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Is the "gospel of adoption" always good news?

Heidi Schlumpf | Apr. 22, 2013 NCR Today

Those who have viewed my video for NCR?s webathon [1] today already know that our family is ?conspicuous??a term used in adoption circles for families formed by transracial adoption. Our children are Asian; my husband and I are not.

I?ve also written about adoption, in a book of spiritual reflections composed during the extended wait for our children, and occasionally here on NCR?s blog. In my book, titled ?While We Wait, [2]? I also mention that I am birthmother who placed a child for adoption when I was 19.

So I have more than a few experiences and opinions about adoption in general, and about international adoption specifically. Last week, when I heard about the new book, ?The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking, and the New Gospel of Adoption [3]? by journalist Kathryn Joyce, my first thought was, ?I wish I had written that book!?

In the book, an article/excerpt in ?Mother Jones? magazine [4] and a radio interview on NPR?s ?Fresh Air, [5]? Joyce looks at the trend of adoption?usually international adoption?among evangelical Christians and others, noting that while it may be a positive example of ?family values? types walking the talk, it also may have some negative consequences, including creating a demand for children and inadvertently contributing to child trafficking.

To prevent this blog post from becoming a book itself, suffice it to say that I agree with nearly everything I have read from Joyce on this subject (though I have yet to finish the book). And she is not the first person [6] to make such assertions [7], including a growing number of adult adoptees [8]. (Please click on these links to read more.)

Experts say adopted children who grow up thinking they were adopted to be rescued, either for material or religious reasons, often suffer psychological issues. While most adoptive families will most likely raise their children in their own religious faith, it has been my experience that some evangelical families are less open to sharing the birth culture?and possibly birth religion?with their adopted children. And, most importantly, although I will not share my own children?s stories publicly, we definitely learned about and even witnessed practices in international adoption that indicated children who were not ?true? orphans were being adopted by Western families. It may be hard to believe, but there is more ?demand??for non-special-needs, AYAP (as young as possible) children?than there are adoptable children in the world.

Joyce has, not surprisingly, gotten some push-back in evangelical circles, including from this Religion News Service blogger, [9] who decried her ?shameful attack? on the Christian adoption movement. The author, Jonathan Merritt, is on the board of one of the agencies mentioned in Joyce?s book.

There is no need to be defensive. Joyce is not saying adoption is evil, nor is she saying that all evangelicals or other Christians, including some Catholics, had malicious intentions in pursuing adoption. What she is saying is that adoption, even in the best of circumstances, involves tremendous loss and should analyzed carefully. While

it can be an extremely life-giving way to build a family, there are other ways to address world poverty. These questions and concerns deserve to be raised.

****NOTE:** While I appreciate the comments I receive here on the NCR blog, I would ask you to please be respectful and refrain from personal attacks on my children and our family. Some day my children will be adults who may have access to this content. Thank you. And if you appreciate my occasional opinions and comments in NCR, please donate to our webathon today!

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Links:
[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_dMDtn7LmE
[2] http://www.amazon.com/While-We-Wait-Spiritual-Practical/dp/0879464062
[3] http://www.amazon.com/dp/1586489429/ref=tsm_1_fb_lk
[4] http://m.motherjones.com/politics/2013/04/christian-evangelical-adoption-liberia
[5] http://www.npr.org/2013/04/16/177350912/how-evangelical-christians-are-preaching-the-new-gospel-of-adoption
[6] http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/10/15/the_lie_we_love
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