

Examination of Child Adoption in the Context of the Christian Religion

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Abstract

The major focus of this paper is to appraise the subject of child adoption from the perspective of the Christian religion. It is basically a qualitative work which relied on secondary sources of data such as journals, text books and materials obtained from the internet for its analysis. The paper showed with limpid evidence from the bible that all Christians are adopted children of God. It further maintains that the bible supports child adoption and that notable leaders of the Christian religion had adoptive parents.

Keywords: Adoption, Christian, Child, Religion

Introduction

Adoption can be viewed as a legal process through which non biological children become integrated as children of their adoptive parents, with all the duties, rights and privileges pertaining thereto. As Cole (1985) indicated, adoption is a legal and legitimate means of giving children to person(s) or couple(s) who desire them and providing parents for children who may have been abandoned by their biological parents or those whose natural parents are incapable of adequately parenting. A properly adopted child enjoys the benefits of family name, protection, legitimacy, provision, inheritance and other privileges accruing to biological children in the household (Omeire, 2016). Watson (1986) also pointed out that adoption is seen as a neat solution to three of society's vexing problems, namely, unplanned pregnancy outside of marriage, children in need of families to rear them, and infertile couples unable to have children.

Child adoption appears to be an enigmatic subject, particularly as it concerns the position of the Christian religion on the matter. Child adoption has not featured very prominently in ecclesiastical discourse. Consequently, while some Christians are aware of and support child adoption, others appear to be indifferent to it. The apathy might be as a result of ignorance regarding the stipulation of the bible with respect to adoption. The present effort is an attempt to examine the subject of child adoption from the perspective of Christianity.

Christianity and Child Adoption in Focus

The issue of child adoption is not isolated for elaborate teaching in the bible. However, evidence abounds in both the old and new testament to show that God approves of it and uses it as a medium to achieve strategic purpose for his people. Adoption in scripture embodies the biblical theme of

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covenant. Apostle Paul described in Ephesians (1 vrs.5) how Christians were “predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”. Except for God’s benevolence through adoption of Gentiles, sonship or being children of God , was the exclusive preserve of Israel but made available through His magnanimity by the new covenant to all who have faith in Christ.

As June (2012) pointed out, from scriptural perspective, adoption is not just a legal process but it is mainly a relationship and a promise. According to him, law and promise are different in principle. While the law is predicated on reward or punishment for conduct, promise revolves on acceptance of an unconditional gift. MacDougall (2009) maintained that for the Christian adoption is, in a sense, a scriptural metaphor that emphasizes the permanence of relationship with God, His covenant love for His people, the right we have as His children and His redemption of us.

The Child as Pivotal

The child is the focal point in any adoption scheme. The bible teaches that God has special love for children. In Mathew (18, vrs. 3 and 5) Jesus told his disciples “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven;...and whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me”. Jesus thus maintained that children are model for any adult aspiring to enter the kingdom of heaven. God loves children; therefore a Christian who adopts out of love, especially for the deprived, orphans and the rejected, is living out his faith. James (1, vrs. 27) stated “religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”. Psalm (68, vrs, 5) indicated that God is “a father to the fatherless and defender of the widows”. In a way adoption for the Christian can become a religious duty and a moral obligation and practical way to show affection, provide warmth, security, emotional support, identity and bright prospects for an otherwise hapless and vulnerable child. On the other hand, an adopted child can be a source of stability and bliss to an otherwise fractious marital relationship (Omeire, 2015).

Anchor for Marriage Stability

From the Christian perspective, adoption upholds marriage as the building block for parenting. God instituted marriage as a basis for procreation. If for any other reason, except mutual agreement, procreation does not take place after marriage, adoption can and should be considered because it upholds God’s original mandate for parents to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1, vrs 28). As June (2012) pointed out, a marriage firmly rooted in Christ is the strongest possible foundation for family building, whether through birth or adoption. The husband and wife relationship provides a canopy that not only shields the couple, but offers physical, emotional and spiritual security and shelter for their children. God’s plan for children is that they experience life in the midst of this covenant relationship between a mother and father.

