



Some Children See Him: A Transracial Adoptee's View of Color-blind Christianity

By JaeRan Kim

On a chilly February evening in 1970, I arrived at White Lily Orphanage in Daegu, South Korea, bundled in a handmade quilt. The Sisters of the St. Paul Chartres, a group of French apostolates, established White Lily in 1888 to take in orphaned children. Since the nuns at White Lily did not facilitate adoptions, a few months later I was transferred to Ilsan, an orphanage run by Harry and Bertha Holt, the evangelical Christians who propelled Korean adoption to the U.S. While I was at Ilsan, my adoptive parents were settled in their home in Minnesota, reading the *Adoption Program Information Letter* from the Holt Adoption Program, in preparation for application to adopt a Korean child.

"Dear Friends," the letter begins, "We are happy to have received your inquiry about adopting a child. . . . From the beginning we have felt that this was God's work, and we enter into this correspondence with you trusting him to lead you and us to the best decisions. It is for this reason that we share with you at the outset, our desire that as many of these children as possible go into Christian homes."¹ There was a Christian home; I arrived in July 1971. I am one of an estimated 200,000 South Korean children placed in the arms of a family in North America, Europe, or Australia since the mid-1950s.²

Modern adoption history in the U.S. has been fraught with criticism that adoption is tantamount to commercial baby-buying. Since the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century, concerns over baby farming, black-market children, kidnapping, and coercion have plagued the practice of adoption.³ Social work and adoption professionals speak of "finding families for children, not children for

families" to emphasize that adoption is meant to be an intervention for vulnerable children. However, as much as adoption has and continues to be socially constructed publicly as a service for children, adoption has largely been more about the needs and desires of the adoptive parents and religion is no exception.

In the United States, the concept of adoption as a means to grow the spiritual family is not new. The practice has often been met with resistance from or engendered controversy within the placing religious community when an adoption changes the religious identity of the child from that of his or her biological family. As a result, matching children to adoptive parents based on religion was a practice for a short time.⁴ However, for the most part, religious identity in adoptive placements is privileged toward the rights of the adoptive parents to raise a child in their faith over the rights of children to be raised in the faith into which they were born.

Christianity played a major role in the advancement of fostering and adoption in the United States. The Native American boarding schools, Indian Adoption Project, orphan train movement, and maternity homes for unwed mothers have all been evangelical projects. And all have been critiqued as projects to reform children and families that did not comply with the dominant, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, traditional, two-parent worldview.

From 1879 until 1980, Christian missionaries operated boarding schools for Native American children where they were given Anglo names and prohibited from speaking their native languages and practicing their spiritual traditions.⁵ The placement of Native American children into non-Native Christian boarding schools and white foster and

¹ Holt Adoption Program, *Adoption Program Information Letter* (personal document on file with author) (undated).

² Since 1953 over 105,000 Korean children have been placed in adoptive homes in the U.S. See ELEANA KIM, ED., *GUIDE TO KOREA FOR OVERSEAS ADOPTED KOREANS* (2004).

³ ELLEN HERMAN, *KINSHIP BY DESIGN: A HISTORY OF ADOPTION IN THE MODERN UNITED STATES* (2008).

⁴ *Id.*, at 125-127.

⁵ See BRENDA CHILD, *BOARDING SCHOOL SEASONS: AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES, 1900-1940* (1983), and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik Stark and Kekek Jason Todd Stark, *Flying the Coop: ICWA and the Welfare of Indian Children*, in JANE JEONG TRENKA, JULIA CHINYERE OPARAH AND SUN YUNG SHIN, EDs., *OUTSIDERS WITHIN: WRITING ON TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION*, (2006).

adoptive homes were part of assimilationist projects supported by federal and state governments in an attempt to eliminate the transference of Native American culture from generation to generation. As Carlisle school founder Captain Richard Pratt put it, “Kill the Indian . . . save the man” through the power of the “missionary, as a citizenizing influence upon the Indians.”⁶ As a result of these policies and the resulting decimation of indigenous Tribal cultures, the Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted in 1978 to end what Native American communities deemed the “cultural genocide” of Native American children through the placement of children into non-Native American homes.⁷

