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THE CREATION OF FAMILIES: CHRISTIANITY AND CONTEMPORARY ADOPTION

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Doctor of Philosophy

2009

Thesis Word Count: 98641.

This research is the product of my own work, and the work of others has been properly acknowledged throughout.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a theological and practical reflection on the practice of adoption in contemporary Britain, as it affects Christian adoption agencies, Christian social workers, Christian parents and adopted children.

The first three chapters set the background context to the research by examining the history, theology, legal and sociological context. This enables the contemporary situation to be established, particularly the potential for tension between the thinking of many Christians about constructing adoptive families and the open, liberal stance of the state and Local Authorities. This tension was heightened with the passing of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 that drew attention to radically different viewpoints within adoption work.

The theological reflection methods employed were the pastoral cycle and canonical narrative, both of which were subordinate to an overall theology of engagement that enabled the interface between the Christian and non-Christian work in adoption to be investigated. The methodological approaches taken enabled quantitative and qualitative material to be combined. Three surveys were distributed: two to Christian groups, agencies and parents, involved in adoption work and one to adoption social workers. Secondly, telephone interviews were conducted. Data was also collected from a wide range of Internet websites. Fourthly, data was gathered from literature distributed by adoption agencies.

A chapter (4) on Christian Adoption Agencies develops a theoretical agency that relates to the Church and the contemporary adoption system. Differences between historically different denominational emphases in adoption work and the present day reality is described. It continues to be possible for Christian adoption agencies to be relevant and specialised in this work.

Central to all adoption work is the child: their future stability and happiness. This is examined by focussing upon the impact of the Christian faith on the potential for healing and wholeness for an adopted child (**chapter 5**). Three specific aspects of life are explored: an adopted child's spirituality, identity and nurture. This discussion naturally leads into a

further discussion about prospective and actual adoptive parents: the manner in which the Christian faith has a bearing upon adoption before, during and after the adoption of a child (**chapter 6**).

Finally, Christian people within and without adoption work have been challenged about the nature of the family in the adoptive context. 'Families' that are accepted by the general population can be tolerated by some Christians yet discredited by others. The question is asked whether newly created adoptive families can have forms that are radically different from traditional patterns (**chapter 7**).

This thesis concludes that Christians are making a contribution to adoption work that could be said to be distinctive. This said the Church should work to promote adoption of children with more confidence and debate less about adopters. This is a bold and contentious statement yet I contend that adoption could and should be a characterising motif of Christian family life.

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1 Introduction

This thesis is a theological and practical reflection on the practice of adoption in contemporary Britain, as it affects Christian adoption agencies, Christian social workers, Christian parents and adopted children. It asks the question: what might be a distinctive Christian contribution to contemporary adoption work?

Underlying the dominant thesis question are issues about relationships within adoption work: What is the relationship between Christian adoption agencies and Local Authorities? What should the Church expect concerning the influence of secular legislation and control in adoption social work? What should society expect from organisations and people that are Christian and involved in adoption work? These are aspects of relationship. These questions are also more broadly about an engagement between the Church and wider society in family life.

This introduction firstly gives a shape to the scope and argument as set out in the subsequent chapters. Two sections follow, detailing how answers to the thesis question have been researched theologically and practically.

1.1 Scope and Argument

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress... (James 1.27)

God's love for his people has always specifically and actively included orphans. In view of this, one might naturally expect that the Christian Church would continue to support vulnerable children, especially those without any families. Yet there has been a prevailing contradiction and tension in the way the Church has reacted to the presence of children. On the one hand, the Church promoted a secure place for the growth and nurture of children: they were a blessing given to a married couple. On the other hand, children born outside of this unit were created as 'illegitimate': they were the outcome of sin and needed redemption; redemptive care that was practically provided by the Church as surrogate parent.

Care for unwanted children, by the Christian Church, began in the first century and at many levels the Church has never stopped offering that care. Latterly, however, the Church's commitment to adoption as a specific form of caring for vulnerable children, has seemed stranded between contemporary legislation, and requests to uphold Christian tradition.

This thesis argues that Christian people who are connected to adoption work in any

way are already making a distinctive contribution. More could be done; especially by the Church as an organisation. The Church could be far more effective in its support of this work if it resolved some key conflicts that have arisen concerning adoption. The contemporary adoption scene demands that the Church wrestles with issues of what and who constitutes a family. This is both an internal struggle between different Christian people and an external debate about what constitutes good parenting in wider society.

The opening chapters provide a historical, theological, sociological and legal background to the main arguments. **Chapter 2** sets the historical and theological backdrop to the contemporary situation, before **chapter 3** moves on to look at twentieth century developments in governmental policy, social work and adoption legislation. Whilst ethical and professional behaviour may derive from Christian concepts for some people, an overarching climate of secularisation exists that potentially provides a challenge to those who admit to a particular religious worldview, specifically a Christian one. Adoption social workers, as well as those being assessed as prospective parents, may feel this challenge.

The present social and legal environment is the product of increasing secularisation and decreasing Church influence. The Abortion Act 1967 and the Divorce Reform Act 1969 changed family and social dynamics generally and specifically. Alongside the widespread use of contraception, far fewer babies were available for adoption; the nature of adoption began to change. Adoption of older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs has become the norm. Today all adoption agencies are regulated by Local Authorities and, from 1976, these Authorities were legally obliged to provide adoption services.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 brought certain issues about the relationship between Christian Churches and adoption practice to a head. These issues included the key question of who should be able to adopt. The new law permitted adoption by married, cohabiting and single adults including same-sex couples. Widely publicised lobbying from Christian groups raised statistical, scriptural and doctrinal arguments about the way in which the shape of the traditional family was being challenged preceded debates. The Act also permitted adoption agencies with religious affiliations to have distinctive approval criteria for prospective adoptive parents. The Equality Act 2007 removed this facility for distinctiveness, interpreting it as discrimination.

Against this background of conflict and tension between Christianity and contemporary adoption, the thesis addresses four specific areas:

- (i) How do Christian adoption agencies provide a distinctive contribution when compared to Local Authorities? Does being 'Christian' make a difference?

(**chapter 4**);

- (ii) When considering the needs of adopted children, does awareness of issues of spirituality provide a means of engagement between Christianity and secular contributions to adoption work? Specifically, how can Christian adoptive parents help or hinder? (**chapter 5**);
- (iii) How do social workers assess prospective Christian adoptive parents? How does the Christian faith make a difference? (**chapter 6**); and,
- (iv) Since adoption creates a new family, how should the Church respond to challenges to the traditional concept of 'family' brought in by recent adoption legislation? (**chapter 7**).

The phrase 'Christian Adoption Agency' can describe an activity and an ethos. **Chapter 4** argues that it is possible to do both in a distinctively Christian manner. This argument is made by reflecting on the historical contributions of three Christian denominations (4.1) and then testing a combined approach against the contemporary reality. The potential for distinctiveness emerges from the analysis, embedded within the nature of vocation and service. The enthusiastic validation of existing work by external inspection authorities, is a source of encouragement to these agencies.

The next chapter focuses upon the adopted child and their need for healing and wholeness (**chapter 5**). Three specific aspects of experience are discussed: spirituality, identity and nurture. Spirituality is an important part of a growing child's identity, yet it is not taken sufficiently seriously in adoption assessment procedures (5.1). The story of any individual's life is enmeshed with the story of the community from which their identity is derived: family, neighbours, church. A child who cannot spend their life with the first family, the original community, has a damaged sense of identity. Issues arising from a poor sense of self are commonplace with adoptive children, many of whom may struggle with 'attachment disorder', a condition defined in this chapter and born from the complex early histories of adoptees. In an exploration of the theology of identity (5.2), the role of love, nurture, steadfastness and self-giving enables a path to be found towards a greater level of personal wholeness for the adoptive child. Finally, the vital role of adoptive parents is discussed, their relationship to the adopted child (5.3). There is evidence that Christian parents have a faith that motivates and strengthens them to care for the specific demands of children who are no longer with the first family.

The assessment process for prospective adopters requires social workers to make a judgement on the 'suitability' of an applicant's lifestyle, including matters of faith and their

religious practice. **Chapter 6** offers research and analysis into the work of social workers, their interaction with the Christian faith and the adoption process. Adoption social workers rightly evaluate the role of church and faith within the lives of prospective adopters. Yet social workers claim that they have typically received no training in spirituality nor do they typically understand the breadth of conviction that can be described using the word 'Christian'. Experiences of social workers and adoptive parents are used to determine if there are areas of genuine misunderstanding.

Contemporary views that work 'in the best interests of the child' generate a tension in the debate about adoption and the creation of new families, since it demands answers to the question: what type of family is needed for *this child*? Christians and non-Christians may have differing responses to this question. There are different responses from within the Christian community itself. **Chapter 7** discusses the most publicly controversial theme in the relation of Christianity to contemporary adoption: the question of family structure. This thesis does not develop a general theology of family nor does it draw conclusions about the large variety of family forms. This thesis discusses matters that affect adoptive families. I argue that the adoption of children is more important than family structure and that the ideal, but not exclusive, circumstance is for adoption to occur within a permanent, stable relationship between a married couple. What may seem to be an argument that supports contemporary societal values, has the potential for being a stance that enables the Church to offer a greater witness to the permanence of love and care within Christian families. The evidence for how adopted children are nurtured within non-traditional family types (7.2) is compared with the views of Christian adoptive parents (7.3), to see how the life experience of adopters might differ from traditional views.

Adoption work in the twenty-first century is complex and emotive territory, existing in a time of impermanence within families. For Christians, adoption is a permanent reality for believers who can all say that they are adopted by God (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; Rom. 9:4). Adoption is also about the provision of a loving home to those who have no permanent family. It would be expected that the Church in particular, since it has obviously cherished family life, would be active in drawing those without families into more enduring and stable relationships. Yet the Church has withdrawn from this work, perhaps through financial pressure, but maybe out of fear or the need to accommodate secular legislation. **Chapter 8** concludes the preceding arguments by answering the thesis question. It takes each of the groups involved in adoption work: agencies, parents, social workers, families and churches, and brings together the arguments that suggest these Christians can continue to

make a distinctive contribution to adoption work. Potentially, adoption can become a characterising motif for the Christian family since it simultaneously values the contribution made by children and parents to family life and the transformation a Christian perspective can bring in creating new families.

1.2 Methods of Theological Engagement

There are two forms of theological reflection used within this thesis: the pastoral cycle, otherwise known as ‘theology-in-action’, and canonical narrative theology. In addition, reference is made throughout the thesis to the manner in which the Church engages theologically with the issues presented by needing to be in conversation with non-Christians.

1.2.1 The Pastoral Cycle

This model of theological reflection uses experience in the world to stimulate thinking about God’s work within a certain situation. The conclusions of the thinking can be used to produce learning that can be used to engage in a new, lived-out experience. Experience can be gathered over weeks, years, or many centuries depending upon whether, in the case of this research, consideration is being given to adoptive parents, adoption agencies or denominational interaction with wider society. The influences upon the experience may include broader social histories, church tradition, and culture. The work of adoption agencies is frequently denominationally based so the history of church involvement in social responsibility builds experience and practice. Adoption social workers are strongly influenced by legal, cultural and societal changes that inform contemporary practice and their specific experience of working in this field. Finally, the experience of Christian adoptive parents is partially constructed by what models of family life are learned from their church and its historical approach to family life and the nurture of children. The experience of people is also influenced by human feelings, personal narratives and self-awareness. The interaction between lived-experience and tradition is the space for this praxis-based means of theological reflection.

In Elaine Graham et al’s book on *Theological Reflection: Methods*, the method is called ‘theology-in-action’ and is strongly connected with themes of liberation theology and social justice.¹ The method draws upon ‘biblically grounded traditions of prophetic protest’ that seek to uphold work rooted in ministries of compassion and justice-seeking. Here action and reflection occur simultaneously, as a unified effort, which emerges from knowledge gained

¹ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 170-199.

within the situation. It values the narratives of professionals and individuals, alongside a dialogue with scripture and tradition. 'Faithful discipleship rests in being able to realise the power of 'love-in-action'. God is understood as active in history, which is ushering creation towards an ultimate vision of redemption. The task of personal and corporate discipleship is to make common cause in solidarity with the suffering of the world in order to work for justice.'² It has an obvious value within an area that can be seen as both socially and politically relevant to contemporary life, such as the field of adoption. It is the dominant approach used in **chapter 4** and its use is indicated in other sections also.

1.2.2 Canonical Narrative Theology

Graham et al characterise this theological reflection tool as a means for 'Telling God's Story'.³ The story is told in the Bible and in lives giving testimony to God's influence upon their actions and motivation; lives centred on the model of Jesus and the belief that God is alive and incarnate in his people. From the viewpoint of Christian people, the tool has merits in building a strong, Christian identity in environments where this may be otherwise indistinct or relativised by external influences. For these reasons it can be criticised for lack of engagement with contemporary culture.⁴

The fact is, however, that a canonical narrative theology can give a clear *raison d'être* to both individuals and the Church. This is applauded by theologians such as Gerard Loughlin and Stanley Hauerwas, both of whose works are quoted throughout this thesis. Loughlin argues for:

'the grounding of narrativist theology in the specific scriptural story of God's Christ, rather than in a general theory of narrative experience, which not only begs the question but makes anthropology the foundation of theology. Beginning with the scriptural story means that theology does not have to counter those theories which insist that experience is inherently chaotic and unfollowable, rather than orderly and readable. But it does mean that narrativist theology insists on the orderability of the world and experience through the following of God's story.'⁵

For Hauerwas, the Church has the potential to transform society by basing its life and witness whole-heartedly upon the example of Jesus:

'Once we recognise that the church is a social ethic – an ethic that is, to be sure, but a gesture – then we can appreciate how every activity of the church is a means and an opportunity for faithful service to and for the world. We believe that the gesture that is the church is nothing less than the sign of God's salvation

² Graham et al, op. cit., 14.

³ Ibid., 78-108.

⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁵ Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 79.

of the world.⁶

For both of these theologians, experience and daily life is about encountering God in the world that God created and in which people are made in God's image. In the field of adoption, therefore, there is every certainty that God will be present in the complexity, challenge and mess of the environment.

In a thesis discussing Christian distinctiveness in adoption work, the canonical narrative reflection tool is evident in the original theological material written about adoption (**chapter 2**) and identity (**chapter 5**) and also in the engagement with social responsibility and family life debated by the three Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist. Canonical narrative theology and theology-in-action are approaches that may appear to be in tension with each other in the debate about contemporary forms of adoptive families (**chapter 7**). They are compatible with each other, however, when the theological principle of showing self-sacrificing hospitality and love to vulnerable strangers enables the specific needs of children to be placed above arguments about traditional forms of family life. For some Christians, this would be seen as an effective theology of engagement.

