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## THE FAMILY

### THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF ADOPTION

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## *The Biblical Model of Adoption*

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In the spring of 2002, popular talk show host Rosie O'Donnell revealed her lesbian relationship live on her show. In what would become the final season of the program, O'Donnell pushed for multiple political shifts that would grant further rights for gays and lesbians. In seeking to demonstrate the normalcy of her life and relationships, O'Donnell talked about her adopted children and her fight with Florida's then governor, Jeb Bush, over the rights of gay couples to adopt. That same spring, Angelina Jolie, noted actress, director, and humanitarian, adopted her first child from Cambodia. After shooting several films in the economically depressed country, she thought it a fitting complement to her humanitarian aid to change at least one life directly. Jolie, as a high profile star, went on to adopt two other children as well as give birth to her biological child with boyfriend, the famous actor, Brad Pitt.

In many respects, adoption went mainstream in 2002 as Hollywood brought attention to the growing need for action on the behalf of children worldwide. Actresses like Jolie and O'Donnell are applying their money and demonstrating with their lives that if people become intimately involved in a dire situation, real change can occur. Their high-profile adoptions created new interest in the plight of children worldwide and led to further adoptions by other stars like Madonna as well as raising awareness for the need of families to become involved in adoption.

Where was the church in all of this? As children suffer in Africa due to the AIDS epidemic or die from hunger or even preventable diseases, why does the cry for help seemingly issue more frequently from Hollywood than from those that Christ challenged to "suffer the children to come to me?" This complex question begs for an answer, but in the West, conservative Christians often fall strangely silent, frequently hiding behind a barrage of evangelical aid institutions that assure us that our money is well spent.

This paper issues a call for radical change. While some Christians have already stepped into the challenging arena of orphan care, there is too much at stake for us to allow the status quo to continue. In the space of the next few pages, I hope to present to you a clear summation of the biblical commands for orphan care. From that general heading, we will then turn to look at the practical, biblical foundation for adoption as one aspect of the scriptural mandate to care for orphans. Throughout the paper, we will reference moments in the history of adoption as well as illustrate ways in which evangelicals in general and Baptists in particular have sought to become involved. I also will draw attention to some of the ethical issues and concerns that must remain at the forefront of those involved in ministry.

### Orphan Care

While we will be discussing the practical and biblical nature of adoption, we need to begin by stating our case in relationship to orphan care. In Scripture, Paul restricts the usage of adoption to refer to our spiritual state, so we will return to this a bit later. James 1:27 tell the believers to “care for the widow and orphan.” Expressing this command in terms of true religion and Christian practice, James is echoing the more than 30 references in the Old Testament dealing with the concept of orphan care.

In the social context of the early church, as well as in the Old Testament, orphans were part of the fabric of society. Wars, disease, or other life events isolated orphans and widows from the system of care traditionally found within a patriarchal society. Despite their isolation and certain death had they been part of a neighboring nation, the authors of the biblical text give specific commands regarding the care for the orphan. These commands fell under the general provisions of hospitality and social justice.

From the outset of the book of Genesis, we are given explanation regarding the role of the family. Married couples are to be fruitful and multiply, following the same command given to all of creation. When sin and death mar the beauty of creation, a new class of people that fall outside of the normal societal and familial bounds become the helpless victims of a broken world—namely widows, orphans and foreigners. In the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, almost every instance of the term “orphan” (*yatom*) or “fatherless” is paired with that of the widow (*almonah*). Usually their care and provision is provided under the same regulations and restrictions of the foreigner or sojourner among the children of Israel.

A key example is found in Exodus 22. Beginning in verse 21 and continuing through verse 22, the text reads as follows:

Do not oppress foreigners in any way. Remember, you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. Do not exploit widows or orphans.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the recognition that the Israelites once suffered as the lowest in Egyptian society, they must not forget that God spared them from their circumstances and redeemed them unto himself. Beyond the command to avoid exploitation of the widows and orphans comes an understanding that these individuals are so precious to God that he will personally judge those who fail to account for their needs. The discourse continues in Exodus 22: 23–24:

If you do exploit them and they cry out to me I will surely help them. My anger will blaze forth against you, and I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will become widows and your children will become fatherless.