In the late 1890s, Charles Loring Brace, a Presbyterian minister, began a child relocation movement through the New York Children’s Aid Society that became synonymous with the orphan train movement. An estimated 250,000 immigrant Irish and Italian Catholic and Jewish children were placed in majority Protestant families in the Midwest, west, and Canada in an effort to prevent future “dangerous classes of New York.”⁸ Many of the leaders involved in orphan train relocation movements were Protestant ministers, and providing “Christian instruction” for a child through placement was one of the movement’s goals.⁹ Catholic and Jewish communities were so concerned with the potential loss of these children as future members of their faith that each opened adoption agencies dedicated to place children within their own spiritual communities.¹⁰

Children are particularly attractive subjects for conversion because of their malleability and inability to advocate for themselves. Children, whose “best interests” are constantly being determined by adults, are not allowed full rights in society. Children from

marginalized or oppressed communities are even more vulnerable if the adults in their communities are unable to withstand oppression against themselves, much less on behalf of their children. The current evangelical focus on “orphans,” exemplified by Both Ends Burning, the Orphan Sunday movement, and popular Christian authors and scholars such as Russell Moore, is the twenty-first century’s, high-tech multi-media version of evangelical humanitarianism, popularized over fifty years ago by organizations such as World Vision. If Dan Cruver and Russell Moore have become contemporary spokespersons for the evangelical response for international adoption, Harry Holt was their prototype, capitalizing on the dual salvations Christian adoptive parents provide for children: material *and* spiritual rescue and salvation.

Harry and Bertha Holt became famous for adopting eight Korean children in 1955. In 1954, the Holts attended a World Vision presentation in their hometown of Creswell, Oregon. World Vision, founded by a Christian missionary named Dr. Bob Pierce, provided humanitarian aid to children in China and Korea. At these church and community presentations Dr. Pierce sought families for World Vision’s child sponsorship program in which an individual or family could send a monthly sum to support a Korean child. Many of these children were full orphans where both parents had died. However, the orphanages also housed half-orphans and social orphans, including children whose parents had temporarily or permanently placed them in care due to poverty, or the death or abandonment of one parent. In addition, many of these orphanages were caring for children with American GI fathers and Korean mothers who were stigmatized for being mixed race. It is estimated that more than 90 percent of children sent for adoption between 1953 and 1960 were of mixed race.¹¹

World Vision used a film titled *Other Sheep* featuring these mixed race children to tap into the emotional heartstrings of American audiences. The film’s title perhaps references the Bible passage from John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” World Vision’s goal was both humanitarian and evangelistic. The idea of providing both material and spiritual assistance was appealing to the Holts. In her memoir *The Seed from the East*, Bertha Holt writes that in addition to contributing to food and material needs, “this small sum would

⁶ *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* 46-59 (1892), in Richard H. Pratt, *The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites*, in *AMERICANIZING THE AMERICAN INDIANS: WRITINGS BY THE “FRIENDS OF THE INDIAN” 1880-1900* 260-71 (1973). From <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/>.

⁷ The Indian Adoption Project was a joint program run by the Child Welfare League of American and the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1958-1967. The goal of the program was to place Native American children in white adoptive homes. A total of 395 Native American children were placed in white adoptive homes. In 2001 the Child Welfare League of American formally apologized for the organization’s participation and leadership in the project. See Ellen Herman, *Indian Adoption Project*, at *Adoption History Project*, <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/IAP.html>.

⁸ See CHARLES LORING BRACE, *THE DANGEROUS CLASSES OF NEW YORK & TWENTY YEARS OF WORK AMONG THEM* 28 (1973), and HERMAN, *KINSHIP BY DESIGN*, *supra* note 3, at 24-25.

⁹ MARILYN IRVIN HOLT, *THE ORPHAN TRAINS: PLACING OUT IN AMERICA* 28-29 (1992).

¹⁰ HERMAN, *supra* note 3, at 46-47.