Adoptions in Scripture

In the Old Testament, one of the prominent illustrations of child adoption was the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh’s daughter (Gen 2, vrss 1-10). In the story, Moses who was decreed to die for being born a male Jew was “abandoned” at the bank of River Nile by his mother Jochebed, and rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter who adopted him as her son. Though brought up in the royal house of Pharaoh, when Moses realized his true identity, he took certain actions and eventually ran away from Egypt. He returned some years later and became an instrument for the divine deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt (Gen 12, vrss 31-36). In the analysis provided by MacDougall (2009), it is noteworthy that Moses had to be born a Hebrew and he had to have what

his adoptive family gave him to be prepared to do what God called him to do. In other words, his birth and adoptive heritage were what made him who he became, namely a useful instrument for God's service.

Another case of adoption in the old testament was that of Samuel who was "donated" to God by his mother and nurtured and trained by the Priest, Eli (1 Samuel 1, vrs 20-28). Samuel became engrafted as an integral part of the Eli household. Unlike Eli's biological sons (Hophni and Phinehas) who became corrupt and perverted, Samuel conducted himself in a righteous manner. Consequently, God annihilated the Eli dynasty and enthroned Samuel as the Priest and prophet of Israel (I Sam 4, vrs.17-18).

Queen Esther was orphaned at an early age and adopted by her uncle, Mordecai (Esther 2vrs7). By divine orchestration, Esther from a very low estate was later to become the queen of Shushan after Vashti was dethroned for misconduct hinged on insubordination. God used her to save the Jewish nation from the annihilation which Haman planned and obtained royal endorsement to execute (Esther 8, vrs5).

Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph were naturally grandchildren of Jacob. However, as pointed out in Gen 48, vrs 5-6, Jacob adopted these two sons of Joseph to be his direct sons, before he died. Speaking to Joseph to convey this decision about Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob declared "as Reuben and Simeon are mine, your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours". By this proclamation, Ephraim and Manasseh became engrafted as integral part of the tribes of Israel.

The patriarch, Abram, also adopted Eliazer, his chief servant as his son. In Genesis 15, vrs.2, the bible records:

But Abram said, Lord God what will you give me, seeing I go childless,
and the heir of my house is Eliazer of Damascus

God responded by assuring Abram that he would have a biological son as heir. This was fulfilled with the emergence of Isaac in Genesis (21, vrs 1-3).

Jesus as an Adopted Child

It could be argued that the most outstanding case of child adoption in the bible which can be said to provide evidence of God's approval for the practice is found in the New Testament with the adoption of Jesus by Joseph, the husband of Virgin Mary. As the scripture records in Matthew (2,vrs 18-20), God Himself allowed His son to be adopted, nurtured and raised by an earthly father who did not biologically beget him. In this context, June (2012) observed that God had in His plan for marriage and parenthood provided for Jesus to have an earthly father. Joseph was not merely an earthly father to Jesus, but also he provided him secular accommodation, fatherly care, love, warmth, protection, orientation, vocation, training and discipline.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it can be unequivocally stated that Christianity supports child adoption. In fact the bible regards followers of Christ, Christians, as adopted children of God. As Maxwell (2007) indicated, Ephesians (1, vrs 5 states) "... In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His good pleasure and will". Commenting on this scripture, the theologian Moore (2009, p. 24) asserted that "for Paul, adoption isn't simply one more literary image to convey 'Jesus in my heart'. It has everything to do with our identity and inheritance in Christ, with whom we are and where we're headed". Nwaoga (2013) pointed out; the Christian religion does not encourage any kind of bias towards an adopted child. The belief

that an adopted child should be treated equally as a biological child; hence all rights and privileges to be given to a biological child should also be given to an adopted child.

From the Christian perspective, child adoption dovetails with God's plan to provide children for childless couples and parents for orphans and other vulnerable children. Many Christians believe that child adoption is a powerful example of God allowing circumstances and vicissitudes for the ultimate benefit of all those that are involved (child, birth mother and adoptive parents). They hold that God uses adoption, just as He can utilize any situation to achieve His ordination and bring about deliverance, restoration and joy. This position is validated by the scriptural stipulation in Romans 8, vrs 28 to the effect that "...all things work together for good to those who love God...". It is thus safe to conclude by asserting that the Christian religion endorses child adoption.

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