

Children on the Move: International Adoptees

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Adoption has become a "Top Topic" for Christian circles in recent years. Propelled to the limelight by movies such as "The Blind Side" and news bastions including TIME Magazine. Christian magazines, including Christianity Today, have picked up on the trend and have highlighted "adoption" in its pages. (See this issue of Christianity Today: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/july/10.5.html>).

I must delimit myself. I am neither an adoption expert, nor a childrens expert. Certainly, there are others, such as my good friend Doug Nichols of ACTION International Ministries, who can provide a better description of the global adoption landscape; but Diaspora Missions and Missiology is interdisciplinary, and the international movement of children being adopted is glaring.

Just as adults are migrating across borders, children are entering new lands.

The United Nations publication: Child Adoption Trends & Policies (Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, New York 2009) reports in its "key findings" that "although domestic adoptions far outnumber intercountry adoptions" The number of intercountry adoptions has been increasing." It further reports that the United States, France and Spain are the top destinations for children adopted internationally. Following these top three are in order of importance: Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. According to Child Adoption Trends & Policies, "each of these countries has recorded over 1,000 foreign adoptions annually in recent years." Major sources for international adoptees are China, Guatemala, the South Korea, Russia and Ukraine. These countries account for more than half of the children adopted abroad. Surprising, to me at least, is that "relatively few children adopted internationally originate in Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean." Nevertheless, the fact is, children too, are on the move.

I will not attempt a treatise on Christian adoption as mission. It is a given that God requires his people to care for the "fatherless" orphans (Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 146:9), but allow me to suggest some missiological implications, particularly in the context of diaspora missions.

1. Extended Family Care

Statistics indicate that it is primarily Western countries that are experiencing large inflows of children adopted from abroad. Not to say that all adoptive Westerners are Christians and will raise their adopted children with Christian values. Obviously this is not the case. But consider the increased opportunities for these children "from over there" to learn about Jesus Christ in their new countries. What does this potential imply? Perhaps we need to step up our local ministries to adoptive families, and to children adopted internationally. Reports indicate that there is a great need in assisting these families. Maybe more churches and Christian organisations need to intentionally minister to and support this growing group of people. (Read this article <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1997439,00.html> for a look into the stark reality of many adoption scenarios.)

2. Diaspora Partnerships

I do not have enough knowledge to discuss the topic of adoptions out of Africa; but I still have to wonder what can be done to help 7.7 million orphans in the continent most affected by the AIDS epidemic. The UN reports:

In 2003, there were an estimated 8 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa both of whose parents had died (UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID, 2004). This situation has gravely strained the customary

support system offered to children through extended family networks. (The United Nations: Child Adoption Trends & Policies. Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, New York 2009. p. 29).

The African diaspora is staggering any which way you look at it (whether you are looking at it from a classical diaspora perspective dating back hundreds of years, or from a modern perspective in light of recent population movements). African-diaspora churches are found throughout Europe and the Americas. Since many of these African orphans affected by AIDs cannot leave as international adoptees, diaspora churches must continue to share their vast resources (e.g. financial) to partner practically with local Christian organisations and churches to assist these orphans.

3. Retaining Roots

Finally, I recall the biblical story of Moses ? who was taken from his Hebrew people and culture and raised in a ?foreign? culture. One has to wonder how his Hebrew nurse (albeit his mother) instilled in him knowledge of his Hebrew roots ? roots that he would retain even as an adult.

Could there be a chance that some internationally adopted children will one day return to their ?roots?, and emerge as leaders of their people? Are there advantages in helping internationally adopted children retain their roots (i.e. linguistically, culturally)? For example, I have heard of some adoptive parents who have enlisted the assistance of language tutors to help their adopted children retain fluency in their mother tongue, and who purposely expose them to the cultural events reflecting their heritage. As a missiologist, I cannot help but consider the massive missiological implications that helping the child retain some of his or her roots could have. Imagine children from Russia coming to know Jesus Christ early in life and someday returning to their Russian roots and actually becoming ?missionaries? or Christian-teachers, and businessmen who do business the Christian way?

Can you imagine children on the move as part of the Church on the Move?

The Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization aims to assist the Whole Church in Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World; Diaspora Missiology is concerned about taking that Gospel to diaspora children.

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