1.2.3 A Theology of Engagement

A theology of engagement is about the dialogue between different worldviews; exploring the areas that enable co-operation and work towards common goals. It recognises that people come to a place of collaborative working from different starting points. For example, the need for marginalized, estranged and vulnerable children to find a family is not an exclusively Christian idea. It is a reasonable surmise to say that Christians attach importance to a traditional family shape that includes married couples. Similarly, it may be said that Christians recognise that some single people have successfully created a family life for children either through their own efforts or after a failed marriage or a bereavement. Anecdotal evidence, looking at Church attendance, for example, indicates that Christians accept the reality of the 'blended' family that is created following divorce and then re-marriage. In the last two examples, these 'alternative' forms of family life are nuances of the traditional form of family that can nurture children. Examples of family forms that challenge many Christians, however, are those that include non-married couples and particularly same-sex couples. The increasing acceptance of a larger range of family forms within wider society means that the starting point for adoption from a non-Christian perspective is different. In adoption work, this need not be a reason for non-collaboration between Christian and non-Christian partners if there is an overriding recognition from both parties that the primary goal is ensuring 'the best interests of the child'. Importantly for this thesis, this engagement

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living In Between* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2001), 107.

can be practical and pragmatic and also distinctively Christian. It is certainly about pastoral care, since it supports the need for vulnerable children to be matched with a parent or parents who will serve them in a way that can be discerned as 'best'.

In his *Theology of Engagement* Ian Markham seeks to promote conversation (a word chosen in preference to dialogue) between Christians and others. By 'engaging' and using Biblical and non-Christian sources of reference, Markham hopes to find common ground, an ability to learn and move away from 'tribal' or entrenched viewpoints. Whilst noting that this appears to be a liberal theological position, in and of itself, Markham stresses this theological activity is not characterised by such a term and attempts to show that it can be supported by all strands of Christian thought:

'The assumption of the "engagement" model in this book is that all traditions (all narratives, if you prefer) are in the business of making sense of the complexity of this world. The tools of coherence (the degree to which a narrative is internally consistent) and explanatory power (the degree to which a narrative explains various positive and negative features of the world) do provide means to determine which narratives are better than others.'⁷

Engaging with adoption work and 'making sense of the complexity' reveals that Christian and non-Christian people can have diversity in their viewpoints and disagree. When using canonical narrative theology, Christians may be connecting with the Bible and tradition in ways that are foundational and unchanging to their thinking. A theology of engagement requires that space is created to challenge reliance upon these resources.⁸

Unsurprisingly, Hauerwas is a critic of a theology of engagement. For him, the answers lie not in conversation to find common ground but in 'how the church can provide the interpretive categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation.'⁹ Hauerwas sees that a tension between the Church and society can make a valuable contribution to the whole.¹⁰ Markham would find that 'selective participation' was an inadequate response to a whole-hearted form of Christian service in society. 'Engaged theology must engage the trends that matter. Second, good engaged theology needs to be messy.'¹¹ For Markham, there is no need to be selective, only an imperative for the Church to engage with society to the fullest.

Messiness in the work of Christian adoption agencies is partially derived from

⁷ Ian S. Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹ Hauerwas (2001), *op. cit.*, 11.

¹⁰ Brian Howe, 'Politics and Faith: Living in Truth', in Francis Sullivan and Sue Leppert (eds.), *Church and Civil Society: A Theology of Engagement* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004), 43.

¹¹ Markham, *op. cit.*, 168.

prevailing debates about family life (**chapter 7**) and religious freedom (**chapter 4**) but also from the multiplicity of stakeholders to whom the work is accountable. To the innocent churchgoer, the single stakeholder is the Church seeking to match a child with a parent. Minimal awareness exists of accountability to contract providers, employment legislation, financial controls, let alone the logistics of adoption, the assessment processes, psychological and social impacts on all parties and so on. Effective service can exist but it may do so at the cost of controversy. A theology of engagement is one that may rarely produce clear moral judgements since the outcomes are more likely to be characterised as just and forgiving.¹² As Markham says:

‘Public life is made of dilemmas, where the right and the good are rarely clear. There is a danger that the language of morality will be confined to those who want to sloganize: to avoid that danger it is vital that the Churches illustrate that moral discourse can meet people where they are. Moral discourse needs to be able to weigh conflicting goods; it needs to concede the “ambiguity of human situations”.’¹³

I shall argue that ‘loving service’ in adoption work, by Christian people, inevitably asks them to participate in work that may be theologically messy and ambiguous. The hoped-for outcome in adoption work is that a child is permanently and securely placed in a new home. It is possible to take the emphases of a Hauerwas-ian view of Church work to this task, knowing that they may be compromised because of a primary need to engage with complex situations.

This thesis shows that working with the common goal secures a future for both Christians in adoption work and for children who need adopting. It shows that Christians need not fear being Christian in a place that can value different constructions of the family. As Jesus braved criticism from the religious community for his radical engagements with people of disrepute and questionable morals, and yet maintained his spiritual integrity by being obedient to God, compassionate and self-giving, so Christians can work in arenas that offend the sensitivities of some religious people yet also be obedient to God.

The roles of several theological approaches within this thesis have been described. The addition of original, empirical research can augment and clarify the arguments.

1.3 Practical Research Methods

Original empirical research can generate a good platform of data upon which to base answers to the thesis question. It moves the discussion away from literature as a primary data source, by addressing questions to practitioners and the wider experience of those

¹² Ray Cleary, ‘The Church and Civil Society: Mission Imperatives’, in Sullivan and Leppert (eds.), *op. cit.*, 115.

¹³ Markham, *op. cit.*, 189.

currently involved with adoption work.

The thesis used quantitative and qualitative material as a basis for its conclusions. Data was gathered to provide information about adoption and its interaction with Christian people. Three surveys were distributed, analysed using SPSS for quantitative information and the qualitative responses recorded. Secondly, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted. The detail of this work is introduced below. In addition, data was also collected from a wide range of internet websites. Fourthly, data was gathered from literature distributed by adoption agencies.

1.3.1 Surveys and Interviews

Three surveys were distributed during Autumn 2005 to Spring 2006, to Christian adoption agencies, adoptive and foster parents and adoption social workers. It was not possible to reach Christian people who had not been approved for adoption. It was judged to be ethically wrong to approach adopted children. Whilst it was hoped that the survey was open to responses from non-Christian people, it was openly exploring the interface of Christianity and adoption and this may have led to a number of non-responses (see below). The source of information for names and addresses of adoption agencies was the database of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which was accessed via the internet. This enabled a list to be compiled of voluntary adoption agencies which have a Christian background.

The survey for Christian adoption agencies is reproduced in **Appendix 1**. As for all three surveys, appropriate ethical considerations and permissions were made prior to circulating the document. Thirty-eight questionnaires were sent out and twenty-three returned, representing a response rate of 60.5%. Over 80% of these agencies have been in existence for more than fifty years. The agencies were located across Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The decision was taken to include Scottish agencies and one in Northern Ireland, in the knowledge that the adoption legal systems were different from that of England and Wales at the time. This was because the sample was small and because the survey enabled them to be self-excluding when questions about the Adoption and Children Act 2002 were asked. The respondents were all directors or senior managers responsible for adoption work. Subsequently, three directors agreed to be interviewed in a recorded telephone conversation. All three gave permission to be quoted and named in this thesis.

A survey was distributed to Christian adoptive and foster parents and is reproduced in **Appendix 2**. Foster parents were included because their assessment for suitability is

identical to that of prospective adoptive parents and their perspectives on alternative forms of family life make a valuable contribution to the debate about adoption. The paperwork was distributed using networks available to this researcher: through churches in the North East of England, an appeal in the *Methodist Recorder* newspaper, contacts with After Adoption, a post-adoption support charity, and contacts made through the leading of seminars about adoption and Christianity. The 58 respondents (out of a 107 surveys distributed, a 54.2% response rate) record information about 35 separate assessing adoption agencies, including three overseas bodies. Ten agencies had a Christian background. Twenty parents had been assessed by two or more agencies at various times. This data was drawn from experiences of adoption around the United Kingdom, revealing that adoption activity is mobile and repeated in new circumstances.¹⁴ Ten parents were subsequently contacted by telephone, using semi-structured interview techniques, to expand upon some of the information in the survey. These conversations were recorded.

The third survey was sent to adoption social workers and is reproduced in **Appendix 3**. The full BAAF database was used to enable contact with all adoption agencies in England and Wales, to ask for permission to send out surveys and to gather numbers required. The majority of agencies were non-responsive or replied saying that since many similar requests were received, this study could not be given any time. One agency that initially offered to help, returned their survey papers uncompleted and made the following statement:

‘We are a LA agency that needs to/wants to be more inclusive of all faiths. We do not find it easy to only spend ten minutes answering this [questionnaire] as we feel obliged to challenge some of your assertions/statements. We feel you have a specific agenda judging by the wording of your questions.’

The particular ‘assertions/statements’ this adoption team leader wished to challenge included the sentence, ‘From the outset, work in the field of adoption involved Christian people who have brought parents and children together.’ This is a reasonable interpretation of historical evidence and leaves one feeling that the openly admitted emphasis on Christian faith and spirituality was the primary reason for the questionnaires being returned. Whilst similar views may have led to the non-return of other questionnaires, it remained possible for one individual to declare that their ‘denomination’ was ‘humanist and nature worshipper’ and to complete the questions on faith and spirituality from this perspective.

In total, 205 surveys were sent to adoption social workers and only 34 responses were returned, a response rate of 16.6%. Whilst disappointingly low, this is comparable with a much larger survey, on religion and spirituality, conducted in 2000 when 5500 surveys were distributed to a randomly selected sample of social workers who subscribed to the journal

¹⁴ The word ‘mobile’ is used to indicate both that adopters move from one region to another but that, for example, parents who were approved by Shropshire County Council adopted a daughter from HackneyKIDS, the Borough of Hackney’s adoption service and were thus in contact with two agencies in different parts of England.

Professional Social Work published by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW).¹⁵ In the latter survey only 789 members responded, a response rate of 14.3%. Following the analysis of the data for this thesis, ten social workers were contacted to participate in semi-structured telephone interviews and the conversations were recorded with permission.

The software used for analysing the data was SPSS. Results were presented using Microsoft Excel. To quantify qualitative data, similar statements were coded by number and counted. Qualitative information from either the survey or the telephone conversations was then used to expand upon or clarify the data. The surveys and conversations provide an original and contemporary source of information for the thesis.

1.3.2 Personal Engagement

Finally, an aspect of the research that needs explaining is that which is embedded within the writing and the quotations: personal involvement. In his book *The Moral Imagination*, John Paul Lederach comments about reflexivity: ‘we arrive at a paradoxical destination: We believe in the knowledge we generate but not in the inherently messy and personal process by which we acquired it.’¹⁶ This section comments upon the value of the narratives, ‘inherently messy and personal’ stories, offered by Christian people. There is also a statement about my own engagement with adoption.

People who are either providers of a service, or those on the receiving end, are people with whom a valuable partnership can be built. Their stories, experiences and aspirations can be an essential part of truth telling. The life and ministry of Jesus provides a model for this inclusive approach to effecting change. For those who respond to the Christian challenge there is a mix of vocation, set in a circle of experience. These people have a story to tell; a ‘voice’ that Lederach defines as: ‘voice constitutes a social geography mapped and measured by the distance needed to create a sense of engagement. More literally, voice is about meaningful conversation and power.’¹⁷ This thesis offers the voices of many Christian people to make a meaningful and powerful contribution to Christian distinctiveness within adoption.

Finally, this thesis is also written because of a personal engagement with both Christianity and adoption. It is written from the experience and insight gained as a Christian

¹⁵ Leola Dyrud Furman, Perry W. Benson, Cordelia Grimwood, Edward Canda, ‘Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Education and Direct Practice at the Millenium: A Survey of UK Social Workers’, *British Journal of Social Work* no.34, (2004), 767-792.

¹⁶ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), x.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

woman who brought up two sons who were adopted as babies; who has witnessed them wrestle with their identity in unique ways; who entered the Methodist ministry; who has divorced, remarried and gained a step-son. I write as someone who has no biological relationship with any of the four people in my immediate family. I reflect that my lived experience finds that the importance of ‘blood-ties’ can be over stated. I also write as someone who finds that God has always been alongside me in my inherently messy journey, being ever present in creating the family of which I am now a part. I find it extraordinary that whilst many other faiths and spiritualities share the values of love, giving, sharing, reciprocity and mutuality, as a married woman with children I can identify fully with the single life of a Jewish man born 2000 years ago. I am a committed Christian. Whilst this thesis has been researched with serious academic detachment, my innate passion for its content and specifically Christian theological perspective must be admitted and owned.

All adoption stories have the right to remain personal, confidential narratives but the anonymous sharing of the journey whether it is taken by an agency, a social worker or a parent can bring about greater understanding about the worth of the family; the power of a few people to produce social change. I have found that Christian people are well equipped to make a distinctive contribution to adoption work and it is their story that is addressed in this thesis.

The following chapter begins to set the scene with an examination of the history of adoption, illustrating how adoptive parenting has always existed in deed if not in name. There is irony in the fact that the Church played a strong part in determining which children were in this category, in the way in which it defined the nature of the family. Theologically, the chapter looks at the contemporary adoption picture and examines the work of God’s love and grace in securing the best outcomes for all those involved in the adoption experience: birth parents, children and adoptive parents. Ultimately the Christian faith is completely bound up in the sense that God’s people are also his adopted children.

2 The Church and Adoption: History and Theology

Offspring do not belong to their parents; rather, children and the parents they are with find their mutual belonging in their familial association. In this restricted sense, there is an adoptive element in every parent-child relationship, because the principal purpose of a family is to provide a place of mutual and timely belonging rather than perpetuate a lineage or satisfy parental longings.¹⁸

¹⁸ Brent Waters, *The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 199.

The Church has always been committed to providing for children, though its approaches have been contradictory. On the one hand, the Church has always been a strong advocate of the principle that children were best conceived within the stability of a committed married relationship. At times, sexual intercourse has been permitted for procreative purposes alone and only within marriage. On the other hand, the fact that children were born outside of marriage, and were sometimes unwanted within it, required a secondary response. In these latter cases the Church itself became the ‘place of mutual and timely belonging’, effectively becoming the parent of illegitimate or destitute children. This care has never been called ‘adoption’, primarily because, contrary to the above quotation from Brent Waters, children were supposed to ‘belong’ to parents and stay with them.

This chapter is about the history and theology of the Church’s approach to adoption. **Section 2.1** covers the history of adoption from the early Church up to the mid-nineteenth century. There were three phases of time revealing how the Church and society worked with children who were outside of conventional family structures: the early Church period up to the end of the sixth century; the medieval and Reformation periods with its quasi-adoptive families; and finally, the period from the late nineteenth century when the Churches were stimulated by individual Christian people to form adoption agencies. **Section 2.2** looks at the creative work of adoption, in generating *new* families, in order to develop a theology of adoption that is suited to the twenty-first century. Establishing the history and theology of adoption will act as a foundation for the sociological discussion about twentieth century adoption work laid out in **chapter 3**.