This rather harsh pronouncement demonstrates a couple of key items that need to be considered. First, based on verse 23, we may discern that the widows and orphans have direct access to God. He hears their cries and appeals for help and promises swift action. Second, avoiding upholding justice for the widow and orphan secures judgment—even death—upon those who look the other way. In the prophets, this becomes one of the burning indictments against the rulers of the house of Israel as they avoided caring for the needs of the widow and orphan.

In the Old Testament, the entire community is commanded to care for the needs of the least of these in their midst. In this respect, orphan care becomes the responsibility of the entire community. There are no instructions for orphanages, not to mention homes for the aged, leading to the claim that adoption is a foreign concept to the Old Testament worldview.<sup>2</sup> Presumably, given the injunctions found in the text, children found homeless were taken in by extended family in order to maintain the hereditary rights of the child as stipulated in the law. Extending protection to these most vulnerable of people, Proverbs 23:10 cautioned, “Do not remove the ancient boundary stones nor encroach on the fields of the fatherless.”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the law stipulated that when harvesting in the field, the people of Israel were not to return for sheaves of grain left behind. At the

<sup>1</sup>All Scripture references are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New Living Translation (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1997).

<sup>2</sup>Michael J. Brody, “Adoption, Personal Status, and Jewish Law,” in *The Morality of Adoption: Social-Psychological, Theological and Legal Perspectives*, ed. Timothy P. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 128–129.

<sup>3</sup>See also Job 24:2–4.

annual grape harvest, the vines were to be picked once and not gone over twice, nor were the olive trees to be beaten twice. That leftover produce served as the portion of the widow, the orphan, and the alien, who did not have formal care in the community. (Deut 24:17, 19–21). Even during the feasts of *Shevuot* and *Succot*, widows, orphans and aliens were to be taken in by individual families to celebrate the holiday. The implication was that this was to be standard practice for all holidays (Deut 16:11; 14).

Not only was it commanded that the community should protect the rights of the orphans, but the populace was taxed to support the needs of those who fell under this category. In Deuteronomy 26:12–13, the nation of Israel was commanded to take up a tithe of their income specifically for the needs of the widows, orphans, Levites, and aliens in the nation. The givers of the tithe were required to make a declaration before God that they not only had brought the tithe to support those God commanded, but that they had kept all of God's commands. They then requested His blessing on the entire household of faith (14–15).

The rationale for these, and similar, commandments derives from a theological understanding of the divine attributes of holiness and justice. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, God becomes the surrogate Father (or surrogate husband in the case of widows) to protect their rights. When the cause of the wicked oppresses the orphan or widow, God promises swift judgment against those he identifies as his children (Ps 10:14; 18; 146:9; Jer 49:11; Hos 14:3). In the burning indictments the prophets brought against the chosen people, consistently God points out their absolute failure to care for the needs of widows and orphans. The curse outlined in Deuteronomy 27:19 on Mount Ebal is prominent: "Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless, or the widow." Books like Job and Psalms outline a lack of care for the fatherless as a sign of absolute wickedness and upcoming judgment.

Again, as we consider the biblical model for adoption, we are not presented a picture of the modern Western view of adoption in the Hebrew Scriptures. The closest thing we may affiliate with any modern form of adoption might be God's selection of his people, Israel: "Israel I have chosen." Another example would be Hosea taking Gomer's children as his own. While that might prove an interesting case study, we are short on space and simply mentioning it here should suffice. So, when we consider adoption in the Old Testament, we are not referring to adoption in the sense that we typically understand the term today. Rather, adoption is understood in the broad terms of orphan care. To summarize, orphan care in the Hebrew Scriptures is as follows:

1. Orphan care is commanded by God for the entire community of faith.
2. Orphan care is designed to protect the rights of orphans in the hereditary transfer of land.
3. A curse followed those who did not take up the cause of the orphan and oppressed.
4. In the definition of evil found in the condemnations of the prophets that were recited against Israel and the surrounding nations, lack of care for orphans almost always appears.
5. God hears the prayers of orphans.
6. God promises to be the defender and father of orphans.

