

ABSTRACT

Earthly & Heavenly Adoption: Exploring Adoption Research, Policies, & Trends through the Lens of God's Adoption of Humanity

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"Pure and faultless religion is this: to look after orphans" (James 1:27). The Bible explicitly references the call for Christians to look after and care for orphans. Some take this command as a call from the Lord to adopt orphans into their own family. There is a plethora of research available concerning the many aspects of adoption, the domestic and international policies of adoption, and the current and past trends in adoption. However, there is little research available that parallels this research to adoption theology. This thesis will conjoin both the area of adoption research, including adoption policy, with the area of adoption theology in a way that can be beneficial to Christian adoptive parents.

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EARTHLY & HEAVENLY ADOPTION:
EXPLORING ADOPTION RESEARCH, POLICIES, & TRENDS THROUGH THE
LENS OF GOD'S ADOPTION OF HUMANITY

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 9:36 (NIV)

The Compassion of Jesus

The above mentioned verse in Matthew comes after Jesus has been healing blind men, a demon-possessed mute, and a deceased girl. By this point in Jesus’ ministry, He had crowds of people following Him asking to be healed, or just simply there to see the miracles that He performed. Jesus was not perturbed by the fact that He had hundreds of people following Him asking for help, because for each broken person in the crowd, Jesus felt an overwhelming amount of compassion. Craig Blomberg, in his commentary of Matthew, speaks to the extent to which Jesus felt compassion by explaining that “Jesus’ human emotions reflect a deep, *gut-level* “compassion” (a reasonable, idiomatic English equivalent for a term [from Greek *splanchnos*] that could refer to bowels and kidneys) for this sea of humanity” (1992, p.166). Jesus’ healing acts model His teaching of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37, NIV). The priest and the Levite in the story passed by the hurt man, too insensitive to help. It took a man, someone that society had cast out, to have compassion and mercy on the hurt man.

Jesus is humanity’s Good Samaritan. Although at the time of His crucifixion, He was cast out by society, and by the very people who might have been in the crowds following Him in His early ministry, He had compassion on His people. Jesus is so

compassionate towards His people, that He even welcomes humanity into His perfect family. In their brokenness, Jesus took humanity and healed them and had mercy on them, and then allowed humanity to come into His family. John 14:18 contains Jesus' promise that "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you." In this instance, Jesus is speaking to His disciples promising that He will return to them in the 'second coming' to take them with Him to Heaven (Borchert, 2002, p.126). Though in this instance Jesus was talking to His disciples, the message is the same for the remainder of His followers. Jesus is making room in His house, in heaven, for Christians to come be a part of his family, the trinity. A few verses before Jesus' promise of not leaving humanity as orphans on this earth, He assures them "let not your heart be troubled; believe in God; believe in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-2). Christians have already gone through the adoption process, a process that God ordained before the creation of the world.

John Piper has said that "adoption is bigger than the universe" (2008). How true this is. God created the earth for adoption, adoption of the human race into union with the Trinity and eternal life in God's family. Ephesians 1:11 (NIV) states that "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Before the universe began, each Christian's adoption was set in place. In fact, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* holds that "God's plan to redeem humanity preexists the foundation of the world" (Keck, 2000, p. 373). Adoptive families are often called "forever families." Paul meant exactly this when he called redemption through Christ adoption. Only through Christ's adoption of mankind, which was set in motion

before the universe, have Christians found their “forever family.” The family of Christ, the Trinity and fellow Christians, will be together in heaven forever. Though Christians have been set in families here on earth, their ‘forever family’ was created long ago, placing them in communion with the Trinity. Through this pathway of thought many Christian families have chosen to adopt children, bringing them into their earthly family so that the children can be in their ‘forever family’ in heaven.

Pure and Faultless Religion

As this paper will demonstrate, the Bible mentions adoption several times. God’s commands on bringing justice to and caring for the orphan are explicit. James 1:27 (NIV) states that “pure and faultless [religion] is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.” God did not intend for Christians to leave the care of orphans to others. Pure, compassionate religion at its core is the care of orphans. Kurt Richardson argues that “genuine religion means that everything in the believer’s life is to bear the mark of the service to God” (1997, p.100). Jesus was the ultimate ‘Good Samaritan,’ but He called His people to follow Him in His care for those in need. Jim Denison writes that when Christians provide children with godly homes they ‘break the cycle of abandonment and poverty, replacing it with a pattern of godliness and responsibility’ (2010, p.19). When Christians display compassion on the fatherless¹, they are making steps to lead the children to the product of compassion, which is hope. Therefore there should be a definite link between the plight of the orphan and the responsibility of Christians.

¹ The author notes that orphans are “parentless,” but in keeping in line with biblical jargon has chosen to use the term “fatherless.”

Adoption Research and Thesis Statement

As Christians decide whether to adopt, they will often turn to research as indicators of what to expect. There is little research connecting God's commands found in the Bible, with the traditional adoption research. In this thesis a connection will be drawn between the two. Adoption research should not be divorced from research in the Bible on the topic. This thesis will first present research on certain topics of adoption, and then parallel it to what the Bible says on the same, or similar, topic. The thesis will also take into account adoption policies both domestically and internationally, for these policies bear greatly on the functioning of the practice of adoption, for both the adoptive and biological families. When viewed through scriptural lenses, adoption is justified and vindicated as a Christian practice, and to some extent a call for all Christians to participate in the practice.

CHAPTER TWO

What is Adoption?

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.” Psalm 68:5-6 (NIV)

Introduction

Biological families are often unplanned. If a mother gets pregnant, then the family is formed, regardless of whether the family is a well functioning family. In contrast, much planning is involved in adoptive or foster families. There must be motivations leading adults to choose to adopt, as well a good deal of thinking through the processes ahead of time that will need to be addressed. Bartholet notes that the process of adoption “creates a family that is *connected* to another family, the birth family, and often to different cultures and to different racial, ethnic, and national groups as well” (1993, p. 186).

There are four main types of adoption: domestic adoptions, international adoptions, interracial adoptions, and foster care. Domestic adoptions can be either a relative adopting a child that another relative is no longer able to care for or a non-relative adopting a child. Within the realm of non-relative adoptions, there are two types, that being private placement (usually independent) or an adoption through a government approved agency (Infausto, 1969, p. 8). International adoptions involve the process of countries that are unable to find adoptive parents domestically allowing adoptions between themselves and other countries (Daugherty Bailey, 2009, p. 170). Interracial

adoptions can occur either domestically or internationally as a parent of a differing race adopts a child. This pathway to adoption has different issues than intra-racial adoption, therefore it must be considered as a separate category (Perry, 2009, p. 837). Finally, the practice of foster care is considered along with adoption. Rodger, Cummings, and Leschied define foster care by saying that “foster care provides children with both temporary and longer-term options for child growth and developments, as well as safe, nurturing, and stable relationships in a family setting” (2004, p. 1130). When choosing to adopt, parents may take into account any of these methods as the way in which they will find their child. Choosing which type of adoption to pursue is only a portion of the different spectrums the family will need to consider.

The Price of Heavenly Adoption

The process of differentiating between the different types of adoptions, as well as deciding if it is a viable possibility can often seem overwhelming. For Christians, in their adoption, it was also a costly process. In the heavenly adoption of Christians, Jesus had to die on the cross. Tony Merida argues that “while it costs us a lot to adopt children, it cost God the blood of His son” (2011, p.36). Christians are sinful by nature, therefore they could not become a part of God’s heavenly family without Jesus’ death as the only sinless person to walk the earth. Romans 6:23 states that “for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV). In life, as this verse describes, a person “earns what they receive. By obeying the impulses of sin, they are storing up the reward for sinning. Their severance check is death” (Mounce, 1995, p. 159). Death is a steep price. However, God promised Christians that he would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). Thus, He was willing to pay the highest price to bring His

orphans into His family. Therefore, if Christian parents are deciding whether to adopt, remembering that their adoption was not an easy one should reassure them as they begin a difficult process.

Another challenge that adoptive families must address is the differences in the way in which they were formed as opposed to biological families. The different types of challenges faced by adoptive families can also be paralleled to scriptural adoption theology. Along the same lines, heavenly adoption, formed through communion with the Trinity, is unique in formation.

The Formation of the Adoptive Family

The way in which adoptive families are created is much different than how biological families are created. Biological parents have nine months to prepare for the child, to be with the child, and to form a secure, affectionate bond with the child. But on the other hand, for adoptive parents “the wait is often considerably longer than nine months and usually there is no date when they can expect their child. During this period, they wonder just where ‘their child’ is. Is he already born? Is she conceived yet?” (Hammons, 2000, p. 252). Adoptive parents have virtually no contribution to their child’s well-being before it is born; this leads to a feeling of uncertainty and usually worrying on the part of the adoptive parents. Parents will worry about the well-being of their future child, as well as fret about the precise time when they will become a parent. Also, because adoption is a corporate process, and not merely a biological one; it could add more stressors to the parents. The process of allowing biological parents to choose adoptive parents, the homestudy, and the paperwork load can make the parents “question their entitlement to be parents” (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 25). Along

with the stigma of infertility, which often accompanies an adoptive parent, the length of the process to adopt might make the adoptive parents feel inadequate. But research and studies have proven again and again that it does not matter when the child comes into the family as to the strength of the parent-child bond. An adoptive mother stated, “It isn’t the birth experience that makes you love a child... it’s the physical thing of *holding* it. *Having* it. Knowing your responsibly for its future” (Hammons, 2000, p. 252). Adoptive parents must persevere during the difficult times of the pre-adoption period and embrace the fact that they are a members of a different kind of family, but not a lesser kind of family.

Attachment Theory

The tenants of attachment theory are of vital importance to a newly formed adoptive family. Erik Erickson noted that “the most important psychological task of early infancy is the development of a sense of trust, to which all other goals are related” (Brodzinky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 26). Attachment theory observes that infants need to “attach” or form a close bond with at least one member of their family; an attachment between a family member and the child is usually visible when the child wants to have a close proximity to that individual. The yearning for proximity, in accordance with the attachment theory, does not have to happen through a biological connection. Anyone near enough to the child can play this role, for “after a few weeks, parent and baby have choreographed a little dance, a synchrony in their response to one another. This dance can be done with any caregiver who responds sensitively to the young infant’s cues” (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 28). The parent that responds most quickly and affectionately to the child is the one that will form the

emotional bond necessary for attachment. Infants can no less tell who is biologically related to them and who is not, therefore in this infancy stage for adoption there is not as much of a difference in the formal title of the relationship between the adoptee and the adoptive parents.

