

Transracial adoption more than a hot Hollywood trend

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Transracial adoption has become chic. Hollywood stars Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt adopted children from Ethiopia, Cambodia and Vietnam. Pop singer Madonna adopted children from Malawi. And that has brought increased attention, pro and con, to transracial adoption—both international and domestic.

While the issue is hotly debated among sociologists and some theologians, many Baptist families love their “belly-button” children and their “heartstring” children equally.

Blake and Kristin Killingsworth- from the Dallas area-completed the adoption of Chloe, a biracial child of Honduran and Nigerian parentage, late in October.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families intercountry—the current term for international—adoptions rose from 5 percent of total adoptions in the United States in 1992 to 15 percent in 2001.

Statistics on the numbers of intercountry adoptions by U.S. citizens are based primarily on U.S. State Department and Homeland Security reports. Total numbers are difficult to pin down because some adoptions take place in the child’s country of origin, while others are handled in the States. Also, procedures for intercountry adoptions vary from state to state.

The State Department reported it issued 19,237 immigrant visas to orphans

in 2001, and Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics noted 19,087 orphans actually entered the country that year.

Health and Human Services reported 127,407 total adoptions in 2001 and estimated 124,000 children were waiting to be adopted in the U.S. public system in 2002. Forty-two percent on the waiting list were black and 13 percent were Hispanic. That total does not include those on private agency waiting lists.

CLARIFICATION

When this article appeared in the Nov. 2 print issue of the *Baptist Standard*, it said a report by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute pushed for only same-race adoptions.

While some advocates of transracial adoption characterized the report's recommendations in that manner, the institute stipulated it was not taking that position.

The report included this disclaimer: "Issues of race and adoption are highly sensitive, and statements relating to them are often subject to misinterpretation. The Adoption Institute wants to be clear about its underlying philosophy and purpose in writing this paper: to bring law and policy in line with sound adoption practice that addresses the relevant issues in selecting families for children and in preparing parents to successfully care for them.

"The purpose of this paper is not to impede or prevent transracial adoptions or to promote racial matching; rather, it seeks to apply relevant knowledge to the practice of child welfare adoptions in order to best serve children and families."

Yet some professionals resist placing children with couples of a different race. In a report released in May 2008, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute included recommendations that some groups saw as advocating only same-race adoptions, even though the institute stipulated it was not taking that position. The Child Welfare League of America, the Adoption Exchange Association, the National Association of Black Social Workers, Voice for Adoption and Foster Care Alumni of America endorsed the report.

The report stressed transracially adopted children and their families face different challenges. Additionally, children in the foster-care system have risk factors that make choosing the appropriate home important.

“For these children, research points to the importance of adoptive placements with families who can address their individual issues and maximize their opportunity to develop to their fullest potential,” the institute reported.

That’s where God’s power intervenes, Russell Moore believes. The dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., recently released *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, a call to Christians to adopt and for churches to consider adoption as a “Great Commission priority.”

In a blog post, Moore criticized the institute’s report shortly after its release. The same-race approach “neatly categorizes persons according to their racial lineages rather than according to their need for love, for acceptance, for families,” he wrote. “Our love for neighbor means we ought to prioritize the need for families for the fatherless—regardless of how their skin colors or languages line up with one another.”



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The church, Moore contends, is partially to blame for the debate. “The family, after all, is constructed around another, deeper reality. It points to the church—that household of God in which Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers,” he wrote.

Race often remains an issue in some churches. Former International Mission Board missionaries Phil and Phyllis Washburn of Dallas experienced some church resistance to their youngest adopted children, a son and daughter from Tanzania.

While most churches they visited during their last stateside assignment accepted the Washburn family, several in Louisiana did not. When some churches learned about the Tanzanian children, they called special business meetings to decide whether to extend speaking engagements to the couple. One church refused to have them speak.

Families for children— rather than children for families—is the philosophy Christian agencies, such as the Missouri Baptist Children's Home, Buckner International and Dillon, follow.

Missouri Baptist Children's Home "promotes adoption for all types of children and encourages adoptive families to have wide parameters for the child they would accept into their family," noted Ramona Conrad-Cooper, vice president of Children & Family Ministries in St. Charles, Mo.

For many families, adopting transracially is more a matter of divine calling.

"One of the things that Kristin and I firmly believe, and something that kept us going in the midst of all of this (adoption process) is that adoption is a calling. It isn't just a choice," Blake Killingsworth from the Dallas area said. "Couples are called to adopt, and if you are not called to adopt, then you will never survive the process."

Blake and Kristin Killingsworth with Chloe before a Dallas Mavericks game. The Killingsworths, an Anglo couple, completed the adoption of Chloe, a biracial child of Honduran and Nigerian parentage, late in October. Now, "in our home, when we pray, we get to be a small picture of the ultimate scene in Revelation as every tongue from every tribe and nation gather around the throne to worship the one true God. How neat is that?" said Killingsworth, who serves on staff at Dallas Baptist University.

Intercountry adoption for Jerrod and Becky Irick of Lewisville has meant joint ministry. First, they minister to the children themselves—daughter Katy and special-needs son Jack, both adopted from China. "I've never quite felt like I was obeying God so much as when I adopted a child, especially one from a poorer part of the world where they're so much less likely to know Christ growing up in that country," Irick said.

Second, they are associates for the agency they used, American World Adoption Association, to speak to individuals and groups as a couple. "It's

been an incredible blessing to minister together and incredible for our marriage,” Becky Irick said.

Michael Hickman and wife Barb of St. Louis decided to adopt when their natural son was 12. They joyfully accepted three African-American children into their home—James in 2000, Karen in 2002 and Alyssa in 2004.

“The beautiful thing about our adopted children is that we did not pick any” of them, Hickman said. “God chose each one of our children and placed them into our home. So in essence, God put this family together for us, and we have been given the responsibility to raise each one of them to know, to love, to depend on God and to have a personal relationship with him.”

Phyllis Washburn notes she has a truly international family, with two natural sons, a daughter adopted from Lebanon, and two Tanzanian children. “Each of them (was) uniquely designed by God, and each of them bear(s) characteristics like their parents, whether by birth or learned,” she said. “They are our children,” some “belly button” and some “heartstring” children.