### **Theological Picture of Adoption**

Moving to the New Testament, Paul gives us the most vivid language concerning adoption as a theological concept. As we have seen in the prior section, the idea of adoption as a set of parents taking on the child of another, who is not closely related to the orphan, is not clearly found. Instead, the concept of orphan care in the context of working towards divinely orchestrated social justice was the main theme. Interestingly, Jesus picked up on this ancient concept when he proclaimed to his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). James also carried the Deuteronomic commands into the New Testament era as he boldly proclaimed that caring for widows and orphans signifies true religion (Jas 1:27).

Knowing his Gentile audience, however, Paul shifts the image away from social justice or hospitality in a biblical framework to a theological word picture of redemption drawn for the Roman legal system. The Romans understood the nature of the need for orphan care as much as any other society, and many orphans became servants of the Empire through pressed service in the military if of age or temple prostitution if younger. Legally, Roman law made allowances for individuals who were citizens of Rome to adopt the children of slaves as their own. This legal adoption translated the adoptee from poverty and obscurity to full rights and status as heir to the adopting parents.<sup>4</sup>

For Paul, there was no more powerful picture of what God had done through Christ for the Gentiles in particular and all believers in general. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes that God elected us to be the children of God before the foundation of the world. How was that to happen for

<sup>4</sup>Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 167. See also John Francis Brosnan, "The Law of Adoption," *Columbia Law Review* 22 (1922): 332–42.

the Gentiles? According to Ephesians 1:4–5, he loved us and predestined us to be adopted as his heirs through the work of Jesus Christ, who paid the price and freed us from slavery.

Consider the letter to Galatians where Paul writes that before Christ, we were helpless slaves to the law of sin and death. But that changed because of Christ. In powerful language, Paul paints the picture of our translation from slave to rightful heir.

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Gal 4:3–5).

Again, this is forensic language, indicating a price has been paid to change the identity of the believer from slave to heir. The text continues:

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father!” so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal 4:5–7).

How can the courtroom imagery be stated any more clearly? God has worked a legal transaction through the substitutionary death of his own son, Jesus Christ, to enable our adoption as his very own children.

Next, there is a key passage, where Paul extensively utilizes and underscores this concept in Romans 8:12–9:5. Here, Paul begins talking about the Christian’s identity in Christ, and again testifies that we are no longer slaves, but are now children of God. Again, how does this happen? Just as Paul outlines in Galatians 4, it is through the Spirit that we receive the “Spirit of adoption” that allows us to cry out, “Abba, Father!” In fact, it is the Spirit himself that testifies that we are God’s children.

In this context, I have recognized that the Pauline imagery parallels the adoption of one of my own children. At the birth of my son, his body craved cocaine. Throughout the pregnancy, his birth mother took drugs, including cocaine, to feed her personal drug addiction. This addiction passed through the uterus to my son so that, at birth, his body was filled with the poisons his birth mother introduced to her body. For three months, as his body proceeded through detoxification, he experienced tremors and other withdrawal symptoms. He had no choice about his condition or the poisons his birth mother pumped into his little body *in utero*.

Similarly, Paul paints the picture of us as depraved humans. There is nothing in us and of us that is good, holy, or deserving. In fact, much like my son, we are like “crack babies” born with the craving of evil and the depraved things of this world because it is what our bodies tell us to crave.<sup>5</sup> Without intervention, we will suffer and die. Without someone to break the bonds of the cocaine (i.e. the sin) we crave, our desire will continue to grow and consume us. But the shed blood of Christ breaks the power of original sin and frees us from the curse of sin and death. Even more amazing, however, is that as we stand before the almighty judge of the universe, he sees the work of Christ and makes a legal proclamation that we are his own.