Creating an attachment at the infancy stage is an important indicator in the future for the adoptee, because it has been found in a study “that teenagers adopted as infants generally have positive self-concepts, warm relationships with their parents, and psychological health comparable to that of nonadopted teens” (Bower, 1994, p.104). Therefore, if parents chose to adopt an infant they have a much higher probability of having a family and child that resembles most others, the reason for this being the fact that attachment is more easily reached during this stage when the infant cannot tell the difference in types of parents. But attachment theory falls a little short in explaining and ordering the adoptive realm of parenting, for the attachment theory “places primary importance on ‘the caregiver’s responsiveness to the needs of the infant,’ yet the adoptive parent’s struggles with feeling of entitlement to parenthood are not addressed within this theoretical framework” (Wegar, 2000, p. 366). During the infancy stage, the adoptive parents struggle greatly with their emotions of whether or not they are adequate to be parents, adequate to be the ones to whom the child forms an attachment. Because of the fact that adoptive parents choose to be parents more so than biological parents, there are different kinds of stressors and battles that they must overcome, one involving questioning their own right to be parents. Attachment happens two ways, one for the child to form an attachment to the parent and the other for the parent to form an attachment to the child.

Stress and Coping Theory

Just as forming an attachment with the baby can be a stressor, there are many other stressors that the adoptive family must handle in accordance with the stress and coping theory. Some of the other stressors include:

handling pressures of instant parenthood, facing children's future developmental or mental health issues, managing the financial consequences of the adoption... and adoptive parents feeling responsible for solving problems that originated in the adopted child's previous placement history. (Bird, Peterson, Hotta Miller, 2002, p. 215)

Adoptive parents have to learn to cope with each of these stressors in their lives. They are issues that will arise in the everyday life, thus in the infancy stage if the parents can learn how to cope and survive these feelings, then they will have a much easier time in the future helping to deal with the stress that their child will feel due to his or her adoption. Another major issue is that adoptive parents often, because they waited so long to have children, have high expectations of their child, or vice-versa very low expectations because of the circumstances from which their child came. Adoption researchers have found that adoptive parents "don't have realistic expectations, that is the biggest problem we run into" (Wegar, 2000, p. 367). Many parents do not know what to expect from their adopted child, therefore when difficulties arise with the child or with their own emotions, they do not know how to cope with them. Parents will try to fix the problem through wishful thinking or distancing, but this method never works. What is needed is the "promoting [of] perceptions of stressors as challenges rather than threats [this] may help strengthen parental resilience. It seems important to validate parents' feelings that some strains are beyond their problem-solving attempts" (Bird, Peterson, Hotta Miller, 2002, p. 219). If parents can redefine their stressors, turning them into less

of a problem, then it will make the coping come about faster. Stress does not always need to lead to breakdown. When families prepare themselves in the right way, they can learn to cope with stress and overcome it for the good of their child and family.

Temperament

Temperament tends to be biological. The issue of origin of temperament is often a very significant topic for the adoptive family, especially evident during the first few months when parents tend to doubt their validity and ability as parents. Parents question how much of the biological parents' traits will arise in their children, for "whatever personality traits led the birth parents to the pregnancy in the first place- impulsiveness, immaturity, poor judgment- may themselves have a genetic component, which could get passed on to the child" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 39). Parents' temperament and child's temperament are definitely issues, but because of the fact that most adoptive parents are more mature in age by the time they adopt they are more apt to be able to cope with this difference. Also, research has shown that "the interactions between baby and parent in the very first few days of life might also help shape a baby's temperament" (Brodzinsky, Shecter, Marantz, 1992, p. 39). If the parents have the appropriate interactions with the child when the child is an infant, then this might allow for their adoptive child to have a temperament more like their own than that of the child's biological parents. Contrarily, some parents tend to blame themselves when their child has a bad temperament. Two theories map this thought pattern out, for "the goodness-of-fit theory and attribution theory assume that adoptive parents are personally responsible for accepting personality, intelligence, and other (perceived) biological differences between themselves and their adopted children" (Wegar, 2000, p. 366). The two theories

focus on the fact that the adoptive parents will blame their own shortcomings, which they may believe stem from their infertility, for the causing of their child's shortcomings and temperament. Again, allowing the adoptive parents to gain more confidence in the early stages of their child's development will help the cohesiveness of the family in the future, at the time when their child starts to question their adoption and what it means in his or her life.

The Formation of the Heavenly Family

When God created humans, He created them in His own image (Genesis 1:27, NIV). But, as a result of the fall, humanity was not perfect. Humanity was not perfect because mankind is not a deity but "reflects the divine nature within his humanity" (Allen, 1969, p.125). Therefore when Jesus died on the cross, He made it possible for the human race to truly be of God's perfect image. He enlarged the circle of the trinity. Dan Cruver writes that:

because God is a communion of eternal Persons, and we were made in His triune image, it is clear that we were created to live in communion with other persons- with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with other human beings. (Cruver, 2010, p.45)

Christians were created in the image of God, and therefore redeemed from sin, that they could be in communion with the Trinity. In the same way that adoptive parents experience a feeling of uncertainty concerning the arrival of their child, many Christians feel uncertain about their life after death. But the Bible says that "you [Christians] are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Corinthians 3:23, NIV). Due to Christ's death, Christians are of Christ, because "Christ is God's, so all things belong to his saints" (Allen, 1970, p. 313). There is an everlasting connection between Christ and His followers.

Christians are then allowed to join Christ in the Trinity, in Christ's family.

Romans 8:15 (NIV) notes that "the Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father.'" Through Christ's redemption of his followers, they were made able to call God 'Abba, Father.' The word 'Abba' in Aramaic meant 'father' in the sense to be utilized in a family circle (Mounce, 1995, p. 182).

Attachment theory is marked by a sense of yearning for proximity. Christians are assured of their proximity to their Heavenly Father as a result of Christ's death and their entrance into heaven. In the same way that Christians have to work towards their earthly proximity through a daily walk with Christ, Christian adoptive parents work towards bettering the attachment between themselves and their child through working daily to enhance the relationship.

Once Christians have received redemption, it does not mean that they are finished here on Earth. Through the entrance into the communion of the Trinity, Christians also experience suffering. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10 that "I want to know Christ- yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his suffering becoming like him in his death." Christians experience suffering because Christ Jesus experienced suffering. But it is through this suffering that the true love of Christ is better realized and appreciated. Allen reiterates this by arguing that "in him we can share in his suffering and can look ahead to the resurrection which for us in the future" (Allen, 1971, p. 207) Understanding suffering, as a part of the Trinity, leads to a fuller comprehension of compassion. Jesus was the greatest example of compassion as a result of experiencing suffering, therefore when Christians become like Christ compassion for others is found

through experiencing suffering and understanding the suffering of others. Adoptive parents often blame their shortcomings for any issues that might arise as result of their adoption. Through preserving through the issues, there is a better likelihood of truly coming to understand and embracing compassion.

Many adoptive children struggle as they cope with the fact that they are not biological members of their parents' family. The parents, as a result, carry the role of embracing their child's adoption story by re-telling it religiously and through working to help the child validate his or her identity in the family. For Christians, there is also sometimes a lack in full understanding of their identity in Christ. Christians are full members of Christ's family, therefore their identity is to be the inheritance of Christ on Earth.

Identity Formation and The Adoption Story

Preschool Years: Discussing Adoption

During the infant stage of life, a child has no idea of his or her adoption. However, during the preschool years "with the emergence of language and representational thought on the part of the child... for the first time, parents can begin to engage their children in discussions about adoption" (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 27). The issue of comprehending their adoption story is a hard one for children to fully grasp, making it difficult for parents to find the right way to tell their son or daughter, as well as the right time to tell the child. But general practice is that "parents have been advised to tell the child early and often, supposedly to desensitize him so that when he learns the meaning it will not be traumatic." (Hammons, 2000, p. 253).

Therefore, many parents have found ways to bring the topic of adoption up in the day-to-day life of the child, making the idea a normal one for him or her. When the child becomes old enough to fully understand what being adopted means, agencies and adoption specialists hope that the child will have an easier time dealing with the issue if the parents have been discussing it with him or her since preschool. Also it is advised that “telling is not a one-time thing. Discussions take place repeatedly, with different words for different ages” (Hammons, 2000, p. 253). The parents will not tell the child, as an early preschooler, much about the adoption, they will simply lay the foundation for deeper discussions later. In the past, common practice has been to try to keep the adoption from the child, but this does not seem like a viable decision. Hammons notes that “keeping adoption secret is not a workable solution for most parents. Too many people know, and the likelihood of the child’s being told by someone else is too strong” (Hammons, 2000, p.253). Parents would not want someone else to tell their child he or she is adopted, for this would make the issue much bigger and the parents may lose their trust of the child. Talking early and often to the child about the adoption, from the age when the child somewhat understands what is going on, is the best method.

The parents’ job of discussing adoption with their child is not the only side of the equation in understanding adoption. Children also must decode this message, and use their own methods to understand their past, for research shows that “if the task of adoptive parents is to tell children about their unique family status, it is the child’s task to understand the information presented” (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 28). But, during the preschool developmental age, the children have very little ability in decoding their parents’ communication towards their adoption. Brodzinsky notes that

“for children of this developmental period, adoption typically is but a self-label, associated with an interesting story shared by parents in the context of a warm, loving, and protective family environment (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 28). A child’s adoption becomes more like a story that their parent’s tell at storytime before bedtime. The children do not really understand the implications of the story and the fact that it is truly their own story.

Another way in which parents help to aid the child in decoding the meaning of their adoption is how they choose to talk about the adoption. Hammon states that “to minimize a young child’s confusion in thinking of two sets of parents, some parents refer to biological parents as ‘lady’ or ‘man’ rather than ‘mother’ or ‘daddy’” (Hammon, 2000, p. 253). Also, parents are advised not to extensively use metaphors to tell the child of his or her adoption, for this confuses the child. (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 51). They are at a critical developmental stage where metaphors do not make logical sense to them, therefore though the parent might think metaphors or analogies make sense, it is really only being understood by the parent as the child will be completely lost as to the true meaning of what his or her parent is trying to convey. The adoption story can be one that the child loves hearing her parents recite, because it a story she has heard many times. During the preschool years, this method is a great way to help form the foundation for what the child will understand about his adoption in the future.

One of the hardest things for adopted children to grasp is that they have two different families, they have their adopted family that will care for them for the rest of their lives and they also have a biological family that gave birth to them. The process of defining the different type of parents for the child is family differentiation, which means

that the “children must be told that although they are part of the family, they also are connected to another family” (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 12). This is a difficult concept for children to understand because they have formed an attachment to their adoptive parents, so to think that at one point they belonged to different parents is something that may make them scared and afraid. One mother in a study conducted by Hammons believed that “it made her daughter feel ‘alone’ to imagine herself as a tiny body inside another woman and without her mother” (Hammons, 2000, p. 253). Children often do not cope well when apart from their parents; therefore overcoming this obstacle of the children understanding that at one point they belonged to a different family is one that is paramount. This process is a part of the social role theory. Social role theory consists of the everyday life, and how one performs and follows certain roles that one is expected to portray. In the field of adoption this theory’s core assumption is:

that adoptive family relationships are built in part on a foundation of loss- for the adoptive couple, it is the loss of fertility and the desired biological child; for the adoptee, it is the loss of his or her birth origins. (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 2003, p. 15)

Dealing with loss is another vital element in the struggles of the adoptive family. The child must come to terms, or begin to understand, that at one point he or she lost a set of parents... only to gain a family as a result. The same is true for the parents. They must begin to understand that they may have lost the ability to have biological children, only to gain a child of their own through another method. During the preschool years for the child it is vital for adopted families to get their child accustomed to the idea of adoption—the idea that they once were of a different family and the idea that they have lost parents only to gain others to love them for life.