2.1 The History of Adoption and the Church

2.1.1 Adoption and the Early Church

*The first natural bond of human society is man and wife... Then follows the connection of fellowship in children, which is the one alone worthy fruit, not of the union of male and female, but of the sexual intercourse.*¹⁹

A reading of family history up to the end of the sixth century indicates that populations influenced by the Roman Empire, were entirely familiar with adoption as a legal occurrence. Children and adults affected by adoption, in its various forms, were also affected by abandonment as infants or removal from the birth family or both. Positively, the Church spoke out against the abuse of children. Adoption itself was a Graeco-Roman concept, not endorsed by the Church, and ultimately it left the legislative books.

¹⁹ St. Augustine, ‘Of the Good of Marriage’, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1309.htm> (accessed 10 October, 2007).

Writing in the fourth century, Augustine accepted that children were a gift conceived within marriage; indeed ‘the purpose of the conjugal act is procreation.’²⁰ Similarly, John Chrysostom stated that marriage was a ‘fellowship for life’ and the foundation for well-raised children under the authority of the *paterfamilias*.²¹ Yet both of these statements follow a period of Christian thinking that preached that ultimate holiness was found in celibacy.²² Created as sexual beings, most of the population did not heed the call for abstinence and children were inevitable. During these early centuries, most Christians chose marriage and effectively ignored calls to celibacy. Examining the attitudes of the Fathers, Carol Harrison maintains that, ‘we are left in no doubt as to which is the superior way, the way of the elite, but the way for lesser mortals, that of the silent majority, married and belonging to a family, is acknowledged and accepted.’²³

In Roman society, a child remained unaccredited as a person until symbolically lifted from the floor by the *paterfamilias*.²⁴ If the *paterfamilias* rejected a child born within the household, the child would be exposed. Exposure involved removing the baby to a public place, awaiting the possibility that they would either be picked up by a passer-by or else left to die.²⁵ These places were known as *lactaria*, nursing columns. Babies were often left with a token for identification that might prove necessary at a later date.²⁶ Exposure was likely to happen if the baby was physically or mentally defective, though John Boswell questions this.²⁷ Legitimacy and family size may have also influenced the decision.²⁸

In Roman society, producing children facilitated the transmission of wealth and property from one generation to the next.²⁹ There was the important, added expectation of children caring for adults in old age; the child had a responsibility to perform various ritual duties of burial and remembrance after death. These factors combined to form a distinct

²⁰ F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 128.

²¹ John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and the Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 20-21.

²² Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 199.

²³ Carol Harrison, ‘The Silent Majority’, in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 99; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 206.

²⁴ Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 24.

²⁵ Brown, op. cit., 28.

²⁶ John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London: Penguin, 1988), 100, 106.

²⁷ Boswell, op. cit., 110-11.

²⁸ Nathan, op. cit., 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

pressure against remaining childless.³⁰ Childlessness within marriage was often countered by the presence of concubines within the household in order to secure an heir. Within the household, a distinction existed between freeborn and slave-born people and also between legitimate and illegitimate offspring.³¹ There was a deep-seated pressure to have children and, though it was fraudulent, legal and literary documents indicate that picking up abandoned infants was a means to securing an heir, thus creating a *familia* by adoption in all but name.³² The *familia* was not a term defining blood relatives but was rather a legal construct that included adopted children. Adoption came to be a recognised way of securing a legitimate heir.

Adoption in Graeco-Roman times has a strong resemblance to the understanding of adoption in modern times, since it legally transferred the adoptee into the new *familia*. Two forms of adoption existed: *adrogatio* and *adoptio*. *Adrogatio* described the transference of someone from a known *paterfamilias* to another. Since the informed, voluntary consent of the adoptee was required, adrogation of minors was not permitted.³³ By the third century the procedure was available by application to the emperor and a specific *comitia*.³⁴ The process of *adrogatio* was more difficult to arrange than *adoptio*. *Adoptio* was the legal adoption of someone who had no *paterfamilias*. This person gained both a *familia*, where they previously had none, and the right to inherit as an heir.

In the Mediterranean countries most influenced by Roman thinking, a form of fostering was common. Exposed children who were then fostered, were known as *alumni*. *Alumni* were not exclusively foundlings. The term was used to describe both children of freed slaves living in the household and also illegitimate children.³⁵ *Alumni* were never officially adopted children but the relationships recorded were found in all status groups and had their own emotional and legal implications.³⁶ Some young children, *delicia*, were brought into the *familia* as a ‘pet’, and could be subject to abuse. Others were more fortunate and these *delicia* could be found within a ‘conjugal-family-like pattern’ in a quasi-adoption like manner.³⁷ Curiously, Christian epigraphy mentions affection for children widely, but not

³⁰ Ibid., 26.

³¹ Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

³² Boswell, op. cit., 75.

³³ Jane Gardner, ‘Status, Sentiment and Strategy in Roman Adoption’, in Mireille Corbier (ed.), *Adoption et Fosterage* (Paris: de Boccard, 1999), 69, 75.

³⁴ Gardner, ‘Status, Sentiment and Strategy in Roman Adoption’, in Corbier (ed.), op. cit., 64, 70.

³⁵ Boswell, op. cit., 117; Hanne Sigismund Nielsen, ‘Quasi-Kin, Quasi-Adoption and the Roman Family’, in Corbier (ed.), op. cit., 250; Nathan, op. cit., 29.

³⁶ Nielsen, ‘Quasi-Kin, Quasi-Adoption and the Roman Family’, in Corbier (ed.), op. cit., 250.

³⁷ Christian Laes, ‘Desperately Different? *Delicia* Children in the Roman Household’, in Carolyn Osiek and

affection for *delicia* since the nature of this relationship was potentially outside of Christian standards.

For the majority of families, those with birth children, the possibility of being unable to support large families was very real. Christians spoke out against abandonment of children.³⁸ In the second century, Justin Martyr addressed his apologies to the Roman emperors including statements of Christian virtue such as the fact that Christians did not expose their children. Likewise Tertullian charged, ‘You [pagans] expose your children, in the first place, to be rescued by the kindness of passing strangers, or abandon them to be adopted by better parents.’³⁹ Other Christians who spoke out included Athenagoras and Clement of Alexandria.

One solution to the considerable economic difficulties a large family faced was to give children to the Church. This enabled Christian families to avoid the sin of exposing children in a spiritually satisfactory way. If a daughter was given to the Church, additional money was saved, since no dowry would now be needed.⁴⁰ Some parents positively encouraged their sons to take up the ascetic life with the desert Fathers, although Peter Brown finds their motivation dubious, commenting that ‘the rich... tended to give up their least healthy and talented offspring to the desert, saving the better ones for marriage.’⁴¹ Arguments against abandonment and acceptable forms of giving children into the care of others did little to promote adoption *per se* but acted as a strong counter argument to prevailing patterns of disposing of unwanted children by exposing them.

The Church gradually expanded the ways in which it cared for abandoned children.⁴² The Church had a part to play in securing the freedom of children ‘who had been stolen (or bought) by slave-traders or kidnapped by barbarians.’⁴³ Secondly, members of the public left children at the doors of church buildings assuming that the Church would care for these unwanted infants.⁴⁴ Early canon law required that exposed children should be taken to a church, and belonged to the finder if they had not been reclaimed in ten days.⁴⁵ Added to these ways of receiving and caring for children was the ongoing practice of gifting a child to a monastery. This was known as oblation. John Boswell asserts that this was arguably

David L. Balch (eds.), *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 312-313.

³⁸ Rowan A. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 13.

³⁹ Boswell, *op. cit.*, 159.

⁴⁰ Brown, *op. cit.*, 261.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁴² Boswell, *op. cit.*, 172.

⁴³ Nathan, *op. cit.*, 137.

⁴⁴ Boswell, *op. cit.*, 174.

⁴⁵ Nathan, *op. cit.*, 136; Boswell, *op. cit.*, 172.

another form of child abandonment.⁴⁶ Receiving the gift of children could be seen as ecclesial generosity but there is evidence that monasteries were selective in who they would admit, excluding the poor who could make no accompanying donation.⁴⁷

There is very little material about adoption dating from the fifth century onwards. The few facts that can be found show the Church in a poor light. In one instance, adoption is condemned because it transferred inheritance money away from the Church rather than into the hands of new kinsmen.⁴⁸ In an earlier instance, the Church is said to have opposed adoption because of its connections with the worship of ancestors. Legal heirs were a prerequisite to such a form of worship.⁴⁹ Despite becoming an increasingly powerful influence upon some European populations, the Church did not build adoption into its canons. Rather than being noted for its work with adoption in these early centuries, the Church acted to help unwanted children directly. The Church became the primary carer, the *de facto* parent.

What is clear is that the fragmentation of the Roman empire with its recognisable adoption laws, was a background factor in adoption disappearing from the legislative codes of Western Europe for nearly 1500 years.⁵⁰ It might not have been called adoption, but this next period of history continues to find the general population caring for children without families while the Church continued to speak out against abandonment.

2.1.2 Quasi-adoption in Medieval and Reformation Periods

Focussing exclusively upon adoption, the early centuries recognised adopted people and included them in an extended household. In medieval and Reformation periods, however, the legal status of adoption was absent and the household was replaced by a smaller unit. The *familia* developed into a unit that consisted of a conjugal couple and their birth children⁵¹, distancing itself from being a household with other residents.⁵² An exception to this family form was when a ward, an apprentice or an additional person was included, as a semi-permanent member of the group, usually on an informal basis. This was an extension to the family unit, in an adoption-like manner, yet with no legal standing.

⁴⁶ Boswell, op. cit., 228; 255.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁸ Goody, op. cit., 101.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40-1, 72-3.

⁵¹ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 67; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 55.

⁵² Hanawalt, op. cit., 89; Martha Howell, 'The Properties of Marriage in Late Medieval Europe', in Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller and Sarah Rees Jones (eds.), *Love, Marriage and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 25.

The Church expanded both its ecclesiology and its influence upon family life.⁵³ In restricting and forbidding certain unions, marriage laws affected the whole concept of being a family. This had a negative impact upon the life of both illegitimate children and infertile couples.⁵⁴ Illegitimate children were to be raised by one or both parents according to both canon and civil law, and the fortunate were.⁵⁵ As usual, the poor suffered more. Among the nobility, households ‘swarmed with bastards’ and the stigma of illegitimacy was felt less, though it was still a bar to inheritance and entering ecclesiastical orders.⁵⁶

The problem of unwanted babies and infanticide persisted. Medieval people categorised killing infants as murder.⁵⁷ Folk tradition gave support to the idea of terrible consequences that would happen to a person committing infanticide. It was not an acceptable way to limit the size of a family.⁵⁸ John Boswell disputes this and finds a general tolerance of infanticide, especially amongst pagans. He finds graphic evidence of abandonment in literary and biographical sources and says that children continued to be ‘left in fields, in baskets, hung on crosses, or “thrown at churches”’.⁵⁹ For his part Lloyd deMause claims that ‘the killing of legitimate children was only slowly reduced during the Middle Ages, and that illegitimate children continued regularly to be killed right up into the nineteenth century.’⁶⁰

The care of fatherless children was a significant theme among medieval families, especially where the child was heir to property and wardship fell, not to the mother, but to the feudal overlord.⁶¹ Orphans were cared for by the community and the manorial court. Becoming a guardian, or ward, of children with an inheritance had obvious financial benefits, though outcomes were not always positive.⁶² There is evidence that these individuals were treated as commodities and not as family members.⁶³

The term ‘foster’ was widespread in medieval times, describing the raising of children by parents and others.⁶⁴ Fostering was a term used for a mix of relationships: apprenticeship, oblation or godparenting. It could also be used in a contemporary way,

⁵³ Joseph H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4.

⁵⁴ Goody, op. cit., 212.

⁵⁵ Boswell, op. cit., 345.

⁵⁶ Mary Martin McLaughlin, ‘Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries’, in Lloyd deMause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 121.

⁵⁷ Orme, op. cit., 95.

⁵⁸ Peter Fleming, *Family and Household in Medieval England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 69.

⁵⁹ Boswell, op. cit., 213-4.

⁶⁰ Lloyd deMause, ‘The Evolution of Childhood’, in deMause, op. cit., 25.

⁶¹ Fleming, op. cit., 102.

⁶² Hanawalt, op. cit., 250-1.

⁶³ Fleming, op. cit., 106-8.

⁶⁴ Orme, op. cit., 55-6.

supplementing care by birth parents.⁶⁵ Within urban communities, wealthy families offered fostering and apprenticeships, though there is little evidence of this in rural areas.⁶⁶ The apprenticeship system offered a form of security and protection to orphans. There was an acceptance that abandoned and poor children could use such training to find a place in society.⁶⁷ Otherwise most orphans would enter domestic service, where they might have been fortunate enough to be referred to as kin of their employers.⁶⁸

In Western Europe, before Christianity had much influence, Germanic peoples had several symbolic ways to show that someone had been adopted. These included giving weapons and cutting hair, or physical gestures such as the adopter wrapping the adoptee in a cloak, or setting the adoptee on his knee.⁶⁹ In medieval England, abandoned children were accommodated instinctively and informally, so there were no formal adoption arrangements.⁷⁰ Childless couples could have been parents to such children.⁷¹ The English jurist Bracton stated that ‘any child reared and acknowledged by both parents must be considered a legitimate heir, no matter how uncertain his or her origins.’⁷²

In the parts of Europe that were nominally Christian, children were baptised quickly to avoid lasting condemnation and eternal punishment.⁷³ Initially, sponsors or godparents could be birth parents, though this was obviously not for orphans and foundlings.⁷⁴ Writing in the early eighth century, Anglo-Saxons occasionally used the words *adoptare*, *adoptio*, and *adoptivus* to describe the relationship between sponsors and children after baptism.⁷⁵

In the Middle Ages, godparents were strongly connected to their ‘sponsored’ godchildren. No longer in the legal statute books, the word adoption became exclusively liturgical and theological. Godparenthood became associated with *adoptio* in church and not in the civil courts.⁷⁶ Dating back to the ninth century, liturgies relating specifically to adoption have been found in Byzantium using language reminiscent of baptismal sponsorship. Prayers referred to the adopted child as the ‘spiritual child’ being ‘adopted in

⁶⁵ Boswell, op. cit., 356.

⁶⁶ Hanawalt, op. cit., 253.

⁶⁷ Daniele Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries* (Notre-Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame, 1999), 84, 89.

⁶⁸ Jeremy Goldberg, ‘Orphans and Servants: The Socialisation of Young People Living Away from Home in the English Later Middle Ages’, in Corbier (ed.), op.cit., 238.

⁶⁹ Lynch, op.cit., 91.

⁷⁰ Hanawalt, op. cit., 252.

⁷¹ Ibid., 256.

⁷² Boswell, op. cit., 332.

⁷³ Orme, op. cit., 23.