¹¹ KIM, *supra* note 2, at 15.

provide Christian education and supervision.”

Other Sheep was an effective campaign as to the Holts, who decided to sponsor ten children that night.¹² Bertha wrote, “Then came the scenes that shattered our hearts. We saw before us the tragic plight of hundreds of illegitimate children . . . GI-babies . . . children that had been hidden by remorseful mothers until it was no longer possible to keep their secret.”¹³ I can only imagine that at the time, this film was a powerful way to show the need for the Korean children impacted by the war, both the literal orphaning caused by the war and the social orphaning as a result of being mixed-race.¹⁴

From the beginning, providing material and parental resources was only one of Holt’s goals. To tap into prospective evangelical adopters, Harry used a method still employed today. Descriptions and photographs of the unsanitary and impoverished conditions of orphanages or congregate care facilities in which children are living equate adoption to the rescue of children from “hell on earth.” In 1955 Harry Holt wrote:

The little boy or girl that may be, by the grace of God, in your home by this time next year is right now lying on the floor in the cold Korean winter, huddled under whatever covers they happen to have. They are always cold and there is never enough to eat. Most of them are weak with malnutrition and sick with colds and dysentery, and many others with the beginnings of tuberculosis.¹⁵

In his book *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (2009), Russell Moore describes his first visit with his sons, who are “lying in excrement and vomit, covered in heat blisters and flies.”¹⁶ In the forward to *Adopted for Life*, C.J. Mahaney of Sovereign Grace Ministries praises adoptive parents who “travel to distant (and sometimes dangerous) countries to adopt.”¹⁷ The inclusion of “dangerous” is a necessary and important qualifier because it reinforces the narrative of rescuing a child from an earthly hell, both materially and spiritually, through the mechanism of adoption.

Conceptualizing adoption as part of a larger

mandate of evangelizing is not merely possible but accepted in part due to Harry and Bertha Holt’s narrative. In the summer of 1955, Harry was on his way to Korea to look into adopting the Korean orphans that the Holt family had been sponsoring under the ministrations of World Vision. Experiencing insomnia during a layover in a Tokyo hotel room, Harry reached over to the hotel nightstand and pulled out the Gideon Bible. According to Bertha,

In the darkness he thumbed through it and put in his finger and turned on the light. His thumb was on Isaiah 43:5. *Fear not for I am with thee*. At that moment he was assured that it was not Harry Holt, it was the Lord Himself who was doing this. He wept for joy, then he read two more verses, ‘I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, give up; and to the south, keep not back: bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.’¹⁸

According to the Holts, this was a sign from God that he was to facilitate the adoption of Korean children to American parents.¹⁹

Their 1955 “Dear Friends” newsletter states, “We would ask all of you who are Christians to pray to God that he will give us the wisdom and strength and the power to deliver his little children from the cold and misery and darkness of Korea.”²⁰ Fifty-five years later, Reverend Tom Benz echoes Holt, telling supporters donating funds to airlift children from Haiti following the earthquakes that they would “bring children out of darkness and suffering into faith and life in Jesus Christ.”²¹

Robert Ackerman, the Immigration and Naturalization Service officer in charge of adoptions at the U.S. embassy in Seoul during the 1980s, expressed concern to reporter Matthew Rothschild that the more extreme religious adoption agencies viewed adoptions as “a quick means of spreading the Gospel, a head start on proselytizing.”²² Proselytizing is exactly what many evangelical adoption advocates hope for through adoption. “The younger the child is, the more opportunity you will have to bring up

¹² BERTHA HOLT, *THE SEED FROM THE EAST* 24 (1956).

¹³ *Id.*, at 25.

¹⁴ KIM, *supra* note 2, at 15.

¹⁵ Ellen Herman, *Harry Holt’s Dear Friends Letter, 1955*, at *Adoption History Project*. <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/archive/HoltDearFriendsltr.htm>.

¹⁶ RUSSELL MOORE, *ADOPTED FOR LIFE: THE PRIORITY OF ADOPTION FOR CHRISTIAN FAMILIES AND CHURCHES* 18 (2009) (Kindle Edition).