School Years: Finding Identity

After a child reaches school, school becomes an entirely new entity in his or her life, the resulting new identity complicates the view the child once held about adoption. The entity usually causing a shift in identity is his or her environment. Even before this outside environment can enter into the child's life, the child is handicapped on how society will view him or her. As a part of the stigma that society holds towards adopted children is that the child is "vulnerable to the world's opinion of illegitimacy and its condemnation of his mother" (Brooks & Brooks, 1946, p. 123). A vast majority of children that are placed for adoption are placed because they are illegitimate children and are a part of a broken family before they are even born. Therefore adopted children have to live with this label, making them the spawn of children and adults around their neighborhood who look down on the child and what he or she stands for in the illegitimacy. Other children will often taunt adopted children by reminding them that they are not the real children of their parents. Also, adopted children can pick up on the fact that other adults look down upon them for "throughout the survey there were indications of the extent to which adopted children listened to tones of voice rather than to words" (Brooks & Brooks, 1944, p. 128). Therefore it becomes extremely important for those in the environment around the adopted child to realize their role in the child's formation and their accepting of the differences. The society around the child should step up and accept its role, and "there ought to be a better understanding that outsiders play a part in making the adoption successful or not" (Brooks, Brooks, 1944, p. 228). A child's environment will influence what the child thinks about himself, therefore to lead to healthy self-concepts, education should be provided for society regarding how to help aid

adopted children in their search for continuity. There are some major steps for society to take to move past the stigma of the illegitimate child, but once this is done it will make it easier for society to support the adopted child.

One of the theories that follows the child throughout the middle childhood years of his life is the Family Systems Theory. This theory claims that the family models a system of interacting individuals, in which the “whole” is observed above the individual. There are several components that make this theory relevant in the lives of adoptive families. One component is “how families handle boundary issues determining the child’s dual connection between two families” (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 26). If the family is able to set boundaries so that the child feels comfortable talking about the fact that he or she was once a member of a different family, then this theory has come into play in that a holistic healthy family relationship is formed. Another component is “the success with which the family is able to negotiate the potentially conflicting processes of family integration (i.e. building family connections) and differentiation” (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p. 26). There are most likely certain rules that indicate a path of patterned interactions that the family will take when dealing with conflict and disruption (which usually occurs when the child begins to question his or her identity as an adopted child). During middle childhood, the child begins to understand that he or she is different than most other children; this would mean that there would be somewhat of an identity crisis during this time. Family Systems theory is a theory that can be applied to gain order during this time of identity formation, as each member will perform a specific role in bringing the family together.

Dealing with the meaning of one's identity is usually a problem that is not very evident in a young child's day-to-day life. This is not the case for adopted children, for identity definition is something that they definitely deal with on a day-to-day basis. For the adopted child "the task of identity involves 'coming to terms' with oneself in the context of the family and culture into which one has been adopted" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000, p. 382). Part of accepting the culture that one was brought into is overcoming the 'what ifs' of one's biological family, and getting past dwelling on what one's life would be like if they were never adopted. When a child is having difficulty dealing with her adopted parents, she will tend to think that her biological parents might have been a better fit for her, for "there is always a mythical 'other' set of parents out there who can hold on to their qualities of goodness- allowing the child to continue investing the day-to-day parents with qualities of badness" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Marantz, 1992, p. 77). The children have to decide for themselves that their identity lies with their new family, or they will continue to dwell in the 'what ifs' of their biological family's life. Even though most adoptees leave a worse situation with their biological family to become a part of a better situation with their adoptive parents, these things will matter very little when they are forming their identity and angry, for whatever reason, at their adoptive parents. Researchers have found that there are "three aspects of identity that are particularly important: self-definition, coherence of personality, and sense of continuity over time" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler & Lash Esau, 2000, p. 381). These are the very things that an adoptee must reconcile. Adoptees must figure out who exactly they are separate from their family, they must then define how their identity will fit in with their family, and then the adoptees must figure out how to allow this

relationship to continue for the long term. When forming identity, adoptees must overcome the thought pattern concerning being inadequate themselves. Brodzinsky, et al notes that “children who think they were put up for adoption because something was wrong with them are usually angry at themselves” (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 79). Adopted children may believe that it is their own fault that they were placed for adoption, therefore it becomes the parents and their environment’s job to reassure them of their worth and importance.

Parents can play a significant role in aiding their adoptive children in the forming of their identity. The way that parents can help their children is by recognizing the fact that “the adoptee simply cannot be the same as the nonadoptee; this can lead to feelings of envy, diminished self-esteem, shame, and, for some, emotional paralysis and social alienation” (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Marantz, 1992, p. 83). If parents hold their adopted children to the same levels that they would hold a biological child, then there will more likely be even more difficulty and conflict within the family. Research has shown that “parents who are honest in acknowledging the inherent differences in adoptive family life are more likely to create an environment that helps assuage the child’s fear and guilt regarding his search for answers about his origins” (Brodzinsky, Schechter& Marantz, 1992, p. 84). Children might feel guilty that they are inquisitive as to their biological family, but if an adoptive family can create open boundaries such that the children do not have difficulty in discussing these types of things with their parents, then it will make identity formation much easier for their child. Parents need not fear that their child will discover that his feelings for his adoptive parents are not as much as for his biological

parents; the parents should embrace their child and his differences from other children as he questions his identity.

Adoptive parents perform many roles during the adjustment of their adopted children into their different type of life. From the attachment that develops during the infancy stages of the relationship, to the task of regularly discussing adoption, and finally to the identity formation of their child; these are all vital obstacles and paths in life that the adoptive parents, and their family, must make it through. But, the parents are not the only ones aiding their children as they develop into the people they will be. Research has concluded that “having an adopted child contributed positively to parents’ better understanding of life’s purposes, happiness, and fulfillment, strength and family closeness, keener sense of awareness about future issues, learning through experience, and career and job growth” (Bird, Peterson & Hotta Miller, 2002, p. 217). Not only do adoptive children develop and learn about life’s purpose, but the adoptive parents grow and develop with the child. Adoptive parents become different people after they adopt, they become part of a select group of individuals who have found life’s calling to be one of embarking on the distinctive journey of the adoptive life.

Open v. Closed Adoptions

When future adoptive parents are researching and considering the different aspects of adoption, the issue of open v. closed adoptions is sure to arise. In open adoptions, the biological parents have more influence in the child’s life. Often this will mean that the children see their biological parents, never having to deal with the process of fantasizing what their biological parents are like. Children will often fantasize about their birth parents because they want to feel connected to someone, therefore “contact

between birth and adoptive families provides adopted children with an internal sense of human connectedness” (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000, p. 381). Though the adoptive parents may try to the best of their ability to connect their adopted child to their own family, there is a certain sense of connectedness that can only be completed through a biological connection. Advocates for open adoptions argue that this pathway obliterates many of the obstacles of adoption because it “enhances the adoptive parent’s ability to raise their adopted children, reduces fear of loss, enhances empathy toward the birth mother, and assists healthy identity formation of the child” (Daly, Kelloway, & Sobol, 2000, p. 419).

There are many parents who find themselves on the other side of the debate. In a study led by Grotevant, it was found that advocates for closed adoptions believe that an open adoption would cause for much confusion in the child as he or she tries to form his identity (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000, p. 381). They believe that this process will not help forming the child’s identity but will instead cause identity conflicts. Though parents in closed adoption cases will have to deal with many questions and the possibility of having a child that will fantasize incessantly about his or her biological parents, there is more control for these parents in this process. Parents who choose not to deal with this decision of closed vs. open adoptions for children have turned to international adoptions as a way to escape this decision. In Lebner’s study of adoptive parents, he found that some “families interviewed had decided on international adoption to avoid having to deal with birth families in the present” (Lebner, 2000, p. 372). When parents are on a different continent, as is usually the case, it makes it nearly impossible for there to be an open adoption, therefore parents who do not want to deal with this issue

can choose international adoption and avoid the decision completely- though they will still have to answer their child's questions.

The Inheritance of Christ

In the ancient Roman tradition, people would adopt if they didn't have children so that there would be someone to grieve for them and continue their work after they die (Julien, 2003). In the same way, Christians were adopted to carry out Jesus' work on Earth. Christians are heirs of the Lord. Romans 8:16-17 says that:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (NIV)

As heirs of Christ, His children are on this earth to continue His work. The purpose is missional living. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes that Christians are to be "Little Christs" (1952, p.107). Lewis' view is rooted in the fact that as sons and daughters of Christ, Christians are to follow in their Father's footsteps. Due to the fact that Christians are heirs of Christ, they are also heirs to His suffering. Yet, as Robert Mounce addresses, "sharing in the sufferings of Christ leads to sharing in the glory" (1995, p. 183).

Christians are full members of Christ's heavenly family; therefore the cost of servant leadership holds the same downfalls and benefits. In Matthew 10:8, Jesus demands that "freely you have received, freely you give" (NIV). Inheritance in Christ causes the topic of compassion to arise yet again. Pastor and author Tom Davis writes that "The truth is, we see Jesus in the eyes of the poor *because we see in them who we really are*. We are able to have genuine compassion as Christ has compassion on us- because we see ourselves" (2008, p. 73). Christians must form their identities in Christ just as adoptees must form their identity. When viewing in the lenses of being 'Little Christs,' Christians

are better able to view themselves as Christ's inheritance, just as an adoptee is the adoptive parents' inheritance and true child.

CHAPTER THREE

Justice: Adoption Policies & God's Policies

“Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless, or the widow.” Deuteronomy 27:19 (NIV)

As sinful people, humans are in need of laws, codes, and justice. In the practice of adoption, there are domestic codes seen in a state-by-state codification and there are international codes best conveyed through the Hague Convention. In Christian practice, there were the Mosaic codes for the Israelites and Jesus' new commandments found in the New Testament. Both of these practices have codes to ensure that the people are guided through the process of adoption or life on Earth.

Adoption Policies and Texas Adoption Codes

One component of adoptions that aims to aid families in their quest to adopt, but often complicates that process, is the policy component. Parents, when deciding to adopt, must decide that they will work through all the “red tape” of the adoption, even if it is at times overwhelming or complex. Kahan describes the goals of adoption policies, the ways in which it should operate, by saying:

ideally, we should be working toward creation of a system that enables homes for all children in which their material and emotional needs are met. Achieving this end involves not only creation of a just and affordable adoption system, but more importantly, development of policies that provide families with the supports necessary for care for their dependents. (Kahan, 2006, p.70)

The basis of policies is to support families. The United States has actually led the way in achievements for the adoption system. The United States was the first country to enact the phrase “in the best interest of the child” into the way adoption and custody decisions would be decided (Simon, 1994, p.143). Now, the policy of ascribing the best interest of the child clause to cases is used on an international scale in decisions for specific children.

