters'. As far as this aspect of
    the brotherhood is concerned, it is interesting to note that in two out of the three
    conversion narratives (concerning Paul) in the book of Acts (i.e. 9:17; 22:13) some
    of the very first words which the apostle heard from members (i.e. Ananias) of this
    new Christian community were words of *familial or fraternal* welcome, 'Brother,
    Saul'.

62 This is an interesting text because, despite the fact that many scholars argue for an
    essentially egalitarian approach to all brotherly relations, this text would seem to
    imply that within the brotherhood there were some brothers who over others (i.e.
    'you who are spiritual', 6:1) and entrusted with the task of correction/restoration
    ('correct/restore him gently', 6:1). Hence there may be room for perceiving some
    form of hierarchy within the Galatian brotherhood (cf. also 1 Thess. 5:12-15); see
    John M. G. Barclay, 'Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-
    Ownership', NTS 37 (1991), 161-86 esp. 182.

the family of God, as an alternative[63] or in some sense a replacement for their natural families, and that such a view can be sustained in this letter.[64]

Abstract

Paul's term *huiothesia*, 'adoption as sons,' has often been investigated along the more traditional lines of Christology, soteriology etc. However, rarely, if at all, have commentators recognised or acknowledged that this metaphor is an(other) important conversion-initiation term ' best viewed against the ancient Roman *socio*-legal practice of adoption ' thereby making it a most appropriate term to describe what was happening to the early Pauline Christians who embraced the gospel. Just as adoption in Roman society signified a break with old familial ties and a commitment to a new *familia*, so conversion, or in Pauline nomenclature 'adoption,' denoted a new allegiance or a *re-socialisation* by joining the new family of God. But, whereas adoption as social reality caused no conflicting loyalties, in its metaphorical sense, applied to Christian converts, it invariably identified the tensions which existed between the natural and the new spiritual family. Moreover, according to modern sociological theory (i.e. Berger and Luckmann), if such a re-socialisation is to 'succeed,' it will best do so in circumstances where one's primary socialisation took place i.e. a family-like fellowship. In light of this, it is instructive to note that Paul's letter to the Galatians is not only the context where Paul employs his adoption term but is *also* the locus where he refers to the early Christians as a '*household/family* of believers' (Gal. 6:10) thereby indicating the apostle's awareness of adoption as a re-socialisation process (cf. Gal. 1:13-16). This letter is one replete with familial terminology (e.g. 'household-guardian,' 'infant,' 'father,' 'slaves,' 'sons,' 'heirs' etc.), including the central focus on these early Christians as 'adopted sons' (Gal. 3:26-4:7) who probably came to

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63 N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 448, writes, 'The common life of the church. . . seems to have functioned from the first as an *alternative* family' (emphasis added).
64 The 'Church's Decade of the Family' has provoked a debate as to whether the *natural* family (i.e. 'God made the family *before* he made the church') or *church*-family should have the Christian's prior allegiance; see R. Clapp, *Families at Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 1993), who challenges the former viewpoint, and Stephen C. Barton, *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, ch. 1), for a critique of Clapp.

regard the *ekklesia*, 'the family of God,' as an alternative or replacement for their natural families.[65]

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65 I am grateful to Dr. John M. G. Barclay (University of Glasgow), currently supervising my doctoral research in 1 Thessalonians, for reading, discussing and providing helpful comments on this article.

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