I never understood this image until I stood before a judge in the Cook County family courthouse in Chicago. There, standing with our attorney (our advocate), we waited as the judge looked over the paperwork to determine our suitability as parents. Satisfied that we had met the requirements, he made a proclamation that “Baby Girl Winters” would from this point forward be known as Briley Starr Yeats, daughter of John Mark and Angela Yeats. Following his judgment, we applied for a new birth certificate for our daughter. No longer were her natural birthparents indicated as the parents; rather, her mother was now legally listed as Angela Yeats and her father, John Mark Yeats, just as the judge had ordered. Even though our daughter may not reflect me physiologically, she is by all accounts my child, and she receives all of the rights and responsibilities that her adoption entails.

In the same manner, the Holy Spirit gives testimony that the requirements for adoption have been met through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:14–18). Thereby, we become the children of our heavenly Father, who in fact is also the judge. His proclamation settles the issue once and for all (incidentally, providing a strong case for the security of the believer) and legally changes our spiritual identity so we can call out, “Abba, Father!” If this grace were not already beyond comprehension, we also become co-heirs with Christ of the inheritance that our Father has laid up for us for all eternity. Paul carries this image forward in Romans 8, discussing the fullness of our adoption being revealed in heaven (8:23). He thereby sets the tone for the full outworking of this concept in Romans 9–11, particularly in Romans 9:4, where he identifies the Jews as those God adopted first (cf. Exod 4:22).

On this New Testament basis, especially as given by Paul, we may identify our heritage and adoption as God’s own children. How humbling is this concept and how blessed are we that God through his Son would

<sup>5</sup>For a further development of this idea, see Robert A. Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 37–38.



testify through his Spirit that we are the children of God. As J.I. Packer eloquently defined the New Testament concept, salvation is “adoption through propitiation.”<sup>6</sup>

### Practical Theology Lived Out Daily

In 1852, Charles Loring Brace, a Yale trained Presbyterian pastor, began working with the poor on what became known as Roosevelt Island. Seeing the need of countless children starving and without decent care, the survivors of whom were repeating their parent’s social foibles (heavy drinking, crime, etc.), he decided to do something about it. He created the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) and began working with evangelical churches throughout New York State in order to relocate children from their oppressed urban environment and place them with Christian families willing to take in a child. For many of these children, this was the first sight of hope that had yet appeared in their life. In fact, this early foster care system became a boon to farmers and aided many children in becoming integrated members of society in their adult years.

Brace created a movement that lasted for almost 75 years. Called “Orphan Trains,” Brace and his organization would purchase tickets for children to ride the rails from New York City to far off locations in places like Kansas and Michigan to gain a new home. These “Orphan Trains” became the means for children to escape horrible circumstances and childless families or families needing extra hands to work the farm to bring more children into their life. For children without parents, Brace and the CAS would send information about the children weeks in advance to local churches, who screened the candidates for suitability. As the train would pull into the station, the parents that were deemed fit would go and look at the adoptable children who were placed on boxes so the crowd could see them, thus, the etymology of the phrase, “up for adoption.” While there were some serious shortcomings and flaws to Brace’s ministry, his goal was commendable: to place children without hope into evangelical families, in the hope that the new context would transform the life of the child and eventually transform society.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “[W]ere I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be *adoption through propitiation*, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that.” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 214.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Brace, the CAS and the social conditions that promoted the Orphan Trains, see Stephen O’Connor, *Orphan Trains: the Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Marylyn Holt, *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2004).

Similarly, in the earliest expressions of evangelicalism found in the Pietistic and Moravian movements, a concern for children along with their discipleship and growth, especially those without a home, marked the movement. As historian W.R. Ward once quipped, early evangelicals could be spotted simply wherever there was an orphanage.<sup>8</sup> Taking the claims of Scripture seriously, the evangelical movement in its earliest days simply obeyed the commands of the text and took care of the widow and the orphan.