In 1980, the first assistance policy was created to help families with adopted children. This policy was the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. Following this act, the current act on the subject, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was formed. The purpose of the Adoption and Safe Families Act is to increase the amount of children being adopted. This act was meant to get rid of some of the extraneous requirements that had been put in place to encourage family conservation instead of adoption (Kahan, 2006, p. 68). The Adoption and Safe Families Act marked the paradigm shift of policymakers and initiated the remodeling of many policies involving adoption. A result of this act was the Special Needs Adoption Program of 1998. The 1998 program defines a special needs children as Caucasian children over the age of ten, African American children over the age of three, members of sibling groups, and children with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities; and then gives monetary and other forms of assistance to those parents adopting these children (Jennings, 2006, p. 565).

When a child’s needs are not able to be met by his or her biological parents, then the state has the right to take over the responsibility for caring for the child. Then the state turns to adoption or foster care to provide the child with parents who will protect and care for the child. The process of finding adoptive parents and placing children with adoptive parents is not one to be taken lightly, for it changes the basic functioning of a

particular family and determines the well-being of the child in the future. The State of Texas has a very extensive adoption code, a code that affects families all over the state immensely. There are six areas that are well addressed through the Texas Adoption Codes. These areas are: enabling future parents, stability, parent involvement, cooperation, diversity, and aiding vulnerable families. Much impact is given by these codes because of their span through all of these aforementioned areas.

Enabling Future Parents

One of the most important roles of the adoption codes in Texas is to determine who is able to adopt a child. Along with this, there is a certain sense of the state providing an incentive for other persons, either within the family or person close enough to know the child, to adopt a child who has lost his or her parents for whatever reason. Section 162 of the adoption codes remark that an adult can adopt a child if “the person seeking the adoption has been a managing conservator or has had actual care, possession, and control of the child for a period of six months preceding the adoption or is the child's former stepparent” (Sec.162.001). The incentive is to allow for there to be fewer stipulations involving adoption close to the original biological family, even so much so that the former step-parent can adopt the child if the court sees it to be in the child's best interest. This is a perfect example of a policy enabling others to take over the functioning of a child's family if needed. Another code within the Texas codes accurately supports parents as they take over responsibilities with an adoptive child. The codes state that

before placing a child for adoption, the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, licensed child-placing agency, or the child's parent or guardian shall compile a report on the available health, social, educational, and genetic history of the child to be adopted. (Sec.162.005)

This facilitates families as they take over the role of meeting the child's needs. The Texas Adoption Codes can be a great support for parents; for example, without the report they would not know how best to deal with issues regarding the child when the issues arise.

Stability

The Texas adoption codes also provide the family with legal incentives for stability and permanent guardianship. In regards to stability in an adoption, the Texas codes place stability for the child in the highest esteem. The purpose of the codes, in essence, is to provide laws and requirements for adults participating in the process to ensure stability for the child. This is shown by the fact that “the court may not grant an adoption until the child has resided with the petitioner for not less than six months” (Sec.162.009). Instead of instantly placing a child in a home and calling the adoption finished, the state has placed safeguards to ensure that the child can find a safe, secure home; one that will provide stability for the child in the future. Only after much investigation into the workings of the family post-adoption can the government officials proclaim the family ready to be officially an adoptive family; one that will protect and care for the child. Another important aspect for adoptive families is to make the adopted child to feel as if he or she is just like any of the other biological siblings. The state encourages this by declaring that “an adopted child is entitled to inherit from and through the child's adoptive parents as though the child were the biological child of the parents” (Sec.162.017). Not only is this code used for the means of codifying how an estate of adoptive parents will be handled after their death, but it back-handedly ensures that the child feels like he or she has just as much worth in the family as the biological child. Codes and laws cannot force parents to treat their children equally, but they can by other

means enforce that biological and adopted children are treated the same in the legal system. The Adoption Code is a good example of how Texas recognized the fact that major changes in family relationships extend over a long period of time and are not something that just happen in the moment, to be let go of at a later point.

Parent Involvement

Family involvement is an area where the state cannot make parents become more involved in their child's day to day life, but can make sure the parent is involved in the legal aspects of their child's life. The way that the court ensures this is by requiring that both parents attend adoption hearings unless a circumstance that the court deems as appropriate occurs, in which case at least one parent must be at the hearing (Sec.162.014). The above mentioned section of the code ensures that in every step of the legal process, both parents are involved in protecting their child, hopefully following up this involvement in court/legal proceedings with involvement at home. One of the goals for adoptive families is interdependence. The adoption codes encourage this by placing most, if not all, financial responsibility of the children on their new adoptive parents (Sec.162.104). Though finances are often one of the major concerns within families, by requiring the parents to deal with issues means that there is a certain investment in their children they must make. Adopting a child is not an easy process, as seen by the fact that it is another person that the family must provide for financially.

Cooperation

Cooperation between different governmental departments and the families themselves is an important component to the adoption process. No parent wants to think

he or she is alone on his or her journey and state governments have a hard time doing everything in the adoption process on their own. From state to state, there can be cooperation according to the Texas adoption code. The code declares that “a juvenile court may place a delinquent child in an institution in another state as provided by Article VI of the compact. After placement in another state, the court retains jurisdiction of the child as provided by Article V of the compact” (Sec.162.105). Sometimes a state may not have the structures and organizations interiorly to deal with a child that has a special sort of needs. Therefore, through cooperation among states, states are able to do what is best for the child. Another way in which the adoption codes meet the principle of partnership and cooperation is that there must be a program in place to aid families as they trek through the adoption process. The code states that the

“department shall administer a program designed to promote the adoption of children by providing information to prospective adoptive parents concerning the availability and needs of the children, assisting the parents in completing the adoption process, and providing adoption assistance necessary for the parents to adopt the children. (Sec.152.302)

States have the capacity to empower families to be the best that they can be through programs such as these where the needs of the families are met holistically. Programs meeting this requirement can help families with pre- and post-adoption issues. Whenever issues arise with an adoption it is very important that parents know exactly where to go, enabling programs that cooperate with the government and its statutes can cause for great security for parents which in turn will mean more security for the child.

Diversity

Adoptive families can be diverse in two main ways: either through adopting a child domestically of a different race or adopting a child from a foreign country. The

Texas adoption codes protect both of these institutions, as to allow for diverse families in the state. For families wishing to adopt a child of a different race domestically, the state decrees that no institution may stop parents from adopting on the basis of race, for it says “in determining the best interest of the child, the court may not deny or delay the adoption or otherwise discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity of the child or the prospective adoptive parents” (Sec.162.015). By enacting the requirement of same race adoptions, the state would be greatly prolonging the adoption of many children, inhibiting their ability to find a caring family at a quicker rate. Therefore, it is important not only for equality’s sake but also for the child’s sake that the state take away this restriction on families. In regard to foreign adoption cases within Texas, the adoption codes declare that they will be treated the same as domestic cases. The code codifies that

an adoption order rendered to a resident of this state that is made by a foreign country shall be accorded full faith and credit by the courts of this state and enforced as if the order were rendered by a court in this state unless the adoption law or process of the foreign country violates the fundamental principles of human rights or the laws or public policy of this state. (Sec.162.023)

It is important that the state of Texas does not encourage any corrupt practices in the sending countries such as the baby trade or child trafficking; therefore, there must be a stipulation in practice that corrupt practices will not be accepted in intercountry adoptions. Also, there should not be a discouraging factor within the laws that discriminates from finding diversity within a family through adopting from overseas, so it is important that international adoptions are treated like domestic cases in the courts. There will be several differences between the two practices based on their nature and premises, but as much as possible continuity between domestic and international adoption practices will cause little to no discrimination.

Aiding Vulnerable Families

The fact that adoptive families have different obstacles than purely biological families makes them vulnerable. The state of Texas has enacted several requirements within their adoption codes to help vulnerable families within the adoption realm. The first thing that the adoption codes did for vulnerable adoptive families is require counseling for the adoptive parents. This helps the parents know how to deal with these differences and to help them feel much less vulnerable. The codes declare “the applicant must participate in counseling for not less than one hour with a social worker or mental health professional with expertise in postadoption counseling” (Sec.162.302). The state has the ability to empower vulnerable families with varying programs such as counseling and other forms of support. Another way in which Texas aids vulnerable families, especially those multiracial families, is by enacting an advisory board that directly addresses the difficulties the families are facing either in the legal process or in the home. The advisory board is “an advisory committee on promoting the adoption of and provision of services to minority children is established within the department” whose goal is to “study, develop, and evaluate programs and projects relating to community awareness and education, family support, counseling, parenting skills and education, and reform of the child welfare system” (Sec.162.309). There are many methods to eradicating the frailty of vulnerable families, and this advisory board’s goals should be able to address most of these methods and find the best way to ensure that families are getting their needs met in all aspects. This takes most of the community type work in the adoption process straight to the community instead of keeping it in administration. The closer the proponents of the issue are to the families, the better the families will be served.

There are over forty pages in adoption codes in Texas. This conveys the complexity of the issue of adoption. The state of Texas wants to make sure that children are supported and protected throughout the adoption process, and also wants to ensure that the adoptive parents are empowered as the process progresses. Many of these codes do an effective job in reaching these goals, making it very clear how important the practice of adoption is to the state. Orphans are often the marginalized in society, therefore any codes that can bring them out of marginalization are for the best. The Texas Adoption Codes, though lengthy, were made to guide families into safe practices as they enter into adoption. In the same way, God gave the Israelites Mosaic Law to guide them as they entered into covenant with Him (Exodus, NIV).

God's Code of Justice

Mosaic Law is diverse, lengthy, and complicated. Jesus condensed Mosaic Law into two commandments. In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus responds to a question from a lawyer concerning the greatest of the laws by saying

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (NIV)

With this revelation of the new commandments, Jesus placed these two laws above all other laws (Blomberg, 1992, p. 335). The Jewish people had become too bound by the laws that they were missing out on God's true commission for them on Earth. Jesus had the authority to abolish the Mosaic Code because He was the end of the Law. Milton Terry comments that "the great Teacher made it very clear and positive that he himself is the end of the law, and his fulfillment, accomplishing, or consummation of the law and

the prophets is a making of all things new in the gospel of a new and better covenant” (1906, p. 240). Scripture reiterates this point in Romans 8:2, “because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives you life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (NIV). With Jesus’ death on the cross, the needs for the Mosaic laws were lifted because the Holy Spirit living inside of each Christian was the new law (Blomberg, 1992, pp. 174-175). Christians no longer had to prove their worthiness for heaven, for Jesus opened heaven up to all who would accept His teachings. God knows the heart of each of His followers and knows their intent in every situation. This means that He is in charge of judgment, not an earthly code. As portrayed with the aforementioned adoption codes, humans need some amount of regulation. David Skeel notes that “because human regulators and law enforcers, unlike God, cannot look into our hearts to discern our anger or lust ordinary men and women could never systematically enforce these principles” (2007, p.144). The principles he is referring to are the principles of Jesus’ new commandments. For earthly justice, codes are needed. On the contrary, for heavenly justice, codes are unnecessary because Jesus freed humans from their bondage.