¹⁷ C.J. Mahaney, *Forward to Moore, Adopted for Life*, *supra* note 16, at 13.

¹⁸ BERTHA HOLT, *BRING MY SONS FROM AFAR: THE UNFOLDING OF HARRY HOLT’S DREAM* 4 (1986).

¹⁹ Kathryn Joyce, *The Evangelical Adoption Crusade* *THE NATION*, May 9, 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/160096/evangelical-adoption-crusade>

²⁰ Holt Adoption Program, *Adoption Program Information Letter*.

²¹ Joyce, *supra* note 19.

²² Mathew Rothschild, *Babies for Sale: South Koreans Make Them, Americans Buy Them*, *THE PROGRESSIVE*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (1988) <http://modelminority.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=478>.

that child in Christian nurture and instruction, to form the character and eternal destiny of this son or daughter,” writes Russell Moore in *Adopted for Life*. “An adopting Christian couple may decide they want to adopt an infant or young toddler so as to exercise a maximal amount of stewardship in that child’s life. That’s a legitimate decision.”²³ In *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living through the Rediscovery of Abba Father* (2010) Dan Cruver declares, “The ultimate purpose of human adoption by Christians, therefore, is not to give orphans parents, as important as that is. It is to place them in a Christian home that they might be positioned to receive the gospel.”²⁴

Adoption, a family-building activity, is considered an act of spiritual warfare. In *Adopted for Life*, Moore calls adoption “spiritual warfare in the heavenly places.”²⁵ By describing Christians who adopt as “spiritual warriors,” Moore and others deflect those who might critique or delay their adoptions, in particular adoption social workers, as the enemy. Positioning social workers as spiritual enemies is part of a larger validation of Christian exceptionalism – a belief that God’s law supersedes man’s law and Christians are exempt from laws that conflict with their spiritual beliefs. Policies seen as “anti-adoption” or that halt the progression of adoption are perceived as “devil’s work” in the “crusade to create a culture of adoption.”²⁶ Moore writes, “Christians can debate whether or not lying [to adoption social workers] is permissible in certain instances to save a life,” comparing the act of lying for the purpose of adoption equal to protecting Jews from the Nazis or Hebrew babies from Pharaoh.

This was certainly the belief of Bertha Holt, who describes in her memoirs the Holts’s interactions with American adoption agencies and social workers, particularly around the approval of adoptive parents for Korean children. According to the Adoption History Project, the Holts “were happy to accept couples who had been rejected, for a variety of reasons, by conventional adoption agencies.”²⁷ In addition, the Holts used a legislative loophole, proxy adoptions, to place children for adoption, thereby circumventing state and federal procedures. In short, the Holts did not abide by the traditional home

study standards set at the time by the U.S. Children’s Bureau and the Child Welfare League of America. This raised concerns from social workers. When social workers from the American Social Agency were unsuccessful in their lobbying efforts to close the Holt adoption agency due to their reputation for accepting prospective adoptive couples that had been turned down by other agencies, Bertha Holt cheered, “The Lord managed to legally bypass [the American Social Agency’s] roadblock.”²⁸

Christians espousing disregard for measures to safeguard and protect children in adoption when these safeguards conflict with their beliefs appears hypocritical at best. Chuck Johnson, President of the National Council for Adoption, told reporter Kathryn Joyce for *The Nation*, “I think Christians are the worst at this sometimes, about the ends justifying the means. . . . You’ll hear people saying, I’m following God’s law, not man’s laws.”²⁹ Moore advises that prospective adoptive parents seek out Christian agencies, despite evidence that Christian agencies and organizations have been responsible for some of the most egregious unethical and illegal recruitment practices in international adoption.³⁰ Some of these unethical and illegal recruitment practices may be crisis responses, such as Zoe’s Ark workers in Chad or Laura Silsby and her colleagues, who attempted to transport thirty-three children out of Haiti for placement with Christian adoptive families. In both cases, those involved considered their actions justified as Christian exceptionalism.³¹ While stories of well-intentioned but overzealous attempts to rescue children are fodder for sensational media stories, Christian agencies like Christian World Adoption and Celebrate Children International institutionalize Christian exceptionalism in a couple of ways. First, they justify their unethical and/or illegal procurement of children as part of a means to an end – the end being the rescue of orphans via adoption. And second, at the other end, adoptive parents who question what appear to be unethical and/or illegal practices by the agency are chastised as being less faithful.³²

²⁸ HOLT, BRING MY SONS, *supra* note 18 at 9.