This, of course, provides a source of confusion for Christians today. In our day, not only do churches avoid social ministries outside of what they can give through the isolationist collection plate, but also, as those who uphold the authority of the text itself, they avoid the simple task of caring for orphans. (Dare we even mention widows here, another glaring problem!) The Old Testament mandates orphan care, and the New Testament modeled that care and bequeathed us a theological model of redemption developed from that mandate. Perhaps for all of our pro-life rhetoric, evangelicals today no longer believe what the text says.

In 2006, Democrat Representative Julie Bartling remarked that most people in South Dakota are in favor of a ban on abortions. Stunning some of her constituents, she stated, “I think South Dakota has always been what I call a pro-life state. . . . I think it’s ready to step up and be in the forefront and make some of these first moves.”<sup>9</sup> While South Dakota does not carry out that many abortions, statistically speaking, imagine if this law actually passed. First, the church would rejoice, and rightly so. Any battle won defending the lives of innocent babies deserves celebration! But, in effect, would we lose?

Let us assume that the abortion rate remained constant since the last data was taken on abortions in this one state in 1995. That year, South Dakota had 1,070 lives ended through abortion.<sup>10</sup> Let us assume that just over half of the birth mothers decided to parent their children, since abortion was no longer an option. What happens to the remaining children? Hopefully, the birthparents made an adoption plan. If they did, an agency would help them in placing the child for adoption. If they did not, chances are the child will become a ward of the state, joining the more than 2,000 children awaiting a permanent home in their state-run system.

<sup>8</sup>As cited in Brian Stanley, ed. *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 3.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Foust, “South Dakota House passes ban on abortion, challenging court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision.” Baptist Press, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=22627> (accessed 10 March 2006).

<sup>10</sup><http://www.abortionfacts.com/statistics/age.asp> (accessed 13 September 2007).

Where are the churches in all of this? Many of us assume that we are contributing to ongoing work at children's homes, something that Baptists have been doing for years. It is true that your cooperative program dollars given through your church support the ministries of several children's homes in several states. Frequently, our children's homes work closely with their respective state governments to take on those children who are not adoptable due to severe emotional trauma or other issues. Many of our Baptist men's groups and women's groups work diligently to support the ministries of these vital organizations in our states.

But do not breathe easy, yet. In Florida last year, the Florida Baptist Children's Homes assisted with 85 foster homes, 38 adoptions and the placement of 182 children in residential care. They were able to do this while reaching some 2,000 people through their various ministries and, as a result of these ministries, Florida Baptists saw 50 people accept Christ as their Lord.<sup>11</sup> In Oklahoma Baptist Children's Homes 2006 annual report, they served 309 children, placing approximately 150 of them in residential care.<sup>12</sup> This is great and sacrificial work on the part of both of these states, but the cost to run these programs entered into the tens of millions of dollars in order to aid a limited number of children.

To demonstrate the desperate need of a new approach, consider the following facts:<sup>13</sup>

1. There are 3.5 million orphans in Asia.
2. 1.5 million orphans in Eastern Europe are without a home.
3. Over 400,000 orphans in Latin America overwhelm their social services.
4. 5.5 million orphans fend for themselves in Africa and this number is set to double in the next 5 years due to the AIDS crisis.
5. 135,000 children are available for adoption in the United States foster care system. The methamphetamine crisis is flooding many states with even more children on a daily basis.
6. In the state where I live, a social worker stated that there are over 5,000 kids whose parental rights have been terminated by the courts and are awaiting adoption.

<sup>11</sup>"2007 Report to the Associations" by the Florida Baptist Children's Homes, <http://fbchomes.org/html1/download.html#reptasn> (accessed 7 September 2007).