⁷⁴ Lynch, op. cit., 16.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁶ Bernhard Jussen, *Spiritual Kinship as Social Practice: Godparenthood and Adoption in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Press, 2000), 28; Goody, op. cit., 195.

Christ.⁷⁷ Later, in Western Europe, the godchild could be referred to as brother, friend, foster child or adoptive son depending upon the situation.⁷⁸ The families of godparents and the families of godchildren shared a ‘spiritual kinship.’ Clodagh Tait writes that the ritual of baptism ‘signified the incorporation of each individual into a broad spiritual family, symbolised by the provision of a set of godparents who were chosen to underline and extend bonds of friendship and bring families to the attention of influential patrons.’⁷⁹ The nature of the relationship was such that spiritual kinship was regarded as equal to natural kinship, to the extent that sexual relations between two of the parties constituted a form of incest.⁸⁰

The overriding concern of the Church was to baptise all children lest they should go to hell, including foundlings. Church council records exist in York (1195) and Westminster (1200) where abandoned children, ‘with or without salt,’ were to be baptised; the reference to salt indicating that the birth family had left some for use during the baptismal ritual.⁸¹ Legislation against abandonment in the thirteenth century arose out of concerns of baptism and not about abandonment *per se*.

At the Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) upheld many existing canon laws, including the sacramental status of marriage. Celibacy and virginity remained a superior state.⁸² Within Catholicism, many parents perceived that they had fulfilled their spiritual duty once their children had been baptised. Any subsequent spiritual teaching was the responsibility of the Church.⁸³ For Protestants, however, marriage was a matter for civil jurisdiction. The Reformers raised strong Biblical and theological objections to the involvement of the Catholic Church in several areas of marriage and family life.⁸⁴ Marriage was advocated for all people, as a duty and a gift of God.⁸⁵ Within this institution children could be nurtured and Christian morals, values and mores upheld.⁸⁶ If a couple was childless, Calvin urged them to accept this as God’s ‘providential design’, stating that sponsorship or

⁷⁷ Ruth Macrides, ‘Substitute Parents and their Children in Byzantium’, in Corbier (ed.), *op.cit.*, 312.

⁷⁸ Jussen, *op. cit.*, 214-5.

⁷⁹ Clodagh Tait, ‘Spiritual Bonds, Social Bonds: Baptism and Godparenthood in Ireland, 1530-1690’, in *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005), 301-327.

⁸⁰ Tait, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Orme, *op. cit.*, 96.

⁸² Witte, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁸³ Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 12; Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), 57.

⁸⁴ Witte, *op. cit.*, 42; Goody, *op. cit.*, 167.

⁸⁵ Witte, *op. cit.*, 49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

adoption of orphans would provide a means for serving the next generation.⁸⁷ Married pastors were held in high regard, with responsibility for modelling the 'ideal' family. In the early seventeenth century, their prescriptions for success were recorded in conduct books.

The recognition of adoption in the period following the Reformation is very sketchy, though Kristin Gager has done some work about the situation in France.⁸⁸ She finds that adoption was considered to be 'unnatural' and even 'un-Christian'. The concept that the duty of parents could be handed over to strangers was unacceptable.⁸⁹ Prevailing attitudes concerning the humiliation of acknowledged barrenness and the need for couples to accept rather than challenge 'the natural order of things', militated against adoption. Inheritance problems and the issue of complicating the blood-line with unknown elements, concerned the legislative authorities greatly.⁹⁰ Despite these issues, there is still some evidence of notarial contracts, arranging public and private adoptions, where adoptive parents legally committed themselves 'to provide the children with a home, parental care and affection, an education, an apprenticeship, a dowry and an inheritance.'⁹¹

In summary, European medieval and Reformation history provides scant evidence for adoption as it is understood today. There was no legal adoption in this period. Caring for fatherless and orphaned children was, however, widely accepted by the general population. Provision for these children was usually informal but included some contractual arrangements such as wardship or apprenticeship. The Church encouraged the baptism of all children and used the language of adoption within baptism. Godparents had a quasi-adoptive parental role. The ongoing movement away from households towards conjugal families was also beginning to increase the separation between legitimate and illegitimate children. As the general population increased, the capacity of families to accommodate those without caring parents was stretched to its limit.

2.1.3 The Birth of Adoption Agencies

*A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade seemed to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out of doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place were the public-houses...*⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁸ Kristin Gager, 'Adoption Practices in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Paris', in Corbier (ed.), op. cit.

⁸⁹ Cited in ibid., 183.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 184-5.

⁹¹ Ibid., 189.

⁹² Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin, 2002), 63.

The population of Europe almost doubled between 1500 and 1800.⁹³ Huge numbers of people lived in expanding cities and factory towns, as the full impact of the industrial revolution was experienced. The difference between urban and rural was as acute as the difference between wealthy and poor. As ever, the poor suffered most and ‘heaps of children’ were the pitiful evidence. Their existence proved to be a catalyst to action for a few passionate, Christian men who were strongly motivated to place these children into secure and loving environments. This was the pre-cursor to the formation of adoption agencies and the drafting of adoption legislation.

In Victorian times, evangelicals took over from Puritans in using the family as the religious and authoritative institution upon which all others depended.⁹⁴ Domestic piety was a characteristic of middle-class family life.⁹⁵ Family ideals were prominent in imagery and rhetoric in both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. This was reflected in hymnody with appeals to children to be Christ-like: ‘Christian children all must be mild, obedient good as he.’⁹⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the numbers of destitute children demanded practical help and not rhetoric.

Whereas Victorian society had distinctly different opportunities for some people, measured by housing, education, health, employment and other standard indicators, it was united in its regard for children: children were insignificant. Unwanted babies were placed with ‘professional’ foster mothers, a form of adoption with no legal standing, which was known as ‘baby-farming’. Baby farmers often took a one off fee for the future care of the child but with no guarantee of safety and welfare. There was a running issue concerning infanticide. As a result, an unhelpful association was created between sleazy, insecure baby-farming, on the one hand, and adoption, on the other. Abuses of children ‘cared’ for by those other than their birth parents produced a considerable swell of opinion hostile to ‘boarding out’ and other types of childcare.⁹⁷

Orphaned or deserted children came under the control of the Poor Law system which dated back to the sixteenth century.⁹⁸ Where provision could not be made by

⁹³ Pier Paolo Viazzo, ‘Mortality, Fertility, and Family’, in David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (eds.), *Family Life in Early Modern Times: 1500-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2001), 157.

⁹⁴ Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households and Familiar Ideologies* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1985), 49.

⁹⁵ Mary Jo Maynes, ‘Class Cultures and Images of Proper Family Life’, in Kertzer and Barbagli (eds.), *op.cit.*, 210.

⁹⁶ Cecil Francis Alexander, ‘Once in Royal David’s City’, in *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1983).

⁹⁷ John Stroud, *13 Penny Stamps: The Story of the Church of England Children’s Society from Its Beginnings as ‘Waifs and Strays’* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 66.

⁹⁸ Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare – England 1872-1989* (London: Routledge, 1994), 74.

'boarding out' the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 enabled Guardians to operate their own apprenticeship and work schemes. They also ran large, unwieldy schools accommodating as many as 1,000 children, albeit that 'no free-wheeling street arab chose to go there.'⁹⁹

Some children experienced a form of adoption. As early as 1837-8, Dickens had written that 'Mr Brownlow adopted Oliver as his own son.'¹⁰⁰ Similarly wealthy individuals provided for some fortunate children in an arrangement legitimated by wardship and guardianship proceedings.¹⁰¹ Overall, the need for *bona fide* work with orphans could not have been more evident and, as in the past when Church institutions cared for unwanted children, so again Churches, inspired and encouraged by evangelical pioneers, came to the rescue.

The first adoption agencies were Christian, the earliest of them being the National Children's Home (NCH). NCH began its life on 9 July 1869 when, as 'The Children's Home', two boys were taken into rented accommodation near Waterloo Station. The founder was a Methodist Minister, Thomas Bowman Stephenson who collaborated with two Sunday School teachers, Alfred Mager and Frances Horner, in order to 'rescue children who, through the death or vice or extreme poverty of their parents, are in danger of falling into criminal ways.'¹⁰² Those children who came into the home were on the receiving end of an aim 'to shelter, feed, clothe, educate, train to industrious habits and, by God's blessing, [be] led to Christ'.¹⁰³

For two years the Home was for boys only, until it moved to larger premises in Bethnal Green when it admitted girls. Employing a pioneering approach to childcare, Stephenson's commitment was to a 'family' system. Children were divided into small groups supervised and cared for by a married couple ('house parents'). With the exception of schooling and worship, daily life revolved around this unit, in a defined living area, whether in a large residence or small house. Christian worship was a central part of each day. At the Methodist Conference of 1871, The Children's Home was accepted as the responsibility of the wider gathering of Methodist Churches in Great Britain. The Children's Home became 'The Children's Home and Orphanage' in 1872 before becoming 'National Children's Home' in 1908.

⁹⁹ Stroud, op. cit., 6.

¹⁰⁰ Dickens, op. cit., 451.

¹⁰¹ Jenny Keating, *Struggle for Identity: Issues Underlying the Enactment of the 1926 Adoption of Children Act*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/HUMCENTR/usjch/jkeating3.html> (accessed 8 October, 2002).

¹⁰² Roger J. Owen (ed.), *National Children's Home* (Exeter: Religious and Moral Education Press, Charities Series, 1985), 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7.

The inspiration of Thomas Stephenson was fundamental to the organisation during its first 30 years and he was Principal until he retired in 1900. He was passionate about professional care for children. Stephenson toured the country fund-raising and trained the childcare workers himself. He also established homes for children with special needs, establishing a home for 'delicate children' in 1887 and introducing the idea of day care for physically handicapped children in 1898. Whereas Stephenson focussed on how to work with the children and their needs, Barnardo's focus was to get the children off the streets.

In 1862, Dublin-born Thomas John Barnardo converted to an 'evangelical faith' and joined his mother and brothers as a member of the Plymouth Brethren. Hearing a talk by Hudson Taylor he initially thought to become a medical missionary in China. In 1866, he started attending a medical school in London. In his spare time, Barnardo set up and taught in a 'ragged school' offering a basic education to poor children. One evening a boy walked Barnardo through the streets and he saw the squalor at firsthand. This made such a profound impact upon Barnardo that he diverted his missionary zeal to work with destitute children.

He established the first home in 1870 in Stepney Causeway. The death of one 11 year old from malnutrition and exposure, two days after being turned away, was a turning point for Barnardo. The words 'No destitute child ever refused admission' were painted over the door of the home. According to one in-house history this was Barnardo's 'pledge born in penitence.'¹⁰⁴

Thomas Barnardo was an entrepreneur; a businessman and a good communicator. He launched himself into this work with great passion, using his skills as a writer or speaker and his network of evangelical friends (Lord Shaftesbury and Robert Barclay) to help whenever financial difficulties arose. Later he was one of the first to use a form of organised mass charity giving, founding the Young Helpers' League in 1891.¹⁰⁵

From 1874 Barnardo became famous for his photographs of 'before and after' children, demonstrating the transformation made possible by his charity ('Once a little vagrant... now a little workman').¹⁰⁶ In fact Barnardo, and his organisation was not alone in this attitude, was utterly convinced that children were to be rescued from both poor conditions and from poor parents. Barnardo is quoted as saying that if slum children 'can be removed from their surroundings early enough, and be kept sufficiently long under training,

¹⁰⁴ Barnardo's, *Dr Barnardo's: 1866-1966* (London: Barnardo's, 1966), 4.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/barnardo.htm> (accessed 15 October, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/barnardo.htm> (accessed 15 October, 2003).

heredity counts for little, environment counts for everything.’¹⁰⁷

Building upon this thought there is plenty of evidence for Barnardo’s efforts to ‘board out’ children rather than keep them in residential homes. He demanded high standards from foster parents: ‘They should be cottagers and working-class people, living in homes that “promised satisfactory sanitary conditions, pure moral surroundings and a loving Christian influence”. Foster parents must have enough accommodation and be well intentioned.’¹⁰⁸ At the time of his death in 1905 there were nearly 8,000 ‘Barnardo’s children’ in 96 residential children’s homes, including 1,300 disabled.¹⁰⁹

Contemporary with Stephenson and Barnardo, but different in character was Edward de Montjoie Rudolf. In common with Barnardo, Rudolf gave his free time to teaching at a Young Men’s Class Room (1869) and later became a Sunday School Superintendent (1872). He joined the Guild of St. Alban in 1874, a society established for devout laymen who wished to serve the Church in deprived urban situations.

In 1880, two boys who attended his Sunday School stopped coming after their father died and the thought that they had entered an ‘undenominational home’ was annoying to Rudolf who ‘like many of his contemporaries... had mixed feelings about Barnardo’ and feared they would be lost to the Church of England.¹¹⁰

Rudolf used his network of friends, lay and ordained, to canvass opinion and to sound out his ideas for helping the waifs in London. Some people counselled that there was no need for additional provision under the auspices of the Church, since many homes already existed by 1880-1. Despite this, Rudolf persisted with the idea of an organisation belonging to the Church of England and astutely recognised that the patronage of the Archbishop of Canterbury would be a positive influence. Thus, Rudolf founded the Waifs and Strays Society, that later became The Children’s Society. It grew at a phenomenal rate: receipts of £740 in 1881-2 rose to £80,792 twenty years later, while the number of children in their care grew from 34 to 3,071 in the same period.¹¹¹

In 1859, The Society of St Vincent de Paul founded ‘St Vincent’s Home for Boys’ to divert ‘boys from criminal offences’ towards useful employment. An orphanage for girls, St Mary’s, was opened in the same year. The Catholic Children’s Society (Westminster) traces its origins back to these foundations. One of its notable workers was Father Douglas who

¹⁰⁷ Hendrick, op. cit., 79.

¹⁰⁸ June Rose, *For the Sake of the Children – Inside Dr. Barnardo’s: 120 Years of Caring for Children* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), 113.

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/barnardo.htm> (accessed 15 October, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Stroud, op. cit., 29.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

took on the work from 1874. Later Cardinal Manning expanded the work, increasing the number of homes for ‘orphans, outcasts, abandoned waifs and strays, rescued from Protestant institutions or from gutters of the street.’¹¹²

This quotation reveals some of the ongoing tensions between the voluntary childcare organisations. As previously noted, Barnardo took in children of every creed. In doing so he brought them into a strictly Protestant form of nurture and this concerned Roman Catholic authorities. By the 1890s, Catholic organisations realised they needed to co-ordinate their work across the country and ‘priests began to prompt parents to try to wrest Catholic children from Barnardo’s clutches and frequently the cases came to court.’¹¹³ Cardinal Vaughan founded the Crusade of Rescue in 1899 to ensure adequate provision for all destitute Catholic children. By 1901, the Crusade of Rescue cared for 367 children.

