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## Foreword

‘This generation has been wounded the most in relationships—it is in relationships where the healing must begin’.

Dr John Sowers<sup>1</sup>

There is a clear consensus amongst social scientists and Christian commentators that we live in a fatherless age characterised by fractured relationships and wide-spread family breakdown. John Swinton and Brian Brock, in the Introduction to this book, intimate this in stating that ‘spirits of fear’ are afoot in Western cultural space, ‘... spirits which threaten the peace of children, adults and whole societies’ (p.12). Indeed, as Pope Benedict XVI has recently suggested ‘the basis of family life is under threat’ and therefore the Church needs to intentionally engage those who are deeply wounded by fractured familial relationships.<sup>2</sup> The thoughtful and carefully considered adoption of children is one way in which the Christian community can, and needs to, respond to this social and spiritual crisis. Thankfully the book you hold in your hands, *A Graceful Embrace: Theological Reflections on Adopting Children* (edited by two leading practical and pastoral theologians), provides a clearly articulated response and call-to-action on this issue—a call to an intentional *agape* model of embracing the most vulnerable among us.

As an adopted child, a practising Christian and an amateur theologian, I was then delighted and honoured to write the Foreword to this book. A book that beautifully interweaves insights from Christian ethicists and theologians (some of whom are adopted, or, have adopted children themselves), and provides ‘practical’ suggestions for the Church and

<sup>1</sup>Cited on the home-page, *The Mentoring Project*, 3 November, 2015, <http://www.thementoringproject.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Libereria Editrice Vaticana, The Basis of Family Life is Under Threat (Pope Benedict XVI’s annual address to the Curia), *The Catholic Herald*, 4 January (2013): 5.

individuals to provide a redemptive response in this age. There is a burgeoning literature from both the social and medical sciences that addresses the many dimensions of adoption. For example, prenatal and perinatal psychology and social policy research that informs the strategies of adoption agencies. This volume offers a diverse and yet coherent set of essays addressing a wide range of issues from a theological standpoint, i.e., the theology of naming and the morality of adopting children, and analyses of ‘adoption hot topics’, such as, identity and belonging, inter-country adoption of special needs children and a fascinating autobiographical essay by John Swinton. Reading John’s essay made me again realise that people’s lived experience of adoption are vastly different and are moderated by a multitude of variables (many of which are examined in this book). John’s experience of being adopted seemed to have had little conscious impact upon his psyche and life. Conversely, I was deeply wounded from my encounter with adoption at just ten days old—my dear mother had been in psychiatric care and was troubled whilst carrying me in her womb. John and I have one thing in common though. We have been ‘gracefully embraced’ by Abba, as described by Paul in the Romans 8, *and* our adoptive parents. We have been ‘healed in relationship’ by the creator and his chosen parental image-bearers.

The deep ‘primal wound’ described by Nancy Verrier in her land-mark book<sup>3</sup>, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child*, which millions of children receive from the experience of separation from their birth parents, often has a devastating effect on their sense of identity, orientation in the world (to others and God), and ability to contribute positively to the families, communities and societies which they inhabit. Consider the millions of orphaned and abandoned children in South Africa, America and Western Europe. And then consider the importance of a book such as this which introduces and develops a Christian understanding of adoption and which *should* inform government legislation, the

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<sup>3</sup>Verrier, N. (2009) *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child*. UK: British Association for Fostering and Adopting

decision making of prospective adoptive parents, the policies and strategies of adoption agencies and the amendment of family law.

The fatherless age in which we live is at its roots a *spiritual* issue—an abandonment of the divine mandate to obey God and live in harmonious relationships that were modelled in Eden. Satan was the first of God’s creatures to become an orphan. And now, he is an intentional orphan-maker bent on the destruction of the nuclear family and therefore social order—bent on warring against Divine love and parenting. The editors of this book propose a response from God’s image bearers:

‘Understood Christianity, then, human adoptive practices are explorative ways of seeking out and awaiting the divine love for every child that expresses the Christian freedom for love’ (p.16)

We are to ‘... counter a broader culture of abandonment that often rules supreme within our societies’, suggests John Swinton (p.168). The editors and chapter contributors to this book have initiated this process through careful theological (and personal) reflection, providing an invaluable resource for the Church, adoption organisations and individuals alike.

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