On Earth, Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning what is right and what is wrong. In fact, the Greek term for the Holy Spirit (*parakletos*) means “helper, advocate, or the one who comes alongside of another (Davis, 2008, pp. 79-80). In John 14:26, Jesus comforts his disciples by saying that “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (NIV). Advocates are often needed in the court room setting to guide the innocent, or needed to defend the rights of the weak in any other aspect of life. The Holy Spirit was sent to each Christian as an interpreter, or guide, for

Jesus' teachings (Borchert, 2002, p. 132). Especially in the realm of adoption, advocacy is vital. Young adopted children have no method to voice their concerns and their issues. Therefore trained advocates are an important aspect of the adoption process. In a Christian's adoption, God sends the Holy Spirit to guide them through their earthly life in preparation for their heavenly life. Codes are not needed for heavenly guidance, for Christ gave Christians a guide through His death.

As a part of God's new commandments through Jesus, Christians are called to love all people. This brings up the debate as to whether this is a call for Christians to minister to children of different races by bringing them into their family. Policies have quivered back and forth on the issue, just as Christians have gone back and forth on their stance on the issue.

Transracial Adoption Policies

"She wanted to know if she could have her skin painted the same color as mine" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Marantz, 1992, p. 59). A Caucasian mother relayed a story about how her African American daughter asked her this question after struggling with understanding why she was a different color than her adoptive mother. This example is one that weighs heavily in the debate surrounding transracial adoption. Caucasian families more and more desire to adopt children of a different ethnicity than themselves, which opens up a new plethora of debates and issues for the government and other agencies to decide. In past decisions on the issue of transracial adoptions, the courts and legislators have claimed that race can only be one of many factors deciding adoptive and foster families but in the future the government will need to make decisions as to whether there will be any aid given to finding families of color to adopt children of

color or if their money would be better allocated by providing more funding for families of all races in adopting whatever race of child they wish to adopt.

Adoption policy in the United States is quite unique in form. Felix Infausto notes that “The United States is the originator of ‘social conscience adoption,’ which makes the best interests of the child paramount to the interests of the natural and adoptive parents and of the State” (Infausto, 1969, p. 3). In the policy of the United States the child is the main determinant of what is decided in adoption cases. Almost all of the cases brought up before a court center around this issue of what exactly is the best interest of the child. In the relatively new debate of transracial adoption, there is much debate as to what is best for the child—staying in a family of the same race that may be more disadvantaged or going to a Caucasian family that is more advantaged. Policies regarding transracial adoption question whether color-blind individualism, which “argues that race should not matter in adoption,” or whether race be a determinate in the selecting of adoptive parents to preserve the racial identity of the child (Quiroz, 2007, p. 57). The history old debate over segregation and racial equality comes to a tough test when deciding the transracial adoption policies of our states and nation.

Transracial adoption policy is of paramount importance in the field of adoption. It not only affects the child and how he or she will be raised, but it also affects the social service system as a whole. Laws that are for keeping adoption within race cause the placement process to be much slower and it also causes “inappropriate” placements with much lower income families that are the same race (Jennings, 2006, p. 561). Advocates that are for color-blind placements believe that “racism can be eradicated through transracial adoptions” (Quiroz, 2007, p. 57). They view laws for same-race adoptions as

a form of segregation and racial inequality. Once African American children, and children of other races, are integrated with Caucasian families, they believe that racial boundaries will be overcome and there will be nationwide acceptance of all races as equal, by bringing the issue of race into the family. On the other side of the debate, “black organizations in this country view transracial adoption as an expression of white racism” in that it views black families as being inadequate in the parental role (Kahan, 2006, p. 67). For there to be progress in the adoption of minority children, the government must become involved with the issue and enact policies that work for the “best interest of the child.” Just as the government has made policy to determine what should be done in other cases of racial equality or inequality, the government should make policies that are best regarding transracial adoption.

Past Court Decisions

The courts have played a major role in determining how the United States would handle transracial adoption. One of the first cases regarding this issue was *Farmer vs. Farmer* which revolved around a custody battle between an interracial couple. The mother wanted custody of their 6 year old daughter, but the African American father sued for custody on the grounds that his daughter would experience racial identity problems if she remained in a Caucasian household as opposed to the African American environment he would provide. The Caucasian mother was awarded custody in this circumstance because “race was once again held to be but one of several factors to be considered in adoption cases” (Simon, 1994, p. 45). Custody cases in the United States have time and time again considered race not to be the only deciding factor when determining where to place a child and be “in the best interest of the child.” The transracial custody cases have

laid groundwork for the cases that are concerning adoption or foster care. In a 1989 court case involving African American foster children being taken away from their Caucasian foster parents to be placed with African American foster parents, the courts went against their usually color-blind decisions. Simon summarizes that

The foster parents claimed that the agency's policy of placing children into ethnically, racially, religiously, and culturally similar environments violated their foster parents' equal protection rights. The foster parents lost... [and] in affirming the trial court, the Eighth Circuit Court held that race may be taken into consideration in determining the child's best interest. (James & Altstein, 2002, p. 50)

Up until the 1990s, the bulk of governance over transracial adoption relied on judicial decisions. Part of the reason for this is that transracial adoptions were not as commonplace before the 1990s. After this point the legislative branch has stepped in to further ascribe rules and regulations regarding transracial adoptions, for with the prevalence of transracial adoptions increasing nationwide legislation was needed.

Legislation

Congress has enacted three legislation pieces that influence the area of transracial adoption. The earliest legislation was the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This provided subsidies for special needs adoptions (Kahan, 2006, p. 68). Special needs adoptions are "White children over the age of ten, Black children over the age of three, members of sibling groups, and children with psychical, mental, and emotional disabilities" (Jennings, 2006, p. 565). The definition of "special needs" children has been altered many times since the passage of this act but the previous definition is the most recent. This act was meant to provide aid for those that want to adopt children that are usually kept in the "system" for longer amounts of time. The Adoption Assistance and

Child Welfare Act greatly affects the adoption of Black children, for it gives an incentive and assistance to those families considering adopting these children. The next piece of legislation was the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, which “entitles from denying to any individual the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the basis of the prospective parent’s or the child’s race, color, or national origin” (Jennings, 2006, p. 561). As a part of this legislation, though it in word says that agencies and the government cannot prohibit denial of adoption because of race, to begin with it did allow race to be part of the consideration of where to place children. The MEPA, because of confusion, needed to be altered. Therefore the Interethnic Adoption Provision (IEP) was written as an amendment in 1996. Patricia Jennings notes that “ the 1996 passage of the IEP removed language that allowed consideration of race, ethnicity, and/or national origin, and it strengthened sanctions against agencies that failed to comply with the law” (2006, p. 562). These two pieces of legislation are what regulate transracial adoptions today, though there is still a debate occurring as to whether these acts truly allow the “best interests of the child” to be considered.

The Debate Against Transracial Adoptions

The fundamental debate behind transracial adoption, as mentioned before, is whether or not it is in the “best interest” of African American children to be raised with Caucasian foster or adoptive parents. On one side of the debate are entities like the NABSW (National Association of Black Social Workers) who are fighting to get the government to situate all importance on placing African American children with African American families who will foster their racial development and identity. In fact “the NABSW fashioned race-matching policies on the affirmative action model” (Jennings,

2006, p. 561). Advocates for this affirmative action model to transcend into the adoption arena also feel that it is too easy for Caucasian families in the middle class to adopt whatever type of child they want, they question “what does it mean that it is so relatively easy for white American families not just to adopt black children but to choose from a range of colors, nationalities, and configurations from around the world” (Quiroz, 2007, p. 65)? These supporters believe that this is also a type of racial inequality in that minority races are not given a chance to have influence in the adoption realm, because adoption agencies tend to always resolve that the Caucasian families are in “the best interest of the child,” when in reality it would be more so in “the best interest of the child” to belong to a type of situation where they would be able to continue developing their ‘black identity’ to the best of their ability. These advocates feel as if a large part of the African American community would be lost to the Caucasian community if Caucasian families continue to have such an easy time adopting African American children.

The Debate For Transracial Adoptions

On the other side of the debate are those who believe that transracial adoptions should be color-blind and follow the policies in other realms of society that do not look at race as a deciding factor. The main advocate for this is The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) (Simon, 1994, p. 139). Supporters, like the NACAC, for color-blind adoption policies have conducted, and cited, many studies in which the black children, and other minority children, have no identity or developmental problems as a result of being raised by a Caucasian family. Simon cites that “the children reared in these homes appeared indifferent to the advantages of being white, but aware of and comfortable with the racial identity imposed on them by their outward appearance” (1994,

p. 144). There are also only a very small percentage of children who were determined to have identity problems, “eleven percent of transracially adopted children told us directly that they would prefer to be white, and 27 percent of the parents believe that their transracially adopted children identify themselves as white” (Simon, 1994, p. 148). This percentage is one that does not alarm the government as being a problem, as there are often problems with identity definition even with adopted Caucasian children. The advocates for color-blind adoption policies also sight “the best interest of the child” in their defense, as they believe that most of the time the Caucasian families deemed capable by social services are better able to care for the children and they believe that waiting for an African American family to adopt a African American child would mean the child would spend much more time in the “system” which would cause more developmental problems than if the child had simply been allowed to be adopted by a Caucasian family.

A portion of the debate surrounding transracial adoptions involves the churches’ approval or condemnation of the practice. The Baylor Religion Survey of 2005 was utilized as research in a study by Samuel Perry. His research shows that there are patterns for approval and disapproval in this realm. The study notes that “whites who attend churches with fewer same-race attendees (i.e., more racially integrated churches) are significantly more likely to approve of TRA [transracial adoption] than whites who attend churches with a higher percentage of same race attendees” (Perry, 2009, p. 859). Exposure seems to be the key to approval of transracial adoptions in churches. The stigma is lessened when a loved church member adopts a child of a different race, or even when more families of color are a part of a church. Perry found that only a 1:5 minority

to Caucasian ratio in a church is needed for the “point of ‘critical mass’ where minority groups represent a large enough percentage of the church to make their presence felt” (Perry, 2009, p. 864). The above-mentioned research can be founded upon tenets of God’s colorblindness found in scripture. As a church lives by the call of God to love all people, the acceptance level of transracial adoptions rises.

God’s Colorblindness

Lyrics in a song made popular by Christian band Gungor state that “God is not a man, God is not a white man, God is not a man sitting on a cloud... but God is Love, God is Love, and He Loves everyone” (2009). Gungor’s song epitomizes the theology surrounding God’s colorblindness. Often, Jesus is painted in Caucasian evangelical churches, as well as depictions around the world, as being a ‘white man.’ However, this was not historically correct. Chigor Chike points out that “the Israel of Jesus’ time was a mixture of different races, such as Chaldeans, Egyptians, Midianites, Ethiopians, Kushites, Babylonians, and other dark people” (2010, pp. 359-360). Jesus would have been far from a white man. Due to the factors involving Jesus’ race, embracing all races as God’s chosen would be more historically and biblically founded. For as part of the Gungor song states, “God loves everyone.”

Over the course of Jesus’ ministry, He had the chance to minister to many Gentiles and people of different races than His own. In Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV), Jesus is cited as healing a Canaanite woman’s demon possessed daughter. Matthew used the word ‘Canaanite’ to describe the woman in this passage because it would “conjure up their evil connotations from bygone eras” (Blomberg, 1992, p. 242). Jesus then questions her faith by asking her why He should help a Gentile.