Aside from the major denominations, the Salvation Army’s interest in adoption stems from their work with street children dating back to the 1880s.¹¹⁴ Their approach was to find children homes and draw up a document of conveyance for long term fostering. Initially their work was with older children. The Army always kept records of such contracts in ‘adoption books’, Book 1 beginning in 1882 and Adoption Book 2 in 1889. They exercised their duty of care by giving priority for adoption to Salvationists whilst other evangelical Christians were second choice.

It was thus Christian pioneers who established adoption work. The work within the first fifty years, up to about 1925, formed the backdrop for a new childcare system, one soon to be backed up by legislation and supported by government. Churches were now actively supporting adoption work. Their work was no longer concerned with abandonment but also with the provision of a new family life. In some cases, the childcare work they modelled became a standard that was to be copied elsewhere.

Looking back over 2000 years of adoption, family and Church history, the Church has been bound up in the support of young human life, albeit in the absence of a well-constructed theology of the family. Numerous volumes published over the past twenty years have corrected this omission. **Section 2.2** is a contribution to these arguments with a specific focus upon a theology of adoption.

¹¹² N. Waugh (ed.), *These, My Little Ones* (London: Sand & Co., 1911) <http://www.cathchild.org.uk/ccswhist1.html> (accessed on 14 October, 2003).

¹¹³ Rose, op. cit., 97.

¹¹⁴ <http://www1.salvationarmy.org/heritage.nsf/0/24ac84939cd3365a80256b060038c951?OpenDocument> (accessed 29 October, 2003).

2.2 A Theology of Adoption

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1.12-13)

Adoption affects God's children: the parents who cannot care for their child, the child who is abandoned or taken into care, and the person who yearns for parenthood. These people can be found in scripture, in history and in everyday life. Everyone has the experience of being a child, but not every child has the experience of growing up with their birth parents. This can create deep emotional problems. Adoption results in the translation of one form of care and belonging, into a new familial context. It can be equated to a conversion experience: physically and intellectually the same person but a new emotional and spiritual location. The apostle Paul's classical understanding of adoption and conversion equipped him to state that God offers all people the chance to accept themselves as God's adopted children (see **section 2.2.3**).

Through adoption, a new family is created. Since all matters of creation can be regarded as a work of God, adoption is readily a matter of theology. It has a place in human understanding that is informed by past, present, and also future realities since it relativises the importance of 'family' being biologically generated and stresses the overriding importance of love. The potential for bonds of love to have an equal priority within a family, equal in status to bonds of biology, give adoption an eschatological dimension. Adopted people are recreated and revitalised within an adoptive context: made new, remade. Additionally, specific and bespoke tasks of parenting and being children are necessary within the adoptive family. All these aspects of adoptive life provide a way of building a systematic theology of adoption. Using canonical narrative theology for foundational material, the section has four headings: (1) a new creation; (2) a new time and a new love; (3) a new person; and, (4) a new task.

2.2.1 A New Creation

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. (Ephesians 3.14).

Since every family is named after the Father, there is no family so remote from God that He cannot love them as a parent. This statement cries out for a definition of 'family'. In recent years, the Church has wrestled with this issue, desiring to preserve the intact, traditional family without denigrating other forms. Key contributors to debates about the theology of the family are Don Browning, Adrian Thatcher and Brent Waters and some of

their thinking informs this theology of adoption.¹¹⁵ This section focuses upon how a new family is created through adoption. It develops its thinking on the basis that God's people are encouraged to welcome the stranger, to consider themselves adopted and to draw children into their midst.

Biblically, the case for extending love and hospitality to others is evident from the beginning of the life of the people of Israel. The dominant category of social organisation was kinship¹¹⁶ but the law given to Moses by God preserved the whole people of Israel including the vulnerable who had lost their family support systems. Deuteronomy argues that the whole society should protect the well-being, safety and life of its members in a way that reflected God's interest (Deut. 15.7-9, 11b).

A particular facet of Israelite culture was the practice of extended hospitality. Genesis 18 tells the story of Abraham entertaining divine guests. His generosity was rewarded, as was Gideon's (Jdg. 6.19f.). Protection was offered to guests, even if it jeopardised the family. Lot defended his guests against the activities of the Sodomites (Gen. 19.1-11) and similarly in the story about the rape of the concubine by the men of Gibeah (Jdg. 19). The welcoming of strangers was a feature of life after the Exodus, and the experience of the nation of Israel whilst in Egypt is frequently upheld as a reminder:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You also shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10.17-19 cp. Lev. 19.33-34; Ex. 23.9).

As a Jew, Jesus would be expected to have responsibility to his family by virtue of kinship. Jesus' questioning about the demands of biological loyalty are shocking and subversive: 'Who are my mother and my brothers?... Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' (Mk. 3.33-35). In actuality, Jesus is being highly obedient and respectful in the family context he comprehends but disrespectful to the human family who have no understanding of his divinity.¹¹⁷

Jesus has full understanding of the principle of honour when he says that 'prophets are not without honour, except in their own home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house' (Mk. 6.4). Jesus had exceptional reverence for familial ties (Mk. 10) and

¹¹⁵ Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007) and other texts; Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Waters, op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and Household Churches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 41.

¹¹⁷ Stephen C. Barton, 'Jesus' Relationship to His Own Family', in Herbert Anderson, Don S. Browning, Ian S. Evison and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (eds.), *The Family Handbook* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 234.

parental love (Mt. 7.9-11). Family *is* the main source of honour and one must behave to support the honour of the family.

In the hard or so-called ‘anti-familial’ statements of Jesus, Jesus clearly gives his heavenly father priority over his kinship family (Mt. 10.32-9, 12.47-50; Mk. 3.31-5; Lk. 12.52-3, 9.61-2, 14.26). Blood connections: mother, father, wife, brothers and sisters, are relationships that have less significance to a disciple, than obedience to God. Christ relativised the primacy of the relationship with natural family members, though he also respected and honoured his earthly family. This teaching has continuity with Jewish monotheism and the primacy of God in all things, including the family.¹¹⁸ Loving God and caring for people is bigger than biology. Creating or re-creating a family for a child is not only about valuing their specific, God-given life, something that may be considered an act of stewardship, but also about reclaiming the importance of the family as an institution. A new type of affinity, instinctive and vocational, can be created when children are cared for by parents who have no biological relationship with them.

This statement stands in contrast to the primacy of the parent-child relationship that Aquinas found to be ‘natural.’ Aquinas said: ‘What is found naturally in all active causes, must be found especially in the Prime Agent. But all agents in their own way love the effects which they themselves produce, as parents their children, poets their own poems, craftsmen their works.’¹¹⁹

Aquinas recognises that children are brought into existence by the action of parents and further that there is a dependence of an infant upon a parent for both nutrition and instruction. He finds that:

For this purpose the woman by herself is not competent, but at this point especially there is requisite the concurrence of the man, in whom there is at once reason more perfect to instruct, and force more potent to chastise. Therefore in the human race the advancement of the young in good must last, not for a short time, as in birds, but for a long period of life. Hence, whereas it is necessary in all animals for the male to stand by the female for such time as the father's concurrence is requisite for bringing up of the progeny, it is natural for man to be tied to the society of one fixed woman for a long period, not a short one. This social tie we call marriage. Marriage then is natural to man, and an irregular connexion outside of marriage is contrary to the good of man.¹²⁰

Browning is very attracted to the inclusion of the father in Aquinas’ writings, especially since they are consistent with current sociological research, although Browning’s arguments include those of feminist theologians who would wish to moderate Aquinas’

¹¹⁸ Stephen C. Barton, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family, in Barton (ed.), op. cit., 20.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Joseph Rickaby S.J., Chapter XCVI, 152, http://www.catholicprimer.org/aquinas/aquinas_summa_contra_gentiles.pdf (accessed 26 March, 2008).

¹²⁰ Ibid., Chapter CXXII, 504.

ideas about the role of women.¹²¹ The ideas Aquinas proposes for family life: infant dependency, certainty of paternity and the place of two parents are found in contemporary ideas about evolutionary psychology but they also make assumptions for the existence of an inherent human preference for blood-related children, as in the modern theory of kin altruism.

In writing about *Theology and Families*, Thatcher desires that we should take ‘kin altruism seriously.’¹²² Most birth parents show natural partiality for their biological children yet a biological-genetic investment does not guarantee love, nurture and stability. Whilst Thatcher says that society should ‘not treat children only as strangers or neighbours,’¹²³ he goes on to say that adoptive parents are called to an ‘intense form of neighbour-love.’¹²⁴ Since parent-child love is beyond measure, adoptive parent-child love can be as rich and permanent as any form of kin altruism. Parents who have both natural and adopted children, often struggle to distinguish between their feelings for a natural child as opposed to their adopted one: to all intents and purposes the quality of their love is identical. Adopted children are loved as children not as neighbours. Additionally, they can be freed from the expectation of conforming with hereditary patterns and enabled to be unique. This liberating perspective can be likened to God’s adoption of his people, his children. In building families through adoption they become new creations.

Gaining children becomes ‘highly ambiguous’ when it is disassociated from the conventional social context of marital love becoming parental and then familial love.¹²⁵ Brent Waters argues that marriage and family offer a ‘presumptive ordering’ for parentage, without which the desire for a child becomes something ‘one owns’ rather than being a child in its own right, belonging within a family. It is this ‘complex nexus of given biological and social affinities constituting a family that makes adoption explicable as a uniquely moral act.’¹²⁶ It is a moral act that can be taken by any adult and the more so when it is charitable in motivation rather than reproductive. Adoptive parenting follows the model that God establishes himself as ‘our Father’, the divine adopter. For Waters, therefore, ‘the principal purpose of a family is to provide a place of mutual and timely belonging rather than

¹²¹ Browning (2007), op. cit., 96; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province, 1920, 2nd rev. ed., 1a q.92, <http://www.op.org/summa/summa-Iq92.html> (accessed 27 March, 2008).

¹²² Thatcher, op. cit., 78.

¹²³ Ibid., 78.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹²⁵ Brent Waters, ‘Adoption, Parentage and Procreative Stewardship’, in Timothy P. Jackson (ed.), *The Morality of Adoption: Social-Psychological, Theological, and Legal Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 40.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 40.

perpetuate a lineage or satisfy parental longings.¹²⁷ This is a commendably detached view, since it disassociates biology from family and still succeeds in binding the family unit together as a group who ‘belong’ to each other and who need each other. Waters does not diminish the importance of being connected from one generation to the next, since doing so would be to deny ‘the vindicated order of creation.’¹²⁸

The idea of creation is also present in contemporary liturgies found in Anglican and Methodist services giving thanks for the adoption of a child. In the Church of England: ‘The birth or adoption of a child is a cause for celebration. Many people are overcome by a sense of awe at the creation of new life and want to express their thanks to God.’¹²⁹ In the equivalent Methodist service, the opening prayer connects the word ‘gift’ with the outcome ‘that *this child and her/his parents* may be united to you and to each other.’¹³⁰ The new unity is recognised in a formal Christian way.

Lisa Sowle Cahill wants to promote the whole idea of Christian families modelling something that is inherently outward-looking and offers a corrective to ‘the natural family with its often exaggerated values of family security and advancement.’¹³¹ For her, ‘The Christian family is not the nuclear family focused inward on the welcome of its own members but the socially transformative family that seeks to make the Christian moral ideal of love of neighbour part of the common good.’¹³² Cahill argues that families can extend hospitality to strangers as part of its mission and through the opportunity it offers to demonstrate ‘covenantal fidelity’ and ‘expansive love.’¹³³ In this sense ‘mission’ is about *being* a family and not about converting children or others to Christianity.

This covenantal relationship is about an altruistic, committed, empathic and practical love in which family members value the individuality and worth of each person. It welcomes the narrative identities of parents and children, while offering the opportunity for these to become a familial narrative ‘enfolded into God’s story of a vindicated creation.’¹³⁴ The family is a result of creative effort. It is located in a framework that is set in a new time.

¹²⁷ Waters, op. cit., 199.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 193.

¹²⁹ <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/initiation/thanksgiftchild.html> (accessed 24 September, 2007).

¹³⁰ *Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 1999), 400.

¹³¹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 134.

¹³² Ibid., xii.

¹³³ Waters, op. cit., 125-6.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 242-3.

2.2.2 A New Time and a New Love

*Real parents experience the grace of God when their relations to their children and to each other embody the Love that the divine Trinity discloses and is.*¹³⁵

Embodying love is one of the primary ways in which Christian people witness to the transformation that knowing Jesus Christ can make within a person. This transformation is achieved through personal intention and by the presence of God, who is love (1 Jn. 4.7-8). Working with ties of love within a family is about working within a relationship that is closer to the goals of the Kingdom, in a truly eschatological sense, than ties of biology alone. Thus adoptive families can be said to work towards living in a new time, with a transforming love.

The Jewish people knew the commandment to ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Lev. 19.18) yet Jesus extended and moved beyond a narrow view of who our neighbour is (Luke 10.25-37). Stanley Hauerwas emphasises this and encourages faithfulness to Christ’s model. He writes that, ‘The form of the Gospels as stories of a life are meant not only to display that life, but to train us to situate our lives in relation to that life.’¹³⁶ Karl Barth contends that living within the command to love God and neighbour is both binding and ‘can only be maintained, accepted and acknowledged as a given fact; it cannot be understood and explained.’¹³⁷ Christian people can respond to the command to ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (Mt. 22.39; Mk. 12.31; Lk. 10.27) by being self-giving and sharing hospitality with the vulnerable and needy, something that can become a life’s work. Adopting a child can be a demonstration of this love, though the term ‘neighbour-love’ can be synonymous with a detached love that is not a good form of parenting. In arguing for the preservation of kin altruism, Adrian Thatcher offers caution:

As the range of neighbour-love expands in the Christian consciousness, and the more inclusive it becomes in the direction of the stranger and the enemy, the greater the urgency to locate the love of children within a different range of compassion altogether...The category of neighbour will not suffice for the intimacy with one’s children that being a parent requires.¹³⁸

Stephen Post finds the view where families do not extend their love beyond their own children a ‘myopic attitude’ and ‘a violation of the order of love.’¹³⁹ Many people draw ‘a sharp line between children who are near and dear and children who are strangers. The prophetic voice must expand the circle of moral concern through the spiritual, religious and

¹³⁵ Thatcher, op. cit., 173.

¹³⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 74.

¹³⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 3.2, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. A.T. Mackay, T.H.L. Parker, H. Knight, H.A. Kennedy and J. Marks (London: T & T Clark, 1961), 560.

¹³⁸ Thatcher, op. cit., 74.