²⁹ Joyce, *supra* note 21.

³⁰ See ERIN SIEGEL, FINDING FERNANDA: TWO MOTHERS, ONE CHILD, AND A CROSS-BORDER SEARCH FOR TRUTH (2011) and Joyce, *supra* note 21.

³¹ Laura Silsby, *Trusting God’s Sovereignty, From a Haitian Jail*, BAPTIST PRESS (May 17, 2011), <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=35318>; Joyce, *supra* note 21.

³² See for example the case of Celebrate Children International director Sue Hedberg’s response to Betsy Emmanuel regarding Emmanuel’s questioning of inconsistencies in her adoption of a Guatemalan child in SIEGEL, FINDING FERNANDA, *supra* note 30.

²³ MOORE, *supra* note 16, at 134.

²⁴ DAN CRUVER, ED., RECLAIMING ADOPTION: MISSIONAL LIVING THROUGH THE REDISCOVERY OF ABBA FATHER 15 (2011).

²⁵ MOORE, *supra* note 16, at 116.

²⁶ Joyce, *supra* note 21.

²⁷ Ellen Herman, *Bertha and Harry Holt*, at *The Adoption History Project* (June 22, 2005), <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/adoption/people/holt.htm>.

Christian exceptionalism occurs on the front end, in the procurement and facilitation of children for adoption, and it occurs on the back end once the children are finalized in their adoptive homes, even when it comes to parenting styles. In 1957 one of Harry and Bertha Holt's adoptive mothers was indicted for murdering her Korean adopted child. Bertha writes, "I remembered Harry's warning that the American Social Agency would make trouble for us," wrote Bertha, "as the false accusation was planned to ruin our program."³³ When the parent was acquitted, Bertha wrote, "The Lord brought victory so the enemy forces had to think up a new way to attack. 'With us is the Lord our God to help us and fight our battles.' II Chronicles 32:8." Two and a half months after the acquittal, Harry placed one-month-old twin Korean girls with the family.³⁴

I read this passage from the book and thought of Hana Williams, the Ethiopian adoptee who was killed by her parents who applied strict physical and mental discipline methods outlined in a popular Christian parenting book. Over the past few years, Washington State has noticed an increase in the incidents of abuse of adopted children and found that many of the adoptive parents were applying Christian-based parenting books advocating strict discipline methods.³⁵ My own adoptive parents were fans of Dr. James Dobson's *Dare to Discipline* and occasionally spanked my siblings and I, believing "spare the rod, spoil the child." However, not all Christian parents spank or use corporal punishment and plenty of parents – Christian and otherwise – abuse their children. My concern is that some of the Christian parenting books advocating corporal punishment are not addressing the differences that corporal discipline may have on adopted children with pre-adoption histories of abuse, neglect, or trauma. Adoptive parents do not realize that withholding food for a child that has experienced pre-adoption food deprivation, as in the case of Hana Williams, is not the same thing as sending a non-adopted child to bed without dinner. In addition, the strict disciplinary methods outlined in some of these Christian parenting books may backfire;

instead of subduing and correcting behavior, these parenting methods may instead bring out the primal, survivalist instincts of children who have experienced violence, neglect, and deprivation in their pre-adoption histories, leading increasingly to cycles of both child and parental actions that may lead to tragedies like Hana Williams.