“He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’
Yes it is, Lord, she said. ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their
master’s table.’” (Matthew 15:26-27, NIV)

The woman was strong in her faith and told Jesus that even though she was a Gentile she recognized Him as Lord (Blomberg, 1992, p. 244). Jesus commended the woman’s faith and healed her daughter. Matthew here shows how Jesus understood society’s condemnation of different races, but embraced the races irregardless of the stigmas. Jesus was color-blind in His ministry. If Christians are to follow His example, then their ministry should be color-blind as well. As churches and Christians look to support transracial adoptive couples, or to become transracially adoptive parents, they can rest assured in the fact that they are ministering in a way similar to Jesus’ color-blind ministry.

In current adoption trends, there is none more fast growing than international adoptions. Thus, there has been a need for regulation in these practices as people from different cultures look to find common ground through the adoption of a child from one country to the next. In current Christian justice trends, Christians have divorced their covenant with God to serve justice for His people in a push to make Christian justice more like social work. Therefore on re-examining scripture references to justice, God’s true meaning of justice can be recovered.

Justice Overseas: The Hague Convention

Purpose

The main source of international adoption policy is found in the Hague Convention. To ensure that international adoption does not turn into child abduction or child selling, the United Nations enacted the Hague Convention as a means to regulate the adoption contract between countries. The Hague Convention cannot be utilized

without realizing the importance of the phrase “in the best interest of the child.” Though the phrase was not physically written into the Hague Convention, it remains a decisive factor. Rhona Schuz argues that part of the reason that the phrase “in the best interests of the child” does not appear in the convention is because of the fear that “the best interests of a particular child may be sacrificed to the best interests of children generally” (1995, p. 776). The purpose of the Convention was to set guidelines to ensure greater safety and security for children around the world. The committee working on the Hague Convention did not want to tie judges and other officials down by mandating something that could be construed in many ways or get in the way of providing for a larger number of children’s needs. The authors of the convention levied that “the courts risk sending a child back [in abduction cases] when this will be detrimental to him/her in order to ensure that return is prompt in other cases and to deter child abduction generally” (Schuz, 1995, p. 778). Given that all evil cannot be destroyed by this Convention, the authors of the Convention chose not to write in this phrase, but to make it a part of how states read the Convention. Gonzalo Parra-Aranguren notes that “the best interests of the child principle is fundamental for the interpretation of the 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry adoption” (Parra-Aranguren, 1999, p. 20). Though there were too many circumstances to make the phrase “in the best interests of the child” a written part of the Convention, the phrase is not obsolete as it is a part of how every state should read this Convention, and a part of how they view the rights of children.

Issues Addressed

The Hague Convention addresses the requirements for both the *sending* and *receiving* countries in the process of international adoption. Ethan Kapstein explains

that “in terms of the Convention [it] requires both supplying and receiving countries to implement new legislation: it asks the first to clean up corrupt adoption networks, and the second to crack down on the receipt of trafficked children” (Kapstein, 2003, p. 122). Both sides of the adoption spectrum are asked to be weary of trafficked children, to face the problem “head on” instead of avoiding it. There are four goals that the Hague Convention implemented to curtail these issues. The first goal is to “ensure that the international adoption is in the child’s best interest” (Kimball, 2004, p. 569). This goal focuses on those issues where the child still has parents in the sending country who are capable of raising the child, for it allows the child to stay in his or her country of origin if it is for the best. Secondly, the Hague Convention hopes to “create a cooperation system amongst participating nations, in efforts to curtail child trafficking and prevent other abuses” (Kimball, 2004, p. 569). The aforementioned system is the area in which the Hague Convention created the most new requirements. The final two goals are “to ensure that intercountry adoptions that conform to the Hague Convention’s requirements are recognized and to ensure proper consent to the adoption” (Kimball, 2004, p. 569). These two goals give incentives for countries to stop the practice of taking children away from poorer families for no reason. If a developing country wants more aid and support from the bigger, developed countries then they will avoid the ‘black list’ at all costs, wanting to be one of the states recognized for achieving the requirements.

Though the Hague Convention does not have much power over the countries, they took what little power they do wield and created guidelines that, if followed, should decrease the amount of child trafficking, trading, and rescuing. The first issue they

addressed was to require that both the sending and the receiving countries investigate the case. The investigation includes the rules that

the sending country is responsible for establishing that the child is an orphan without existing parental ties, while the receiving country must conduct home studies to determine the fitness of the prospective family to raise and care for the child. (Kimball 2004, p. 570)

If both states perform well in these aspects, then there will be less often a chance of fraud, and it will give the children more of a chance of success later in life and stability in the present. The requirement of an investigation is the best way that the Convention can ensure that “the best interest of the child” is being addressed. The second tenet utilized to ensure cooperation was the establishment of a central authority in each country, for that reason “a cornerstone of the Convention is the requirement that each state establish a central authority (CA) with which member states will cooperate and which will provide oversight of all aspects of the adoption process” (Bergquist, 2009, p. 627). Without the central authority, there would be no mechanism to go back and forth between the states ensuring communication regarding the adoption of each individual child. An adoption cannot commence without the agreement of both the sending state and the receiving state (Parra-Aranguren, 1999, p. 21). Therefore the central authority plays a large role in decreasing the amount of trafficking occurring, and holds the life and betterment of many orphans in their hands.

The United States

The United States is the largest recipient of adopted children, therefore their compliance is essential for the Hague Convention to be a viable and legitimate set of guidelines. Though the United States signed the Convention in 1994, they did not act on

any of the tenets until 2000 (Schmit, 2008, p. 380). For the central authority required in the Hague Convention, the United States placed the Department of State (Schmit, 2008, p. 381). All adoption cases must go through the Department of State before the adoption can occur. The Department of State then sends the case to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and they “make an administrative judgment about the child’s adoptability” (Bergquist, 2009, p. 627). This occurs on two levels. First the USCIS makes a judgment on its own as to whether or not the parents are citizens of the United States and are suitable parents, then USCIS works with the Department of State, the central authority, to determine from the sending state whether the child is actually an orphan or not and if the child is suitable for adoption into the United States (Schmit, 2008, p. 381). These are the major ways in which the United States follows the guidelines set out by the Hague Convention. Other extraneous steps that the United States takes are the steps to make the adopted child a United States citizen by verifying the adoption documents and by implementing an accreditation process for adoption agencies to go through in order to become a Hague accredited agency. The United States has situated the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Council of Accreditation in the role of accrediting adoption service providers in the United States (Schmit, 2008, p. 382). The United States is a good example of what compliance to the Hague Convention looks like, which follows the pathway that the Hague has paved in that “the Hague Convention favors compliance of receiving countries, which tend to be wealthier and more able to bear the economic burdens posed by compliance than comparatively poor sending countries” (Kimball, 2004, p. 563). The disparity between receiving countries and

sending countries are only part of the compliance issues that the Hague Convention has been dealing with since its implementation.

Concerns

The Hague Convention, though it has been effectual at initially setting good guidelines to prevent child trafficking, still has many issues that must be overcome for there to be even greater gains in institutionalizing the practice of international adoptions. One of the major concerns with the Hague Convention is that “it is not binding on non-members, and member states may continue to facilitate adoptions with non-members” (Bergquist, 2009, p. 629). Little incentive is left for non-member states to ever join the Hague Convention, for they may still set up adoptions with member states without receiving the penalties they would receive if a member state. Member states may not facilitate adoptions with other member states that are in violation of the code, which is why much of the adoptions between Guatemala and the United States have halted. If a state knows that it cannot overcome the corrupt practices, then the state will most likely remain a non-member.

Another glitch in the Hague Convention is the fact that “the regulations may cause smaller agencies to go out of business because compliance will impose greater liability upon the agencies, as well as increased fees” (Kimball 2004, 576). In countries that are developing, where it is much harder to have wealth, it is difficult for adoption agencies to muster up enough money to comply with all the Hague requirements and the money that is necessary for the rest of the components of an adoption. Adoption agencies that were not corrupt to begin will then be forced to go out of business simply because they cannot keep up with the Hague Convention. This may be doing a disservice to the

children of that country who could benefit from being adopted overseas. So much as the Hague may be helping to halt corrupt practices, it is also deterring some of the cleaner agencies from being a part of the adoption process.

A third problem with the Hague Convention is that there is no section written into the Convention that addresses penalties for non-compliance to the Convention. The enforcement of penalties is then left entirely up to each individual state and its central authority (Kimball 2004, p. 572). This practice is almost working backwards, for the Hague was created to place more uniformity to the process of international adoption, but does not have the backing to ensure that the uniformity occurs from state to state. The Hague Convention rests entirely on the hope that each state will do what is “best” for its state when it comes to compliance. Ethan Kapstein notes that “home country control does little to curb the corruption that is endemic in some places” (2004, p. 124). For corruption to be addressed fully, there must be uniformity in the penalties for non-compliance on an international level.

Improvements

The sanctions outlined by the Hague Convention are weak, not far from non-existent. In both cases there are no real incentives for non-member countries to abide by the guidelines set forth. In abduction cases, countries may sign the Hague Convention but never act upon the guidelines. Reasons for signing the Hague usually include pressure from other member states. At present, there is an increase in membership to the Hague, in regards to abduction laws, but the countries that are signing are not fulfilling their obligations, which is most vividly seen in the fact that they “ratify or accede without even having designated the Central Authority mandated by Article 6” (Bruch, 1999, p.41). If

the country has not already begun paving the way for the obligations to be met, there is a good chance that those obligations will never be met or will be met at a very slow rate. In adoption cases, there is also no real motivation for non-members to become member states. The only states within whom member states cannot proceed in international adoptions with are those who are member states and have not met the requirements as set forth by the Hague Convention. Thus, joining the Hague Convention is a disadvantage for states, in that if the state signs the Hague and then cannot meet all the measures then adoptions will be restricted in that state. On the other hand, if the state were a non-member and its adoption process fell short of the requirements it would not matter, for the member state would still be able to proceed with the adoption (Schmit, 2008, p. 389). At present, there is a great disparity in the international adoption legislation. For the Hague to be most effective, then this disparity would need to be overcome and there would need to be an incentive for states to sign the Hague and follow its guidelines closely. Sanctions are needed in both cases if there is going to be mass improvement in both these areas. Part of the reason as to why there is a lacking in sanction is that this issue is not one fully heralded by the international community.