¹³⁹ Stephen G. Post, *More Lasting Unions: Christianity, the Family and Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 29.

ethical insistence on the equal value of human beings.¹⁴⁰

There are alternative approaches within the concept of Christian love, one identified with self-sacrifice and the other with self-fulfilment. These are associated with *agape* and *eros*. A middle view is associated with the Latin word *caritas* and is understood as mutuality or equal regard.¹⁴¹ This view contains elements of self-fulfilment and self-sacrifice but both of these are subordinated to an idea of mutual benefit and reciprocity. Don Browning finds that ‘equal regard’, in the writings of Aquinas, illustrates a love ethic of meeting the needs of ‘the other’ such that mother and father ‘have a friendship of equality that binds them together in the task of raising and educating their children.’¹⁴²

Considering *agape*, self-sacrifice is offered as an act of love: ‘This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins’ (1 John 4.10). Our Father sacrificed his own son for the sake of others and parents are prepared to love sacrificially for the sake of children. This action is particularly associated with mothers and can generate its own problems.¹⁴³ Feminist theologians, ‘have critiqued extreme agapic models of love, fearing that women would once again be asked to play the role of sacrificial worker, denying their own selfhood, needs and potentials.’¹⁴⁴

Identifying the driving forces behind a desire to have children is important. Christine Gudorf, an adoptive mother, writes powerfully and insightfully when she says that ‘one’s self-interest is often, but not always, also the interest of the other. When we assume that to do the hard, self-sacrificing thing is to do the loving thing, we have, in fact defined the interest of the other in terms of ourselves, and not in terms of the person and conditions of the other.’¹⁴⁵

As a middle way, *caritas* has the potential to provide many resources within a family as it grows, develops and matures and can have ‘holy significance’ in terms of parent-child relations.¹⁴⁶ The embedded element of *agape* is explained by Post who says that ‘to experience divine love as parental love is to find the most loyal of loves; to respond to God as Jesus did is to take a filial position; to respond morally as a neighbour is to love as if in a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴¹ Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon and Robert M. Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 101.

¹⁴² Browning (2007), op. cit., 166.

¹⁴³ Thatcher, op. cit., 184.

¹⁴⁴ Browning et al, op. cit., 127.

¹⁴⁵ Christine E. Gudorf, ‘Parenting, Mutual Love, and Sacrifice’ in Barbara Hilkert Anderson, Christine E. Gudorf and Mary D. Pellauer (eds.) *Women’s Consciousness, Women’s Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 184.

¹⁴⁶ Thatcher, op. cit., 181.

universal family of siblings under God.¹⁴⁷ This understanding can facilitate a diminishing of the stress on being a tight, ‘nuclear’ family and move towards being an open, inclusive family. This is a move towards an eschatological position where the blood ties are replaced by love ties.¹⁴⁸ This position accords with that of Brent Waters who argues that the Church is an ‘eschatological community bearing witness to God’s kingdom. The church does not reconstruct familial relationships, but anticipates their transformation.’¹⁴⁹ He finds that Church is a group of brothers and sisters and not strictly a family. The adoptive family is thus a unit that exists between the biological unit and that found in heaven, bound together and recognised for its loving relationships, freely offered by parent to child both of whom participate in God’s purposes to make his own love and care manifest, known and reciprocated in the relationships. Waters argues that ‘a ministry to strangers’ is born from obedience to God’s love for the family and testifies to Jesus’ incarnational love present in believers.¹⁵⁰

In summary, God’s purposes for his people are worked out in family forms that extend beyond immediate biological relationships. Family life can be sustained by faithful obedience to God’s laws for love of neighbour and care of the stranger within the family unit. The Church can work towards ensuring that there is equal value and regard for all family types in response to the love of God; a new, transforming love which exists both here and in the future. Giving and receiving love within a parent-child relationship creates and moulds all participants. The next section develops this theme.

2.2.3 A New Person

For the infertile, the myth that one day their bodies would produce a baby was shattered. Out of this disbevelled myth, out of this climate of powerlessness, comes a keen appreciation of a child as a gift and of the giving as a grace.¹⁵¹

Twenty-first century adoption creates a family unit with a complex emotional history. The adults may be affected by childlessness or a strong vocational desire to complete a family. For the child, the nature of the nurture prior to adoption will have lingering emotional and behavioural consequences. Being able to transition between an ‘old’ past and a ‘new’ future can be fraught with issues of identity and self-discovery, yet these concepts underpin so much of what it means to be converted (e.g. Rom. 6.6, 2 Cor. 5.17,

¹⁴⁷ Post, op. cit., 62

¹⁴⁸ Sarah L. Lamb, *Adoption: The Challenge to the Church* (Cambridge: Grove Books (E130), 2003), 21, 24.

¹⁴⁹ Waters, op. cit., 248.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 246-7.

¹⁵¹ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 69.

Eph. 4.22-24). Adoption creates within us a new identity through the grace of God.¹⁵² Mark Stibbe, himself an adopted person, writes that once a person accepts that they are adopted by God, their ‘sense of *significance*’ is not based upon achievement but upon their ‘position in Christ.’¹⁵³ The new significance and sense of identity for an adoptee is discussed in **section 5.1**. This section focuses on the change that adoption itself can create within a person.

Children are present throughout the Bible in reality and metaphor; within families and without. Children are loved by both father and mother (Gen. 22.2; 37.35; 2 Sam. 12.15-23; 1 Kgs. 3. 16-27; 2 Kgs. 4.18-37). They are the lynchpin of blessings for the times to come and a feature of the covenantal relationship (Gen. 9.1,7; Gen. 12.2, 15.18, 26.3-4).

The life of the illegitimate, fatherless or orphan is not the same as a child in an intact family. The Bible instructs the faithful to care for these children. The Hebrew *yathom*, translated orphan or fatherless, is a foreboding of a difficult future in a patriarchal society. It is a state to be lamented (Lam. 5.1-3). God listens to these vulnerable people (Ex. 22.22-3) and legislates for justice and provision for those who are uncared for (Deut. 10.17-19). Job appealed to the merits of his actions of caring for an orphan in addition to his family (Job 31.18). Caring for such people can restore God’s blessing (Jer. 7.6). An emphasis to provide for the vulnerable is found throughout the prophetic writings (Isa. 1.17, 23; Jer. 5.28; Eze. 22.7; Hos. 14.3; Zech. 7.10; Mal. 3.5).

The fact that God’s son was a child, nurtured in a human family, enables us to understand him as a child and welcome him as a child. Being a child is acceptable to God. ‘After and because of Jesus, childhood is included in what counts as perfect humanhood. There is nothing incomplete, imperfect, or preliminary about it. Whatever childhood is, God the Word becomes it.’¹⁵⁴

In Jesus’ teaching, several images are represented by childhood: the needy, as a symbol of hope and new beginning (Lk. 2.12-14, Jn. 16.21, Rom 8.22, 1 Thess. 5.3), and as those who can learn. Jesus calls a child and places him in the middle for visual emphasis. Children are the ‘little ones’ (Mk. 9.36-42; Mt. 18.6-14, cp. Lk. 9.47-48) yet they are examples for adults to follow (Mt. 18.3). ‘Becoming children’ is about humility and equality, not status. ‘Receiving children’ concerns openness and servanthood for men and women equally. Jesus is for the marginalized and the insignificant; those who are dependent upon others. Christ valued and included children in his ministry without ever becoming a parent. He had

¹⁵² Mark Stibbe, *From Orphans to Heirs – Celebrating our Spiritual Adoption*, (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 1999), 126.

¹⁵³ Stibbe, *op. cit.*, 126.

¹⁵⁴ Thatcher, *op. cit.*, 102.

a particular and intense love for children.¹⁵⁵

Jesus never referred to adoption but the apostle Paul was familiar with the concept of adoption through his Roman citizenship. James Scott's research finds that the word *huiothesia* is one of the commonest terms of adoption employed in Hellenistic Greek and concludes that whilst Paul's religious use is 'unparalleled' it is appropriating the normal usage of the word.¹⁵⁶ Paul uses *huiothesia*, meaning 'adoption as son', on five occasions: Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; and, Rom. 9:4.

The use in Galatians is the earliest occurrence in the Pauline corpus.¹⁵⁷ Scott explores a discontinuity between the legal illustration of guardianship in 4.1-2 and the application of adoption in 4.3-7. He harmonizes the verses by connecting the issue of slavery (heirs 'are no better than slaves') to the one experienced by Israel in Egypt. Now 'adoption as sons' (4.5) follows guardianship, like the liberation from Egypt in the Exodus followed a time of slavery and bondage. Gentiles can enter the family of faith through the barren mother, Jerusalem.¹⁵⁸ Scott regards this new liberation as a second Exodus and sees it as an 'eschatological redemption'.¹⁵⁹ Adoption becomes the means of becoming children of God, where Christians experience redemption into 'a relationship with the Father established by "adoption"'.¹⁶⁰ Paul now makes a logical deduction that the transformed relationship, confirmed by the in-dwelling of the Spirit, enables the children to call their Father 'Abba!' Christ's work of salvation determines the destiny of humankind and not, as Paul has primarily discussed in this letter, any act of men.

The family that started with the relationship of the natural Son to the Father is extended to include new children through adoption. This act of grace brings pleasure to the Father (Eph. 1.4-5). The verses in Ephesians reinforce the understanding of God's plan through Christ working outside of time, before and beyond creation (2.2.2).

Using Ephesians 1.4-5, Mark Stibbe argues that the church there emphasises justification, 'the finished work of the cross' rather than the 'continuing work of the Spirit (adoption)'.¹⁶¹ He feels this neglect is due to a 'nervous apprehension' about the doctrine of predestination since some would find it scandalous that God chooses some to be adopted

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 57-63.

¹⁵⁶ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God* (Tubingen: J.C.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992)55.

¹⁵⁷ Scott, op. cit., 121.

¹⁵⁸ Stevenson-Moessner, op. cit., 39.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, op. cit., 149.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 174.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 13.

and not others.¹⁶²

Paul uses *huiothesia* three times in Romans. The verses in chapter 8 (Rom. 8.15, 23), form part of Paul's explanation about the transforming and liberating work of the Spirit. Again the analogy is made with slavery. In Roman culture the one adopted was likely to have been a slave or son of a slave within the household and through adoption the slave became both free and heir to the estate. Within God's household, all those adopted are equal to the natural son: joint heirs with Christ; heirs of God; they cry 'Abba!' Again, the future aspect of *huiothesia* is found in 8.23. We await 'the redemption of our bodies' after adoption. We look forward to being part of the heavenly family.

Finally, in Romans 9.4, Paul links with the Old Testament understanding of the Israelites being 'children of God' and the whole nation being one large family under God. This sense of equal worth and value before God, irrespective of tribal connections or lineage is a vital aspect in linking these verses with today's understanding of adoption, especially since adoption became stigmatised and secret, primarily due to associations with illegitimacy and 'bad-blood'.¹⁶³

Stanley Hauerwas writes that 'we extend hospitality to God's kingdom by inviting the stranger to share our story. Of course, we know that the stranger does not come to us as a cipher, but also has a story to tell us.'¹⁶⁴ Yet, because of the historical, low worth of children it is a relatively recent view that we should pay attention to a *child's* story. In adoption, the child's story may also include rejection by birth parents. For the adoptee to become a new person, a relationship to Christ as brother and to God as Father may become central to future stability and potential for growth as a person.

In examining the reality of this possibility, Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner invited adopted seminarians to reflect on their view of God as parent, in the light of their adoptive experiences and found that:

...the images of God, first person of the Trinity, as either birthing parent or adopting parent are personally, although not Biblically, problematic. The problem is that for them adoption was like an amputation. The wound of relinquishment left them with a sense of emptiness, abandonment, and alienation. Knowing that they'd been chosen by adopting parents revived the knowledge of being "unchosen" by birth parents.¹⁶⁵

These Christian people, adult adoptees 'connected with Christ's cry of dereliction,

¹⁶² Ibid., 15.

¹⁶³ Mia Kellmer Pringle, *Adoption – Facts and Fallacies* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1967), 123-33; Margaret Kornitzer, *Adoption and Family Life* (London: Putnam and Co. Ltd., 1968), 19.

¹⁶⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics', in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (eds.), *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 385.

¹⁶⁵ Stevenson-Moessner, op. cit., 90.

‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15.54).’ Their image of God developed so that they could relate to him as both adoptive parent and also, crucially, as relinquishing parent. They were, as Christ himself, a relinquished child. ‘The vulnerability of God would then include not only anxious yearning as Adoptive Parent, but pain as Relinquishing Parent and abandoned agony as Forsaken Child.’¹⁶⁶

This testimony cuts through the rosy idea of adoption as an easy journey that originates with an idea that any parents are a gift for a child, and it restores attention to the child’s journey. As God’s children, all Christians are on a journey that includes adoption. The New Testament shows that Christians enter the family of faith as adopted children, a fact that is understated and often unrecognised.

Previously childless, adoptive parents do not regard themselves as a gift to their adopted child, rather that the child is God’s gift to them. Whilst there may be a strong understanding of the theology of adoption, the fact that the childless become new parents is itself a good reason for adopting. Don Browning writes that:

Christians can, and should, acknowledge that there may be other than Christian ways to justify and inspire the adoption of the needy. Admitting this should not undercut the Christian belief that acknowledging children as gifts of God, God’s children, and objects of Christ’s love – hence as persons we too should love and cherish – provides even profounder reasons for adoption.¹⁶⁷

Adoption recreates people. The fact that God can be seen as adopter and relinquishing parent and relinquished child enables him to relate to all people involved in an adoption process, a process which inherently involves the task of parenting.

2.2.4 A New Task

Give me children, or I shall die... (Genesis 30.1)

This plea of Rachel articulates the aching despair of adults who deeply desire children and who discover that they cannot conceive. Others seem to conceive effortlessly and then be either unwilling or unable to keep their children.

In the Bible the main purpose of sexual activity was procreation and the continuance of the family. Children are regarded as a blessing and a gift (Gen. 15.5, 22.17, 24.60; 128.3-4; Deut. 7.12-14). They are the ‘crown of the aged’ (Prov. 17.6) and ‘a reward... Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them’ (Ps. 127.3-5). This overwhelming sense of being bestowed with a favour, a child, coupled with an emphasis on caring for one’s own children, has led to mothers who give up their children (rarely do fathers feel victimised) being

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 91-2.

¹⁶⁷ Don S. Browning, ‘Adoption and the Moral Significance of Kin Altruism’, in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 77.

ostracised and misunderstood. They seem to have violated the natural order by forsaking the blessing, yet the child lives and is blessed by life. In adoption, the role of the birth parent needs to be understood and valued. There is no adoption without a birth parent.

Such a radical adjustment of cultural norms requires there to be an understanding that birth parents do not *abandon* their children, they *relinquish* them. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner explains this, saying: ‘*Abandonment* carries overtones of renouncement, desertion, dereliction. *Relinquishment*, in contrast, can include nuances of sacrifice, yielding or rendering up something beloved, relaxing one’s hold on someone.’¹⁶⁸ The birth parent is best understood as both relinquishing and giving and has a parallel in God’s demonstration of the ultimate act of giving his Son, relinquishing him in love (Jn. 3.16). By attributing an act of relinquishment with spiritual and moral value, Post asserts that ‘Christian ethics can allow a birth mother to be free from negative cultural stereotypes that painfully interfere with her choice or convince her that she has none.’¹⁶⁹ Thus a woman may actually feel a certain ‘beneficence in her action.’¹⁷⁰ She enables another to become a parent.