<sup>12</sup>"2006 Annual Report" by the Oklahoma Baptist Children's Homes, <http://www.obhc.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=727&srcid=508> (accessed 7 September 2007).

<sup>13</sup>Statistics provided by Hope for Orphans, a ministry of Family Life, <http://www.familylife.com/hopefororphans/overview.asp> (accessed 18 October 2007).

The statistics are overwhelming, are they not? But wait, there is yet more. Since the 1980s, Americans have consistently adopted between 118,000 and 125,000 children per year. But these numbers are a bit deceiving. Until the mid-1990s, over 70% of adoptions were kinship adoptions. This means that out of that 118,000–125,000 adoptions, the vast majority were step-parents adopting step-children or uncles and aunts adopting their nieces and nephews. At best, only 40,000 children were being brought home in a traditional adoption per year!<sup>14</sup> Thankfully, some of the percentages have changed, but the number of actual adoptions remains steady.<sup>15</sup>

To further complicate the problem, infertility is on the rise across America. Doctors do not know why, but the numbers of those actually able to carry a child to term is falling rapidly.<sup>16</sup> Infertility hurts. It hurts in an indescribable way. It creates an ever-present ache of longing combined with the blackness of despair to the barren parents. Few rays of hope dare penetrate into this maze of confusion. It seems as if all hope is infinitely trapped in the black hole of pain and hurt. One in five couples know this hurt. My wife and I know this hurt. People in your church are currently feeling this hurt.

Yet seeking the counsel of Scripture in this maze of confusion and doubt is often the last place many hurting couples turn. Trusting in science and technology, they seek medical remedies to their issues. These remedies are not only costly, but physically dangerous and ethically questionable, if one believes that life begins at conception. The processes of super-ovulation and *in vitro* fertilization often result in 10 or more embryos being formed outside of the womb. Frequently, physicians look at the babies, decide which appear most viable and inject those, arbitrarily tossing the rest away. For some people, the thought of tossing the fertilized eggs away is immoral, so they cryogenically freeze the eggs. This has led to a new dilemma since the freezers of fertility clinics run over with the conceived children of many couples that are sustained in a frozen purgatory of our making.<sup>17</sup> For

<sup>14</sup>For more data, see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistics from 2001, [http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/s\\_adoptedhighlights.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/s_adoptedhighlights.cfm) (accessed 24 February 2006).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. In 2000, just over 54% of all adoptions in the states shifted to traditional adoptions.

<sup>16</sup>George Creatsas, George Mastorakos and George P Chrousos, "Setting Reproductive Health Priorities to Meet the Needs of the New Millennium," in *The Young Woman at the Rise of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Gynecological and reproductive issues in health and disease*, eds. George Creatsas, et al. (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 2000), xiii.

<sup>17</sup>John C. Mayoue, "Legal and Ethical Challenges of Embryonic Adoption," in *The Morality of Adoption: Social-Psychological, Theological and Legal Perspectives*, ed. Timothy P. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005): 262–282. For more on adopting these cryogenically preserved embryos, see [www.snowflakes.org](http://www.snowflakes.org) (accessed 24 July 2007).

those who are injected with the fertilized eggs, doctors frequently inject six to eight embryos to ensure success of at least one attaching to the uterine wall. Most of the embryos do not attach. In fact, there is only a 33% chance that the embryos will attach, leading many couples to repeat this process multiple times at a cost ranging from \$10,000 to \$12,000 per cycle, in a non-insurance covered process.<sup>18</sup>

Occasionally more than one of the embryos will attach to the uterine wall and most fertility doctors will evaluate the progress of the children until the eighth or ninth week, at which time most will counsel their patients to abort all but one or two of the embryos. This is done in the hope of ensuring a successful completion of the pregnancy. Christians should be appalled. At some level, we should question where we are within the providence of God. On another level, we should be concerned about our culture's understanding of the ethics of life itself.