*Some children see Him almond-eyed
This Saviour whom we kneel beside
Some children see Him almond-eyed
With skin of yellow hue!*

- Alfred Burt and Wihla Hutson, 1951

My brother and sister and I sat side by side in the white wooden pews, book-ended by our parents. The sanctuary was lit by the dim wisps of candlelight, casting finger-like shadows on the pine-and-poinsettia wreaths draped along the choir loft. Christmas Eve service at our church, like every other aspect of our Christmas celebration, was a sacrosanct tradition. Every year my sister and I wore matching new dresses made by my grandmother. Our whole family attended service and along with the congregation sang the familiar Christmas hymns, listened to Pastor John's sermon, and closed the service with an a cappella version of *Silent Night*, the tiny pleated paper aprons catching wax drippings as our white candles kissed each other one by one, until the entire congregation was awash in the glow of Christmas spirit.

I first heard the Christmas hymn *Some Children See Him* at one of these services. The song describes Jesus as "bronzed and brown" or "dark as they," "with skin of yellow hue," presenting this idea that each Christian sees Jesus as they see themselves, not transcending race but embodying race.³⁶ Except I never saw Jesus portrayed as anything but a white man, with long wavy brown hair, wearing a white robe and sandals. My Jesus did not have black hair, and he certainly was not donning a white *hanbok*.

³³ HOLT, BRING MY SONS, *supra* note 18 at 44.

³⁴ *Id.* at 49, 57.

³⁵ See Natasha Ryan and Jake Whittenberg, *Ethiopian Child Starved Dead in WA Home*, *King 5 News* (September 30, 2011), <http://www.kgw.com/news/local/Ethiopian-adoptee-starved-to-death-in-WA-home-130852443.html>, and Barbara LaBoe, *State officials investigating several cases of abuse of adopted children*, at *The Daily News* (January 14, 2012), http://tdn.com/news/local/state-officials-investigating-several-cases-of-abuse-of-adopted-children/article_7fac29c2-3f25-11e1-b980-0019bb2963f4.html.

³⁶ Lyrics to *Some Children See Him*: Some children see Him lily white/The baby Jesus born this night/Some children see Him lily white/With tresses soft and fair/Some children see Him bronzed and brown/The Lord of heav'n to earth come down/Some children see Him bronzed and brown/With dark and heavy hair/Some children see Him almond-eyed/This Savior whom we kneel beside/Some children see Him almond-eyed/With skin of yellow hue/Some children see Him dark as they/Sweet Mary's Son to whom we pray/Some children see him dark as they/And, ah! they love Him, too!/The children in each different place/Will see the baby Jesus' face/Like theirs, but bright with heavenly grace/And filled with holy light. <http://www.alfredburcarols.com/burt/Web%20Pages/This%20Is%20Christmas/Childrensee.htm>

Russell Moore and others describe adoption as an example of “color-blind humanity;” however, the church congregations that many transracial and transnational adoptees attend are not bastions of color-blindness. As Martin Luther King, Jr. often said, “11:00 on Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week in America.”³⁷ A church cannot boast of embracing multiculturalism if the only diversity in the church is represented by transracially- and transnationally-adopted children attending Sunday school.

As one of a few non-white persons in my church, I describe my experience as one of simultaneous visibility and invisibility. I was the visible reminder of the missionary success in faraway heathen countries, having been “saved” from the “cold and darkness” of Korea.³⁸ My visibility as an “other” also subjected me to individual racism by members of the majority-white congregation. My experience is not singular; many transracially-adopted persons have shared similar experiences of racial prejudice within their own places of worship.

Despite my visible “otherness,” my South Korean heritage was ignored to facilitate my assimilation into a white church community. Christianity has a tendency to breed a kind of color blindness by promoting a “we are all God’s children” mentality, especially for a transracially or transnationally adopted child who is the sole representation of “other” in a white, Anglo-American congregation. It is easy for a church community to forget our racial, cultural, and ethnic heritage. In Christianity, all human beings are God’s children. In addition, sometimes churches are active participants in the racial reconstruction of adopted Korean or other non-white adopted children, either through denigrating their racial or ethnic culture or by insisting in a universal identity as a Christian. Either way, both overt and covert biases lead to transracially- and transnationally-adopted children distancing themselves from their ethnic heritage in order to fit in with the dominant culture.