The background to becoming an adoptive parent can include childlessness and/or a sense of vocation. Barth states that ‘parenthood is now only to be understood as a free and in some sense optional gift of the goodness of God. It certainly cannot be a fault to be without children.’¹⁷¹ Yet, the Bible contains many stories of the ‘curse of barrenness’ and the striving of men and women to overcome infertility.¹⁷² Just as the arrival of children is denoted in scripture by words such as ‘blessing’, ‘gift’ and ‘reward’ so infertility and childlessness is a source of shame and disgrace, to the point of being considered a punishment from God (Gen. 15.2-3, 16.2-5, 30.1-2; 1 Sam. 1.2; Gen. 20.18). Stevenson-Moessner protests that, ‘There is not one woman recorded in either the Old or New Testament who, desirous of progeny, remained barren. There is not one model, mentor, or mother in Scripture with whom modern-day infertile women can connect.’¹⁷³ Neither is it easy for barren twenty-first century men to connect with the patriarchs since all are eventually blessed with biological children through their wives. Charlene Miall takes up the case from a sociological standpoint: ‘Childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary, is considered a form of deviant behaviour in that it is statistically unusual and violates

¹⁶⁸ Stevenson-Moessner, op. cit., 92.

¹⁶⁹ Post, op. cit., 139.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹⁷¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. A.T. Mackay, T.H.L. Parker, H. Knight, H.A. Kennedy and J. Marks (London: T & T Clark, 1961), 266.

¹⁷² Stevenson-Moessner, op. cit., 22.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 23.

prevailing norms of acceptable conduct.¹⁷⁴

Being a parent and raising a child, is a God-given task to many who find it deeply fulfilling. Within scripture there are stories of how Jesus is brought up in a family of faith. He is taught the scriptures and develops astonishing insight (Lk. 2.46-52). Jesus is loved by his father (Jn. 5.20), instructed by him (Jn. 8.28) and accepts God's will (Jn. 17). In his teaching on prayer, Jesus acknowledges God as 'Our Father' (Mt. 6.9; Lk. 11.2). Within the prayer, God is a father who is holy, separate and detached but also one who provides for our needs. At the last, Jesus ascended to be with 'my Father and your Father' (Jn. 20.17). He drew people into a new, deeper and more intimate relationship with God (Mt. 23.9). The use of the familial word had great power for Christ.

The language of fatherhood continued in Paul's epistles. God is our father (1 Cor. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.2; Gal. 1.4, 4.2; 1 Thess. 1.3, 3.11, 13), our 'Abba' (Rom. 1.7, 8.15). The repetition of the father-child relationship and the extensive use of family words such as brothers and sisters is noteworthy.¹⁷⁵ Paul uses father-child imagery to encourage the Church to operate as the apostles did, who were likened to a nurse and then a father in their attitude of care (1 Thess. 2.11). They have a duty, in the familial sense to respond like a child and offer honour and love (1 Thess. 4.9). The contemporary Christian sees that the Father-Son, parent-child relationship is the one that has an enduring and inclusive emphasis within scripture, rather than the marriage relationship.

There is no law or rite of adoption mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and no use of the word for adoption, *huiothesia*, in the Septuagint. There are, however, examples of activity that we would consider to be adoptive. James Scott proposes texts such as: Gen 48.5-6 (Jacob 'adopts' Ephraim and Manasseh); Ex 2.10 (Pharaoh's daughter 'adopts' Moses) and Esther 2.7,15 (Mordecai 'adopts' Esther).¹⁷⁶ To these we could add the raising of Jonathan's son Mephiboshet by David after Jonathan's death (2 Sam. 9), the raising of Samuel by Eli (1 Sam. 1-3) and even the embracing of Ruth into the family of Naomi. In the case of Jacob and Mordecai there is an obvious blood connection between adult and child but the relationship is not parent-child. The 'adoption' of Moses and Mephiboshet is a more familiar pattern to the present day.

In the New Testament, Joseph acted as an adoptive father to Jesus. At the end of his

¹⁷⁴ Charlene E. Miall, 'The Stigma of Adoptive Parent Status: Perceptions of Community Attitudes Toward Adoption and the Experience of Informal Social Sanctioning', *Family Relations* 36 (1987), 34-39.

¹⁷⁵ Philip F. Esler, ' "Keeping it in the Family" – Culture, Kinship and Identity in 1 Thessalonians and Galatians', in Jan Willem van Henten and Athalya Brenner (eds.), *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions* (Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 2000), 168.

¹⁷⁶ Scott, op. cit., 74.

life, Jesus proposed that Mary and John were to care for each other as mother and son in a new familial relationship not unlike adoption (Jn. 19.25-27). New immediate and spiritual families are created in the death of Christ.¹⁷⁷

The parenting task is a serious responsibility and certainly easier when shared. For Aquinas, bringing up a child required a father and a mother and, for him, marriage.¹⁷⁸ In an adoptive context, the whole subject of procreation needs to be qualified and adjusted by use of phrases such as commitment and vocation. Adoptive parents ‘are highly motivated to become parents – more so than most people. Hence they often make excellent highly invested parents.’¹⁷⁹ Such parents can illustrate commitment by embracing the Christian faith: its fundamental values of equal worth for all that is created and the ability of love to conquer all.

In this section on the theology of adoption, I have used the framework of new creation, new time and new love, new person and new task to show how adoption is very much a location for the work of God. Under the separate headings, the dispersed comments about adoption, found within general theologies of the family, are examined alongside Biblical theology. Within a theology of adoption, concepts that need to be stressed include the primacy of love above biological connections (eschataological ties), the place of changing identity (conversion) for adoptee and adoptive parent within a new family, and, the role of God in creating and building a family. It concerns the journey of a child that is facilitated by adults. The Church has played a leading role in history and now, in the twenty-first century, it needs to rekindle and rediscover this work.

2.3 Christianity and Adoption: Moving Forwards

*Adoptees should know that they are not second-class citizens, bastard children, unwanted, or illegitimate, but born of the womb-love of God, swaddled in God’s mercy and compassion. In microcosm, they are the model, the measure of all of us in God’s family.*¹⁸⁰

History illustrates how the general population has created adoption scenarios even when legislation did not recognise adoption. The Church has acted as parent to unwanted children left on its doorstep. The Church enabled godparents to be regarded as co-parents, with near biological responsibility, and thus built alternative family forms whilst simultaneously legislating for only one family form. The Church also stands responsible for

¹⁷⁷ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 81.

¹⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, op. cit., Chapter CXXII, 504.

¹⁷⁹ Browning et al, op. cit., 117.

¹⁸⁰ Stevenson-Moessner, op. cit., 116.

generating 'illegitimacy' as a description of children born outside of wedlock and creating the legacy of stigmatism and exclusion through 'sinful' behaviour.

Jesus had no duality in his treatment of children. He gave them a radical place in his teaching and drew them into relationship with him. He demonstrated the indiscriminate nature of God's love for humankind. In relativising the relationship between his biologically connected family members and God (Mk. 3.33-35), Jesus diminished the stress upon natural kinship and providing a spiritual and moral emphasis. Rodney Clapp says that 'Christian parenthood... is practice in hospitality... welcoming the strangers who are our children.'¹⁸¹ When all children can be considered to be 'strangers', they are liberated from the pressure of expectation and conformity and valued as individuals of worth in their own right.

When it illustrates steadfast love and provision, the family can be the primary place of bearing witness to Christ. Christian families that demonstrate stability, tolerance and mutual respect make possible an 'apologetic and evangelistic impact' that should not be underestimated.¹⁸² Yet it is not for this reason that children should be adopted by Christian people. Children should be adopted because they need families. Christian families already understand a concept of family since they model behaviour upon Jesus who was a son. They also have Biblical teaching that they themselves are members of the family of faith through adoption.

Adoption has been shown to be a work that is relational, practical, Biblical and incarnational. Christian people can relate to each of these aspects of adoption: the human factors and the spiritual ones. People without faith, primarily relate to the human aspects of adoption: the emotional, intellectual and physical needs of children and parents. The next chapter examines the current adoption scene and how social services and legislation interact with the foundational attributes of adoption described in this chapter.

¹⁸¹ Clapp, *op. cit.*, 148.

¹⁸² James D.G. Dunn, 'The Household Rules in the New Testament' in Barton (ed.), *op. cit.*, 57.

3 Contemporary Adoption: Social Services and Legislation

You will have a social worker whose name you will be told and who you will get to know. Their job is to:

- *work out what she or he thinks is best for you;*
- *listen to what you think; and*
- *stand up for you when the adoption is being sorted out.*

Your social worker should do this in a way so you understand what is happening.¹⁸³

Sociologists have reflected upon changes in dynamics within society during the twentieth century and have characterised the trends using words such as: secularisation; de-traditionalisation; liberalisation; and, individualisation.¹⁸⁴ The above quotation provides a pointer towards some of the changes in the field of adoption, coming as it does from a governmental body responsible for national standards. It outlines the responsibilities of the social worker and the rights of the child; no longer do delegated officials tell children what is going to happen to them. The purpose of this chapter is to set out the underlying story of the last century, as it applies to adoption social work and the law.

The previous chapter established the role that Christian pioneers had in establishing adoption agencies and innovative childcare practices.. In this chapter, **section 3.1** continues the historical narrative through two World Wars, attending to adoption legislation and the expansion of adoption work into Local Authorities. **Section 3.2** discusses how governmental policy changed social workers' interaction with adoption issues, much of which was whole-heartedly endorsed by the Church but some matters generated a tension between new proposals and the traditional views of some Christian people. This tension was brought to a critical point with the arrival of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. This legislation is assessed in **section 3.3**. Before these specific adoption-related matters are addressed, there is a need to describe some of the underlying trends.

Secularisation is the process whereby religious institutions, practices and thinking become steadily more detached from everyday life and culture. Whereas some arguments to support this can be found in statistical evidence such as decreasing church attendance,

¹⁸³ Simplified standards used in the consultation exercise with children and young people in 2001. Department of Health, *National Adoption Standards for England* (London: HMSO, 2001), 9.

¹⁸⁴ The brief explanation of these terms in this introduction is gathered from literature including: Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Longman, 2006); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); David Martin, *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Penguin, 1966).

membership and the measurable quantity of church services such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, in adoption work the issues are more ideological, concerning the diminishing role of the Church in dialogue that shapes the form of the family. A secular society would not expect any difference in function or performance between faith-based and Local Authority adoption agencies. Increased secularisation of thinking asks for answers to questions such as: Should the Church be permitted a distinct view about adoption? Should Christian adoption agencies be autonomous in assessing the suitability of adopters?

Alongside secularisation, a set of social mores has developed that are more liberal and individualist and much less conservative and traditional. Changes in the choices people take, especially moral choices based upon religious precepts, are affected by religious decline. The years of austerity immediately following World War 2 were also years that restored family life to a traditional shape: husband, wife and children. This conformity and cultural restraint was challenged to the full in the 1960s. Women's liberation and new sexual freedoms, accompanied by the contraceptive pill for married and then single women, hugely influenced the form of the family. Major legislative changes occurred in this period, as the law followed societal patterns. The Abortion Act 1967 and the Divorce Reform Act 1969 were passed to legitimise new choices. The classical measure of moral and demographic change is the illegitimacy rate. To this data can be added statistics about numbers of marriages and the age of marriage; typically high marriage rates are associated with low illegitimacy rates. Changes in these statistics indicated the way that, from the 1960s, the general population were beginning to have children without marriage, through choice and with diminishing stigma and controversy.

All Churches struggled with the implications of these changes, especially the Roman Catholic Church which held fast to its' conservative and traditional values. Whilst most mainstream Protestant churches sought to make themselves relevant in the face of nominalism, others with an evangelical persuasion tightened the guidelines of membership, establishing clear moral codes.¹⁸⁵ The diversity in religious expression, including the awareness and participation in non-Christian religions, is another illustration of the choices, spiritual, personal and moral, that are part of an ongoing trend in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. These factors operated in parallel to the debates surrounding adoption reform through the period. The Church wished to assert Christian values of love and care for the vulnerable who would benefit from adoption, whilst the cultural and legislative environment became more secular and more individualistic. In many ways, adoption matters

¹⁸⁵ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 34-38.

are the apotheosis of the tensions between conservative and liberal family systems as processes of individualisation and detraditionalisation release people from previously conventional scripts. A theology of engagement in adoption work enables the Church to work ‘in the best interests of the child’ whilst simultaneously challenging the Church to re-imagine the context of adoption. Secular society rightly asks questions about the autonomy of Christian adoption agencies. An additional question that engages with both Christian and non-Christian interests is: what can society expect from Christian adoption agencies?

In this chapter, I will argue that despite the changing environment, Christian values permeate adoption work. The shared concern of all adoption agencies to work towards children being adopted in permanent and stable family environments should be the focus of attention. A further shared concern could be to dispel fears in both communities about the role that faith plays in adoption work and assessment processes. The discussion commences with a history of adoption matters over the last century.

3.1 Twentieth Century Adoption History

3.1.1 Post World War 1

One of the legacies of the First World War was a soaring birth-rate and a significant increase in illegitimate births.¹⁸⁶ Some children coming into care were neither illegitimate nor orphaned but their one surviving parent was indisposed to provide for them. Two years after the end of the war a Parliamentary Committee was set up to examine the issues. Their findings were key factors in the lead up to the Adoption Act 1926.¹⁸⁷

At this time and throughout the twentieth century, NCH campaigned for legislation affecting children and were involved in the first struggles for legal recognition of adoption. Their historical notes show that this was contemporaneous with them starting ‘matching’ of children to potential parents.¹⁸⁸

Barnardo’s and the NSPCC were not particularly in favour of adoption, because of known cases of cruelty to adopted children, but did recognise that it would help to eradicate baby farming.¹⁸⁹ In-house histories of Barnardo’s look to the character of Thomas Barnardo himself for reasons why the organisation had reservations:

When Dr. Barnardo was alive there was no such thing as legal adoption and his strong sense of being the father of “his” children would have made the idea of

¹⁸⁶ Hendrick, *op. cit.*, 238.

¹⁸⁷ Keating, *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁸ ‘Our History: NCH Children’s Charities’, <http://www.nch.org.uk/page.asp?auto=79> (accessed 14 October, 2003).

¹⁸⁹ Keating, *op. cit.*

adoption foreign to his sense of duty. With the passage of the Adoption Act Barnardo's had to reconsider its policy and took time in reaching a decision to become an Adoption Society, for its experience made it alive to the weaknesses as well as the benefits of adoption.¹⁹⁰

The Waifs and Strays Society were also slow to enter the field of adoption.¹⁹¹ It wasn't until 1935 that a committee was established to develop this work and it 'permitted' rather than 'arranged' adoptions of suitable children with twenty nine adoptions completed during this first year, a number rising to seventy three in 1938. Barnardo's initial reluctance to support the Adoption Act 1926 may explain why they were not formally registered as an adoption agency until November 1947.