The United Nations, and other international organizations, cannot ban completely the adoptions from non-member to member states. This would be an option that would break the foundation of the Hague Convention, which is creating an environment where the best interests of children are met and the welfare of children is heightened. Therefore, international organizations need to look for other options to increase the sanctions and improvement for these entities. Ethan Kapstein contends that

strengthening this regime (the Hague) is essential to the well-being of orphans and to the parents who would receive them. By doing so will require more diplomatic

pressure, more foreign aid, and more political courage in confronting traffickers than the international community has mustered. (2003, p. 116)

These requirements for improvement in international adoption hold true for international child abduction cases as well. Raising awareness of the problem to the attention of diplomats will help the case to become a topic of discussion and resulting legislation and sanctions. Providing more foreign aid would greatly help both of these programs. How can the international community expect a small, developing country to meet all the requirements that a developed country is able to meet? These developing countries are lacking a firm foundation in their welfare and governmental system as well as monetarily. If international organizations and other member states can provide more aid in helping the developing countries to meet the requirements, then there would be a much safer environment for children. Fighting for the cause of children's rights is not an easy fight, for it does not encompass a national security threat nor a problem of great international economic importance. For the goals of the Hague Convention to ultimately be met, diplomats and citizens from around the world will need to show how important protecting and enhancing the lives of children is for a better future. Much of the dealings of the Hague Convention encompass the notion to provide justice for children in countries that may not fight for their own children's justice. God does the same for His children. The world does not provide perfect justice, it is only through the loving justice of God that people on earth meet true and perfect justice.

Scriptural Definition of Justice

God demands justice for His people at many places in the Bible. For instance in Psalm 82:3 (NIV), God calls for His people to "defend the weak and the fatherless;

uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed.” Yet, God did not call Christians to be social workers (Burghardt, p. 1993, p. 5). The church often will see the practice of justice as social work, something secular. But that is far from the biblical truth. Daniel Bell writes that the church has begun to separate Jesus from justice, just as they are distancing themselves from the practice of justice as a whole. He says that instead “Jesus is a motivator who through his teaching prompts us to get involved in the struggle for justice” (2006, p. 90). Jesus has never just been a motivator for His people. In fact, Jesus is justice. Whereas Jesus is justice, Christians are only just by way of their justification through Jesus’ death on the cross (Bell, 2006, p. 90). As made just through Christ, Christians are then in covenant with Christ, thus must follow God’s command to treat others as He would want them to be treated (Burghardt, 1993, p. 4). Luke 4:18 (NIV) outlines God’s command for His people, for “the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” Jesus spoke of His command from God, which He then gave to His followers.

As a part of God’s command to treat others as He would have them treated, God substantiates this command by saying to the Israelites, “you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19, NIV). There was to be no haughtiness in the mind of God’s people, for at one point God had to bring justice for them as He brought them out of Egypt. Walter Burghardt argues that “the Israelites were to father the fatherless and feed the stranger, not because the orphan and the outsider deserved it, but because this was the way God has acted towards Israel” (1993, p. 4). In remembering the past, the present commands were justified. At some point all Christians were in need of justice. In the Old Testament, it was a more physical

justice as the Israelites needed to be led out of Israel. But in the New Testament, justice was given to Christians through Christ as the justification for entry into heaven.

Thomas Aquinas noted that the secular version of justice fell quite short of the Christian version of justice. He argued “the secular/pagan notion of justice [of] ‘rendering what is due’ is completely transformed by the love that is Christ” (Bell, 2006, p. 99). As mentioned previously in this thesis, Jesus revolutionized the commandments by which Christians were to live. Christians were to love God and to love others. Therefore, it follows that “not to execute justice is not to worship God” (Burghardt, 1993, p. 4). Christians fighting for justice for those around them is a form of worship. Just as God calls Christians to worship Him through different modes, one very vital way to know Him more is to serve others for justice. Romans 12:15-16 (NIV) calls for Christians to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn in those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.” In his commentary on the book of Romans, Robert Mounce observed that “the Christian experience is not one person against the world but one great family living out together the mandate to care for one another” (1995, p. 239). Through adoption, Christians can live out this mandate to ‘care for one another’ as ‘one great family.’ As a part of a Christian’s covenant with God, the Christian is called to serve justice through love. A great picture of this justice can be addressing His command to “defend...the fatherless” (Psalm 82:3, NIV).

CHAPTER FOUR

Motivations to Adopt: Current Trends in Adoption Practices

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” Isaiah 1:17-18 (NIV)

The reasons why parents will choose to adopt are varied. For Christians, it is often in response to a call from God. For non-Christians, it can be for many reasons, among them humanitarian reasons. International adoption is seen as the trend for parents to choose as they seek to adopt for humanitarian reasons. Christians, as the current trend in this arena displays, are usually motivated to adopt because they have sensed a call to adopt, usually through proximity to another adoptive family. As a result of proximity being a major factor in Christians experiencing God’s call to adopt, churches are more and more addressing their congregations’ call to the plight of the orphan through adoption ministries. In the same way that Christ has called His people to community, community can help to build upon God’s mission to come to the aide of orphans.

Overview of Motivations

Adoptive parents come from all ethnicities, backgrounds, social classes, gender preferences, and, to some extent, age. One characteristic that does seem to transcend all of these differences is that adoptive parents are usually people of good will (Kornitzer, 1968, p. 119). Either from religious reasons or attitude, adults will adopt because they believe that it is the right thing to do. Though good will is the common theme among all adopters, another theme just a little less common is infertility. Instead of, or as a result of

failure, using infertility medicines and procedures, many parents will look to adopt or foster children to fulfill their yearning for parenthood. A final common characteristic among all types of adoptions is that adoptive parents have a higher level of stability than biological parents. Brodzinsky has found that “adoptive parents are usually more mature than biological parents, more stable in their marriage; more financially secure, and more adept to coping with stress” (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Marantz, 1992, p. 41). This characteristic most likely boils down the adoption process, and the fact that more planning is needed for an adoptive family to be formed than a biological family. There is a certain sense of maturity needed to go through the process of adopting, which might be a part of the reason that there are statistically more parents of adopted children that were adopted themselves as a child (Malm & Welti, 2010, p. 188). Adults who come from an adoptive family are much more aware of the sense of security that an adoptive parent must provide for their children, therefore they are more likely to be the ones that repay the security they received as a child for other children.

After delving into all the different aspects that adoptive parents need to consider before adopting a child, the question arises as to what motivation causes parents to go through the process of adopting. There are two types of motivations for adopting; those motivations related to humanitarianism or those of personal gain. Following personal gain, and the fact that one of the characteristics of adoptive parents is that they are older in age, one of the reasons why people will adopt is wanting to fill an ‘empty nest’ (Rodger, Cummings & Leschied, 2004, p. 1130). After all the biological children have moved out of the house, the parents often feel lonely and decide that adopting a child will fill this void left by an empty house. Therefore some adoptive parents’ motivation for

adopting is to provide a companion for themselves, to care for another individual like they did for their biological children. Studies have found that for parents who go through with private adoptions, the number one reason for adopting a child is “wanting an infant” (Malm & Welti, 2010, p. 195). This motivation comes into play most often when there was an instance of infertility. A final motivation that is commonly found in foster parents, related to personal gain, is fostering “from a desire to supplement family income” (Rodger, Cummings, Leschied, 2004, p. 1130). Many times, for families without a good income, the money provided for them to foster can become a full-time job. Though the money for fostering is not nearly substantial enough to fully provide for children, it is a feasible motivation if the case were for it to be one of the parents’ occupations to raise the children.

The other side to motivations is the one of adopting for humanitarian reasons. Rodger, Cummings, and Leschied conducted a study, asking adoptive parents what their main reasons were for adopting. Out of their pool of interviewees, they found that the results indicated “two most frequently endorsed reasons for fostering were wanting to provide loving parents to children and wanting to save children from further harm” (Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2004, p. 1133). These two conclusions are the very root behind all humanitarian reasons for one to adopt. For the first result, parents will often adopt because they feel as if they have the heart and ability to care for children well, and decide that they want to ‘give back to the community’ in this way (Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2004, p. 1139). In line with the second result, parents will adopt so that they can ‘save’ children, this motive would be especially evident in international and foster care adoptions (Malm & Welti, 2010, p. 189). Within the realm of humanitarian

motivations, there belies a further question as to what force within the adoptive parents call them to want to adopt, either as caring parents or to save children. Many studies have pointed to this force as being religious motivations (Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2004, p. 1131; Perry, 2009, p. 840; Malm & Welti, 2010, p. 189). In a study conducted by Fiegelman and Silverman, they found that “that preferential adopters were ‘often inspired by religious motives’ along with social or humanitarian motives, were more likely Protestant, and showed fairly high levels of religious participation” (Hollingsworth, 2000, p. 20). The tie to attending church and feeling a motivation to adopt is vital as churches and researchers indicate trends that need to be addressed on the topic. In the next two sections, this thesis will expound first upon a type of humanitarian motivation to adopt; and then will secondly illustrate further trends of religiously motivated adoptions.

Rescuing Children: Humanitarian Motivated International Adoptions

International adoptions are the most cited type of adoptions for those adopting for humanitarian reasons. Sometimes, as the evidence below will display, the adoptive parents will believe that they are helping to save the child through the adoption, but in the end are either being duped or not really ‘saving’ the child from a bad life. Humanitarian work sometimes does not follow the best interests of children. This is evident in the act of ‘rescuing’ children, a mechanism too often used to bring children a perceived better life. An example of humanitarianism falling short in providing for children was ‘Operation Babylift’ in Vietnam after the Vietnam War. As a part of ‘Operation Babylift,’ President Ford ordered for thirty flights to airlift new ‘orphans’ to the United States and other European countries (Bergquist, 2009, p. 623). The problem was that some of these

children were not orphans and had living parents. Thus, it is clear that there had to be an alternative motive for this action. Many critics have detected that it was “a media relations effort...to give Americans a positive spin on its role in the war” (Bergquist, 2009, p. 623). After there was a mass upheaval concerning the United States’ reasons for entering into war with Vietnam, the state in which the United States left Vietnam would appear a little more glorious if there were rescued children. Thus the humanitarian effort at the end of the war could very well have been a media ploy to have something positive to say at the end of the war. Nothing was done as a result of this humanitarian mishap. A reason for this was that “because of questions whether the plaintiffs could be designated as a class and a protracted appeal process, the likelihood of reunion with birth families diminished and the best interest of the children were deemed to remain with their American families” (Bergquist, 2009, p. 624). Thus, there were thousands of Vietnamese children, adopted by families in the United States, who still had families in Vietnam that were able to provide for their needs. As a result of instances such as this, there was a great need for there to be legislation internationally setting guidelines for international adoption, to prevent adoptions of no reason from developing or war- torn countries.

There are many occasions when international adoption is a positive experience and a good humanitarian cause. This would include adopting children who have lost their parents due to a natural disaster, adopting children whose families have been torn due to HIV in Africa, family planning circumstances in China, and for sociopolitical reasons in South America (Bergquist, 2009, p. 622). However, sending countries often spin the adoption to look like a humanitarian deal, a good cause for their country, when indeed there are ulterior motives. Caeli Kimball indicates that “sending countries can decrease

overpopulation and ‘get rid of’ unwanted children, which in turn allows parents in receiving countries to adopt a new member into their family when they are unable to have their own children, or are moved to adopt a child in need” (Kimball, 2004, p. 567). The act of sending countries ‘getting rid’ of unwanted children, for whatever reason, is child trafficking. Families in the United States and other developed, receiving countries may feel as if they are doing a good deed by taking children out of hard times, but in reality sometimes the children were getting their needs met in the country they were taken from.