For some Christian adoptive parents, erasure of transracial and transnational adoptee racial and ethnic identity is a goal. During one speech, Russell Moore brags, “These children don’t recognize the flags of their home countries, but they can all sing, *Jesus Loves Me*.”³⁹ Moore writes that during the home study process, he and his wife were advised

to teach their children about their Russian cultural heritage. Moore writes, “[Russian] is not their heritage anymore . . . we teach them about their heritage, yes, but their heritage as Mississippians.”⁴⁰ Moore can be proud of *his* cultural heritage, teaching his sons about *his* parents and grandparents and red beans and rice and catfish – but borscht or Russian culture and history, because they are not part of Moore’s heritage, are irrelevant. Color-blindness, according to Moore, is not about erasing *his* culture.

I have often wondered why white Christian adoptive parents who espouse “color-blindness” do not seek Christian churches in communities of color as a site for cultural, social, and spiritual growth for themselves and their children. White Christian churches are not the only faith communities promoting adoption. There have been attempts made by both Black churches and Korean-American faith communities to exhort members of the congregation to adopt. The “One Church, One Child” program was created in 1980 by Reverend George H. Clements to encourage Black churches to recruit and support adoptive parents from within their congregation.⁴¹ Stephen Morrison, adopted from South Korea as a teenager, founded Mission to Promote Adoption from Korea (MPAK) to promote adoption of South Korean children by Korean Americans. Christianity is a fundamental core value of MPAK’s mission. Morrison asks, “Why are [Korean Americans] not working to buoy [adoption] which still is part of the overall grand commission?”⁴² Programs such as “One Church, One Child” and MPAK have a strong Christian-based commitment to support adoption, yet their presence is strikingly absent from the larger conversations of the Christian mandate to adopt.

Apparently the “colorblind” approach is welcomed when used to erase racial and ethnic differences of non-white Americans, but not in the reverse direction. White adoptive parents who attend a Korean, Black, or other racial or ethnic minority church are the racial minority in those settings, so even when the doctrine and liturgy of the Korean or Black church is the same as a white church, most white adoptive parents prefer to worship within the comfort of their *own* racial and ethnic community. To live in communities without access to ethnic

³⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. on Meet the Press, NBC. April 17, 1960. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_0bNaAprZo

³⁸ Herman, *supra* note 15.

³⁹ Joyce, *supra* note 19.

⁴⁰ MOORE, *supra* note 16, at 35.

⁴¹ National One Church, One Child, Inc. website, <http://www.nationalococ.org/>.

⁴² Stephen Morrison, *Mission to Promote Adoption from Korea*, http://www.mpak.com/blogs/adoption_usa/archive/2009/05/17/the-history-of-mpak.aspx

minority churches reinforces the assimilation of transracially- and transnationally-adopted children.

While many adoptive parents write publicly (often on personal or public blogs) about the connection between Christianity and adoption, there are few first-person narratives from transracial- and transnational-adoptee perspectives on the meaning of religion and spirituality. For some adoptees, such as Morrison, their Christian faith is central to their lives and their work. Some transracial adoptees feel more comfortable worshipping in a church where they are not the racial “other.”⁴³ Others walk away all together.

Adopting a child does not guarantee his or her spiritual salvation or adoption by God; eventually it will be the adoptee’s choice. Affirming a transracially- or transnationally-adopted child as a person of color, honoring his or her ethnic cultural background, and becoming a social justice ally for the child’s racial or ethnic community does not keep parents from passing on their own spiritual values. These goals are not mutually exclusive. Fifty-two years after Martin Luther King’s pronouncement, American churches are still largely segregated, and transracially- and internationally-adopted children continue to be the sole representations of diversity in their church congregations. Many transracial and transnational adoptees do not experience the church as a site of embraced or welcomed diversity, but as an institution that sees only the white Jesus, not the one “bronzed as they,” with “skin of yellow hue.”

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⁴³ JaeRan Kim, *Waiting for God: Religion and Korean American Adoption*, in DAVID K. YOO AND RUTH H. CHUNG, EDs., *RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN KOREAN AMERICA* 95-6 (2008).