### **A Vision for Revival**

With the Scriptural mandates in mind, what is the church to do? Please allow me to offer eight suggestions for how we might bring about a revival in the biblical practice of adoption:

1. Recognize that adoption is a calling. Not every Christian will adopt nor should every Christian adopt. That being said, every Christian can and should help in some way. Doctors may help families with the burdensome medicals and physicals that must be accomplished before bringing a child home. Churches may create adoption friendly atmospheres where adopted children are welcomed. Sunday School classes and friends, through adoption showers, may help meet the sudden needs of families bringing a child home. Unlike a typical birth, there is not always a nine-month gestation period in which to prepare for a new family member. For those families adopting older children, they often do not know the needs of the children

<sup>18</sup>Gilbert Meilaender, "A Child of One's Own: At What Price?" in *The Reproductive Revolution: A Christian Appraisal of Sexuality, Reproductive Technologies and the Family*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000): 36–45. For the financial and rate of success, see [www.socialfertility.com/ivf-cost-information.html](http://www.socialfertility.com/ivf-cost-information.html) (accessed 15 January 2008). According to Dr. R.E. Anderson of the Southern California Center for Reproductive Medicine, the younger the patient undergoing the IVF process, the greater the opportunity for success. In the under 35 bracket, Anderson's group saw 62% carry an infant to term or longer than 12 weeks. But the number drops from there with only 43.2% in the 35–37 age bracket, 30% in the 38–40 age bracket and 11.8% in the 40 and older age bracket, [www.socialfertility.com/ivf-success-rate.html](http://www.socialfertility.com/ivf-success-rate.html) (accessed 15 January 2008).

- (clothing, school supplies, etc.) until the child enters the home. Even then, it may be financially unfeasible to meet those needs immediately.
2. Get involved in the world of orphan care. Take mission trips to other countries and work with their orphanages. See what you and your church can do with your regional Baptist Homes for Children.
  3. Become an advocate for adoption from your pulpit and from your study. Take this brief study on adoption and examine it from a scriptural standpoint. Teach your people about the scriptural images of adoption and orphan care. Know where to refer couples considering adoption. Of the five pastors from whom my wife and I sought counsel, after discovering we were unable to conceive, not one knew anything about adoption, the biblical framework for adoption, or even where to obtain such information. Pastors and church leaders *must* learn about the infertility issues effecting thousands of young adults across this country. Incorporate infertility and adoption issues into at least one session of your pre-marital counseling. Be certain that your preaching reflects the realities, hopes and fears of infertility and adoption as you preach through the text of Scripture exegetically.
  4. Get involved financially. Currently, it costs an average of \$4,000.00–12,000.00 to adopt domestically through an agency, and \$7,000.00–25,000.00 or more to adopt a child internationally.<sup>19</sup>
  5. Know that Christian churches are now in competition with the world for the hearts and souls of the orphans. The Gay and Lesbian lobby groups are working hard to legalize adoption for same-sex couples and are more than happy to take in children while the church sleeps. Rosie O'Donnell boldly stated on her show in 2002 that if the nation would allow gays and lesbians to adopt, they would alleviate the strain on the system.<sup>20</sup> Could this be yet another role of the church we allow others to fill?

<sup>19</sup>Groups like Stephen Curtis Chapman's Shaohanna's Hope help fund adoptions for those who want to adopt but have little means but there are many more requests than available finances. For information on wide range of adoption costs, see the information provided by the Evan B. Donald Adoption Institute, "Costs of Adoption," [www.adoption-institute.org/factoverview/costs.html](http://www.adoption-institute.org/factoverview/costs.html), (accessed 26 August 2007).

<sup>20</sup>Dan Allen, "The adoption option: Rosie O'Donnell and tens of thousands of other gay people have chosen to adopt children—but how many roadblocks stand in the way of others who want to follow their lead?" *The Advocate* (May 28, 2002), [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1589/is\\_2002\\_May\\_28/ai\\_86128324](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1589/is_2002_May_28/ai_86128324), (accessed 28 July 2007).