Ryan Noel Fraser’s Dissertation: A Review on Religious Motivations

Texas Christian University’s Ryan Fraser completed a dissertation entitled “The Spiritual Narratives of Adoptive Parents: Constructions of Christian Faith Stories and Pastoral Theological Implications.” This dissertation was an interview of 20 adoptive couples and was centered around their own adoption narrative. These qualitative results are indicative of the research previously presented in this paper. Not much research has been conducted on this topic of faith in adoption, therefore this dissertation is a good source of information.

One major item that Fraser highlighted in his dissertation was that most of the couples he interviewed displayed some predisposition to adopt. Fraser notes that “throughout their childhood experiences, it appears that a seed had been sown that predisposed them psychologically and spiritually to being receptive to adoptive parenting at a later stage in their lives” (2010, p. 174). This could be either knowing a family that adopted or a child that was adopted, or being a part of an adoptive family personally. Not only did the parents feel a direct call from God to participate in adoption, but often there were even more specific callings. Some parents felt like they were called to adopt a

certain child, often realizing their call to adopt through interaction with the child (Fraser, 2010, p. 187). Also, sometimes the parent will believe that God called them to be barren. Fraser notes about one of his participants in the survey “believed that God allowed them as a childless married couple to experience human brokenness, so they would be more open to pursuing adoptive parenting and assuming all the challenges and difficulties that often accompany adoption” (2010, p. 185). Dependent on how strong the belief is that God allows everything to happen for a reason, then this line of thought is quite viable. Often families will not even think of adoption until they are unable to have children biologically, therefore if barrenness caused their awareness to the call then it could be the catalyst and foundation for the adoption.

In paralleling earthly adoption to heavenly adoption, Fraser noted that one parent indicated that “their adoptive parenting experiences also helped them framed [heavenly] adoption as an ongoing process” (2010, p. 180). Not in that their entrance into the family was an ongoing process, but the process following the entrance was very much ongoing and never stagnant. After one becomes a Christian, it does not mean that one is finished on this earth. God has a path for that Christian to fulfill and to walk with Him down, therefore it is ongoing. For adoptive parenting, with all the difficulties that constantly arise as the child adjusts to his or her new life, there is a definite feel of insecurity and instability. The process is thus very much a day- to-day walk, just like the Christian walk. Many parents begin the adoption process due to a perceived failure in timing. They are usually unable to have children, too old to have children, or ready for more children. However, in Fraser’s study, he found that most couples called God’s timing the ‘perfect timing.’ Though there might have been stress during the preliminary process, this was

often overlooked due to the fact that the end result was ‘perfect timing’ (Fraser, 2010, p. 190). Interestingly, Fraser also notes that one adoptive mother in her interview stated that she “believe[s] that through adoption, adoption parents are invited to accept God’s acceptance of them, their child as an adopted person, and their child’s birthparents as beloved children of God” (2010, p. 182). Earth is not a perfect world, earthly adoption is not perfect. The important part is acceptance, as noted by the mother.

Diversity was also an important theme in the motivations to Christian adoption, per Fraser’s dissertation. One couple indicated that because of their adoption of a biracial child, there was more diversity (besides their child) added to the church (Fraser, 2010, p. 172). These adoptive parents have as a result become leaders in the church, in teaching that God loves and cares for all people, just as the church loves and cares for all people. Easily one of the most touching stories in a narrative shared by Fraser in his dissertation is one of a Caucasian woman who had adopted an African American child. After her child’s Sunday School class sang “Jesus Loves the Little Children” together, the mother was

caught offguard by the thought that her two sons are children of the world. This sentimental children’s song acquired a new significance for her because they were not singing about imaginary populations of children living in an exotic, faraway land; they were singing about her own children. (Fraser, 2010, pp.172-173)

Diversity makes the scripture real for a church, as these adoptive parents have witnessed.

Defining the Church’s Role

The church taking a role in aiding the plight of the orphan is not a new cause, but to some extent a forgotten mission. In her book *Precious in His Sight*, Diana Garland records that

The early church was well known in Roman society for rescuing infants and children who otherwise would perish. If a Roman father did not lift up his new baby, who was ceremoniously placed at his feet, the child was exposed-left to die on the garbage heaps of the city. Christians sought out these infants and took them into their homes. (1993, p. 19)

In times when there was injustice for children in the past, Christians visibly came to their aid. Often the troubles of the orphan are not necessarily visible for Christians today. If there is no exposure to the problem, there may not be a realization of the injustice or the need. Through churches taking a greater role in the issue, more Christians will receive their call to care for orphans.

Peter was one of the first models of a missionary. While others were afraid of the hurt, needy, and diseased, Peter embraced God's call to serve by breaking down the barriers and healing and touching the lives of the hurting. One profound example of this is found in Acts 3. A man who was crippled saw Peter walk past him; he began begging for money. Instead Peter gave him a more life-altering gift. Acts 3:7 records the "taking him [the beggar] by the right hand, he [Peter] helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong" (NIV). It was not the norm for a Jewish person to touch a handicapped man, for his handicap was seen as a punishment from God for his sins (Denison, 2010, p. 40). Regardless of the law, Peter saw a need and helped to alleviate it. Often, the church can get so caught up in the routine or the 'laws,' in the same manner that the Jewish church did in Peter's time, that change is hard to muster for the church. Embracing the adoption culture is indeed a change for the church. Adoption advocate Tom Davis writes that "as Christ-followers, we have a theological understanding of both evil and redemption. This understanding ought to compel us to show the world how to respond to suffering and indifference" (Davis, 2007, p. 95). Christ redeemed Christians

for the purpose of ‘making disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:16-20, NIV). Therefore, Christians ought to respond to the suffering, for it is part of their commission as the church. Obedience is a foundation to the Great Commission for “teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands forms the heart of disciple making” (Blomberg, 1992, p. 433). Part of the reason that churches have difficulty in wholeheartedly supporting adoption ministries is that some view it as a social ministry, ‘the social gospel,’ and not evangelism (Merida & Morton, 2011, p. 59). Pure evangelism can take over a church’s mission such that often the love that leads to others being saved, ‘the social gospel’ gets overlooked. The church, in response to the cry from Christian parents for support in their quest to adopt, ought to have already planted the seeds for guiding couples through the process.

John Wesley wrote that a Christian should “do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the peoples you can, as long as ever you can” (Denison, 2010, p. 58). Embracing the adoption culture, as vital as it is a ministry, should not overwhelm the church and take away from other successful ministries. However, following Wesley’s inspiration for Christ-followers, churches should be prepared to ‘do all the good [they] can’ with all the means they hold. Tony Merida, a pastor in Mississippi, recommends several ways for a church to effectively do just that in his book *Orphanology*. He suggests providing ministries, teams, printed materials, media, supporting a common language on the topic, creating Bible studies, and instigating regular discussion on the topic (Merida & Morton, 2011, pp. 79-92). Visibly showing support as a church body can get church members interested and involved even if they are not adoptive parents themselves. This creates a

welcoming atmosphere for those families that have adopted. Merida also speaks to the importance of the support of the pastor in the quest to embrace adoption as a church. He recommends that “the first place to begin with promoting a biblical view of adoption and orphan care is by addressing the matter with clear and compelling biblical instruction” (Merida & Morton, 2011, p. 81). Due to the fact that adoption theology is not a traditional instruction topic, many church members may not even realize the depth of biblical foundation found in the practice. Church members have the opportunity to hear from the Lord concerning their own role in the support of adoption through the words of a pastor.

In *Fields of the Fatherless*, Tom Davis writes that “the church is not an institution consisting of walls and stained glass. The church is people; people who represent the physical body of Christ on earth. We as the church are called to put flesh to His words and make Him alive to those who are desperate to know He is real” (2008, p. 37). In a time when children were not an emphasized group in society, Jesus gave them significance in calling the kingdom of heaven theirs (Mark 10:14, NIV). As the church is called to ‘put flesh to His words,’ most Christians will begin to hear a call from God as to what ministry they can serve through. If a church sets the foundation for adoption ministry to be one of those outlets for service, many children and families will benefit. Embracing the orphan ministry for a church can lead to more of an emphasis on servant leadership in the church, and can motivate more parents to go through the process of earthly adoption as a representation of their heavenly adoption.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

“But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear Him, and his righteousness with their children’s children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” Psalm 103:17-18 (NIV)

In all aspects of adoption research, Christians should look for parallels to God’s call to tend to the care of the orphan and to His adoption of them into His Heavenly family. There are definite parallels between the two events: the adoption of children into Christian earthly families and subsequently hopefully the adoption of that child and his or her parents into God’s heavenly family. Research, policy, and trends all point to a need for Christians to be motivated by their love of God, God’s love of them, and their agreement to be in covenant with Christ on earth as a pathway to establishing their calling to be concerned with the plight of the orphan.

As parents decide whether or not adoption is a possibility for their family, there are many stressors that they may need to overcome. First they must accept the fact that getting to the point where they get to hold their child in their arms is not an easy process. These parents can rest assured, though, that neither was their heavenly adoption into the Trinity. Also, parents might struggle with whether, or in which way, they will form an attachment with a child that was not in the mother’s own womb, as well as how to handle a child whose temperament may be more in line with the child’s biological parents. Many of these same issues arise as Christians evaluate their entrance into the Trinity. Through

Christ's death, Christians were welcomed into God's 'forever family' and into proximity with God. There should be no doubt as to whether God is near His people because of this proximity, yet there often is an insecurity of this heavenly attachment. Once a child is older, a parent will need to figure out how best to communicate with the child concerning his or her adoption and his or her identity as an adoptee. Christians are guaranteed of their identity as adoptees, for they are Christ's inheritance on earth.

God is a god of justice. As His people time and again fall short, justice must be brought upon them. However, with God's son as a sacrifice and atonement, justice was served. The Holy Spirit is the current interpreter of God's 'code' of right and wrong. In the same way, in earthly practices there is a need for codes and interpretations of those codes to cause for best practices. In adoption, there are domestic codes and international codes. It is important for adoptive parents to understand these codes as they enter into adoption. In the same light, it is important for God's children to understand the impact of God's justice and His love for His people so that they can emulate it during their time on earth.

The motivations for a parent to adopt are varied. The trends include a call for humanitarianism for non-Christians, and a missional call to adopt for Christians. Similarly to the way in which non-profits will meet the needs of the humanitarian motivation, churches can meet the needs of their congregants serving out their mission on earth as adoptive parents. Christian parents yearn for the support of others in the process and day-to-day life as an adoptive parent. Therefore the church can be a foundation, a place of solidarity and comfort for families as they experience struggles and triumphs as a part of their call to adopt.

God uses scripture to speak to His people. God calls the care of orphans “pure and faultless religion” (James 1:27, NIV). He also speaks to the fact that Christians cry out to Him “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15, NIV). As a response to scripture, Christians are promised that their father is there for them and waiting for them in heaven. In addition, Christian adoptive parents can receive their call to adopt through His scripture. Researching scripture should be a recommended part of the adoption process for parents, for parallels are abounding between tenets of adoption in the earthly sense and tenets of adoption in the heavenly sense.

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