6. Teach your people about the power of divine sovereignty and the destructive power of our expectations in relation to procreation. God is the God of life.
7. Listen for God to call you to do more.
8. Pray.

The world of orphan care challenges all who decide to hear the scriptural mandate given to the people of God. Adoption is frequently romanticized and idealized without consideration of the real costs. The challenges and concerns are real, but the purpose of this essay is simply to aid church leaders in beginning the consideration of the scriptural role and mandate God instituted for his people to be involved in orphan care. What if the churches in America would wake up and realize that our walk does not correlate with our talk in relation to pro-life issues. What if 5,000 Christian couples in the metro area where I live raised their hand and said they believed God was calling them to adopt and they adopted unwanted children from the state. What if those same Christian couples raised those 5,000 children and they became Christians, who in turn raised Christian families with Christian children? Do you catch the impact here?

Christopher Padbury caught the vision. He and his wife began the adoption process in their church years ago and saw how central their community of faith was during the emotional ups and downs of the process. As the pastor, he began to call on his church to consider adoption as a call from God and a mandate from Scripture. As such, he and his church family founded Project 127 and began to help members of their church adopt children that needed homes. Despite a monster snowstorm the night of their first formal meeting with the state's welfare workers, 250 people turned out in January of 2005 to hear about what God was doing through this unique ministry of adoption. At that point, God turned the heart of that church around and they began to adopt children from the county where they are located. To date, they have 206 families involved in the process of adopting with 68 actually adopting over the last two years. What is their goal? It is quite simply the eradication of the fact that there are 875 children who are still in Colorado's social system.<sup>21</sup>

As the number of homeless children grows in Africa, China and around the world, what would God have you do? Scripturally, we already have a mandate and an example. At some point, we must say enough is enough. We must begin to question if God will continue to move through our churches, our missions, and our ministries when we do not fulfill the basic social ministries he has provided for us. The problem of orphan care

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Christopher Padbury, June 21, 2006. See also <http://www.project127.com/about/allabout1.htm> (accessed 24 July 2007).



is global and we need to stand against the rising tide of commercialism and individualism and put our focus where God has had his focus all along: the eyes of God are upon the children. What will we do?

### The Biblical Picture of Orphan Care and Adoption

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| Warning not to oppress and condemnation for those not caring for orphans | Exod 22:22<br>Deut 27:19<br><br>Lam 5:3<br>Isa 1:23; 9:17; 10:2<br>Jer 5:28<br>Ezek 22:7<br>Zech 7:10<br>Ma. 3:5             | Cursed for not caring for orphans  |
| Not taking care of orphans is a sign of wickedness                       | Job 6:27<br>Job 22:9<br>Job 24:3<br>Ps 94:6  |  |
| Taking care of orphans is a sign of righteousness                        | Job 29:12<br>Job 31:17–18<br>Job 31:21   |  |
| Command to take care of orphans and laws regulating orphan care          | Exod 22:22<br>Deut 16:11, 14<br><br>Deut 24:17, 19–21<br><br>Deut 26:12–13<br><br>Jer 7:6; 22:3<br><br>Ps 82:3<br>Prov 23:10 | Bring the orphans in to celebrate the feasts<br>Leave the fields to provide for the needs of orphans<br>Tax to meet needs of orphans<br>Condition for staying in the land<br>Must do justice |
| God's role in orphan care  | Deut 10:18<br>Ps 10:14, 18<br>Ps 146:9<br>Jer 49:11<br>Hos 14:3  | God defends<br>God defends<br>God protects<br>God as Father<br>God as Father   |
| New Testament passages carrying the Old Testament theme                  | John 14:18<br>Jas 1:27   | Disciples not orphans<br>Care for orphans mandated   |
| Adoption as theological identity   | Rom 8:15, 23<br>Rom 9:4<br>Gal 4:5<br>Eph 1:5  |  |