Not all organisations involved with adoption at this time, were Christian in foundation. Thomas Coram founded the Foundling Hospital in London in 1739 and this continued to exist until the 1920s when the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children, moved out of the hospital. In the early 1920s, the principal non-Christian adoption agency was the National Children's Adoption Association, based in Exeter. Another group was the National Adoption Society.

The first adoption legislation gave adoption work the accreditation it needed within society. Important issues such as inheritance by an adopted person were still outside of legislation but these were gradually addressed during and after the next World War.

3.1.2 Developments After World War 2

In 1942, the major voluntary organisations (Barnardo's, NCH, Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, Jewish Board of Guardians, Catholic Children's Rescue Society, Shaftesbury Home and the Arethusa) came together for informal discussions about the post-war future, pooling common experience and ideas. This resulted in the formation of a more formal organisation, known as the National Council of Associated Children's Homes (NCACH).

In 1943 the Waifs and Strays Society's Post-War Committee 'reiterated its belief in fostering as the best form of care for children.'¹⁹² This was instrumental in the slow process of converting homes for semi-permanent residence into reception homes and day centres for children who lived in family homes. In early 1946, the Society became the Church of England Children's Society.

Lady Allen of Hurtwood was a leading campaigner on behalf of young children at

¹⁹⁰ Barnardo's, op. cit., 16.

¹⁹¹ Stroud, op. cit., 193.

¹⁹² Stroud, op. cit., 218.

this time. She wrote in *The Times* of 15 July 1944, ‘The public... are unaware that many thousands of children are being brought up in repressive conditions that are generations out of date and are unworthy of our traditional care for children. Many who are orphaned, destitute or neglected still live under the chilly stigma of “charity”.’¹⁹³ She called for a public enquiry in a provocative pamphlet, *Whose Children?* This action was partially responsible for the 1946 survey of children ‘deprived of a normal home life’ that was the basis of a significant piece of work by the Care of Children Committee, known as the Curtis Report.¹⁹⁴

Barnardo’s estimated that they were responsible for 1 in 14 of the children surveyed by the Committee and this number included those pending adoption. Barnardo’s sent the largest number of witnesses to the Committee of any voluntary group. Whilst paying tribute to the initiative, they privately considered that the Committee was encroaching on their preserve. ‘The possibility of state interference by inspection of their homes and foster-homes threatened their historic ‘freedom of action’.’¹⁹⁵

The Committee found 2,400 children were pending adoption out of 124,900 children in care. 40,100 were in voluntary hospitals or homes and 27,800 were in foster homes. The latter situation made a very favourable impression upon the Committee since ‘there were few where a child was not a member of the family or did not appear to be finding happiness and affection.’¹⁹⁶ In its conclusions, the Committee stated that ‘subject to the needs of the individual child, adoption, boarding out and institutional care are to be preferred in that order’. The Curtis Report attached great importance to the durability of the placement citing that stability was ‘the feeling that he can expect to remain with those who will continue to care for him till he goes out into the world on his own feet.’¹⁹⁷

In an early example of state-led calls for sharing adoption work, the Report called for co-operation between the state and voluntary sectors. Sadly, the subsequent legislation, the Children Act 1948, continued to fail in accurately defining the relationship. Anomalies existed in the Act that encouraged an atmosphere of suspicion between the two sectors rather than the ‘friendly rivalry’ envisaged by the Curtis Committee. Local authorities were free to negotiate the level of maintenance payment for a child taken into care. This resulted in a serious under-funding of the voluntary sector. NCH and Barnardo’s were suspicious about the actions of Local Authority planning groups who made life difficult when the

¹⁹³ Rose, op. cit., 197.

¹⁹⁴ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, <http://www.bopcris.ac.uk/bop1940/ref856.html> (accessed 18 October, 2003).

¹⁹⁵ Rose, op. cit., 199.

¹⁹⁶ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, op. cit.

¹⁹⁷ Cited in Barnardo’s, op. cit., 15.

organisation applied to build or purchase homes intended for use as residential homes for children. Government grants for capital projects proved difficult to obtain. There was a continuous source of conflict and a complex pattern of relationships between the societies and the authorities.

In 1952, the executive committee of The Children's Society included in its aims and objectives the following statement: 'if it is inadvisable for the child to remain with the parents or parent, and unless the help is of temporary nature, the next best prospect is adoption.'¹⁹⁸ The Society adopted policies against any institutionalising of children wherever possible, preferring adoption or boarding out. Now the Society identified the recipients of its attention: no longer 'them' but 'the child'. This seemingly simple modification of terminology meant that the individual needs of a child had to be discerned by reliable, professional social workers and not by committees. This produced a considerable adjustment to the working practices of the Society.

For the Children's Society, whilst the numbers of foster placements were on the increase towards the end of the 1940s, the expansion of the adoption work surpassed it after the Children Act 1948. Three hundred adoptions were finalised in 1952 and the figures increased to a peak of seven hundred and sixty completed adoptions in 1965, making the Society the largest adoption agency in the country.¹⁹⁹

Adoption practice was re-evaluated in the 1960s. 'It came to be recognised that the success of an adoption depends in large measure on the skilful preparation of the adopters for the task that lies before them.'²⁰⁰ 'Hard to place' children became an increasing part of the Society's work.

NCH was monitoring changes in its work. Whereas prior to the 1950s a significant proportion of children could spend their whole childhood in a residential home, by 1985 the average stay was quoted as 'about two years' although a subsequent statement said that 'once children have been in residential homes more than six months, only one in four ever goes back to live with its own family.'²⁰¹ Demonstrating its ability to adapt to the needs of specific children, NCH began training foster parents for fostering handicapped children, children with ethnic backgrounds or children with behavioural problems from 1975. In 1981, NCH established the first Family Access Centre where children in care could meet with members of families on neutral territory, including potential adoptive parents meeting children

¹⁹⁸ Stroud, *op. cit.*, 230.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁰¹ Owen (ed.), *op. cit.*, 14.

available for adoption.

Barnardo's was an organisation gradually moving away from some of its founding tenets. In the 1960s and 70s, Timothy Lawson chaired a committee on Barnardo's religious outlook. He recognised that 'the main expression of the Christian motivation of Barnardo's in the multi-racial society will be in the quality of our caring.'²⁰² Barnardo's became interdenominational in the 1970s. As an organisation it was 'more flexible in the demands it made on the religious life of both staff and children, less institutional, less judgemental.'²⁰³ Whilst Barnardo's once had a policy of placing children for adoption only with Christian families, by 1987, adoption workers 'were more concerned about the family's philosophy of life and values than about formal church attendance.'²⁰⁴ Nevertheless Barnardo's still states that it 'derives its inspiration and values from the Christian faith.'²⁰⁵

In the same decade the Children's Society moved away from its work with children's homes, adoption and fostering and refocused its work with children and young people. The last Children's Society adoption agency based in the East Midlands became part of the Coram Family group, an independent voluntary adoption agency with no religious affiliation. Adoption work within the Church of England, as with the Roman Catholic Church, is now done at Diocesan level.

Overall, the history of these post-war decades show an emerging trend: a relationship was developing between the voluntary agencies and governmental bodies that was sometimes tense, especially with regard to money; children were no longer objectified but respected and central to discussions; and Christian agencies regarded their faith as an ethos or backdrop to their activity rather than as the primary reason for the work itself. Church based agencies worked with both a Christian ethos and accommodated new legislation and social work practices. This accommodation was vital if the work was to continue and became mandatory once government passed legislation requiring all adoption agencies to be inspected and regulated. Oversight passed out of the hands of Christian people and into the hands of the state. The growth of statutory adoption agencies was an inevitable consequence of these developments.

3.1.3 Local Authority Adoption Agencies

After the first legislation was passed, state oversight for adoption matters rested with

²⁰² Rose, op. cit., 286.

²⁰³ Ibid., 285.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 285.

²⁰⁵ <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/whoweare/vision.jsp> (accessed 23 October, 2003).

the Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children. The Horsburgh Committee met prior to the Adoption of Children (Regulation) Act 1939 and found that:

Although it is better to secure the adoption of children into good homes than to place them in institutions, the methods of the societies which do this work had been called into question. Some societies have dispensed with home visits and personal interviews, medical reports on children are sometimes inadequate, hostels for children 'returned' after the probationary period are inadequate, and many adoptions have not been legalized.²⁰⁶

Vital regulation of adoption agencies was performed by governmental bodies yet local authorities themselves did not register as adoption agencies. Local authorities followed on from the traditional work of the Poor Law Guardians and arranged for children to be 'boarded out' or fostered. The Hurst Committee made its recommendations before the passing of the Adoption Act 1958. It strongly advocated 'that local authorities were empowered to place for adoption children who were not in their care under the Children Act 1948, and that for this purpose local authorities should be subject to regulations similar to those applying to adoption societies.'²⁰⁷ The Adoption Act 1958 thus acted to consolidate the role of local authorities as both provider of fostering and adoption services. It finally became mandatory for local authorities to provide an adoption service in the Adoption Act 1976.

In 1970, one legal commentator noted that 'the social services provided by Local Authorities have been developed almost entirely at random during the past eighty years.'²⁰⁸ The Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970 attempted to minimise duplication of effort and reduce the number of separate groups offering services to families and children. These structural changes were coincident with a dramatic reduction in the numbers of babies available for adoption, as the full impact of widespread use of contraception and the Abortion Act 1967 became apparent. Gradually the children available for adoption became older and their needs more complex to accommodate.

The Departmental Committee were highly critical of the fostering and adoption system provided, especially concerning matters of custody since 'the people making the decision are a fluctuating body of councillors none of whom possesses any qualifications or experience in child care.'²⁰⁹ They advocated training and specialism in this work for social workers and those on social service committees alike. In the early 1970s they made

²⁰⁶ Abstract from Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children records June 1937, <http://www.bopcris.ac.uk/bopall/ref8727.html> (accessed February 17, 2007).

²⁰⁷ O.M. Stone, 'The Adoption Act, 1958', *Modern Law Review* 22, no. 5 (1959), 500-510.

²⁰⁸ Jose Harris, 'Local Authority Social Services Act 1970', *Modern Law Review* 33, no. 5 (1970), 530-534.

²⁰⁹ Christine Davies, 'The Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children and the Tug of War Cases', *Modern Law Review* 36, no. 3 (1973), 245-259.

recommendations that 'local authorities are to ensure that a complete adoption service exists in their area. There are to be no independent placements – only a Local Authority or a voluntary society may place a child for adoption.'²¹⁰ Local Authorities social services departments became much more involved with childcare issues and the support of all 'looked after' children, the majority of whom would never be freed for adoption.

Several pieces of legislation (Children Act 1975, Adoption Act 1976, Children Act 1989) placed stress on decisions being taken in 'the best interests of the child.' Fundamental to the implementation of this principle is the need to discern 'best interests'. Many different aspects of development may need to be assessed: health, education, welfare, family circumstances and so on. The prevailing wisdom of how best to nurture a child at the end of the twentieth century was for a child to be kept in the care of birth parent(s) and to minimise the intervention of social services. High profile cases where this principle failed added to the administrative and practical 'duty of care' burden already experienced by social workers. It became more difficult for Local Authorities to offer experienced social workers to adoption work where the needs for child protection and other responsibilities were urgent and critical. On the other hand, voluntary adoption agencies continued to specialise and grow in expertise in adoption work.

The availability of voluntary adoption agencies in some areas of the country led to a new way of working. The Local Authority could meet the needs of children who needed fostering services and place some children for adoption. Other children remained 'looked after'. The voluntary adoption agencies were able to offer a pool of approved adopters to a Local Authority who would collaborate in the matching process prior to adoption. These relationships became the norm in many areas and occasionally all adoption work was contracted out to voluntary agencies under a service level agreement. This offered financial resources to voluntary agencies, the majority of whom were Christian in foundation if not name.

3.2 Social Work and Social Workers

Alongside the development of adoption legislation described in the previous section, and often preceding it in reality, practical work in adoption by social workers has changed dramatically in the past fifty years. The source of change was sometimes political when different governments enforced their policies and sometimes a reaction to events, such as media pressure after specific child-related incidents.

Changes in governmental policy with regard to adoption are discussed in **section 3.2.1**. I will argue that political ignorance has generated some policies that have been detrimental to adoption work. Adoption social work itself (**3.2.2**) began with Christian

²¹⁰ Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children, Recommendations 3 and 13, cited in Davies, op. cit.

initiatives. Initially, social workers naturally embedded Christian principles of care and respect for humankind into their code of ethics. Latterly, careful detachment from all religious influences is the emphasis. **Section 3.2.3** addresses dilemmas that can arise when attempting to separate social work from religion.

3.2.1 Governmental Policy

The Government will:

- invest £66.5m over three years to secure sustained improvements in adoption services

- set a target of increasing by 40% by 2004/05 the number of looked after children adopted, by improving councils' practices on adoption, and aim to exceed this by achieving, if possible, a 50% increase.²¹¹

Social policymaking is part of a political process. Social workers work for Local Authorities or voluntary agencies and have the task of implementing government policy. Social welfare, however, is dependent on both policy, individual actions, and on the activities of non-state institutions (trade unions, churches, charities etc.).²¹² In Great Britain, the impact of religious groups upon social policy formulation has been considerable. Individuals such as Butler, Wilberforce and Shaftesbury made a significant impact, as did organisations such as Barnardo's, NCH and the Children's Society.

Attempts to address welfare issues date back to sixteenth century Poor Laws and the emphasis that each parish should care for its own poor people. The Poor Law system eventually demised in 1948, precipitated by the Local Government Act of 1929 that handed responsibility to the Local Authorities.²¹³ Following on from this, the Children Act 1948 had a significant impact upon the support of children in the care system. It created departments of professional social workers who specialised in childcare issues and worked with families.²¹⁴ Before the 1970s, many of those who worked as social workers with families and children were Christians. At this time, much of social work law, policy, and practice promoted Christianity 'and its institutions.'²¹⁵ These included children's homes, adoption agencies, homes for unmarried mothers and so on.

During the period of the Conservative government (1979-97), there were a number of serious child abuse scandals. Social workers had to rebut doubts about their adequacy as a

²¹¹ Adoption – A New Approach, A White Paper (London: HMSO, 2000), <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm50/5017/5017-03.htm> (accessed 21 February, 2007).

²¹² Michael Hill, *Understanding Social Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 7th ed. 2003), 6-7.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹⁵ Kieran O'Hagan, 'Culture, Cultural Identity, and Cultural Sensitivity in Child and Family Social Work', *Child and Family Social Work*, 4 (1999), 269-281.

professional group.²¹⁶ Major legislation for children emerged during this period, notably the Children Act 1989 which established the ‘paramountcy principle’ that determined that all decisions affecting children were to be driven by *their* ‘best interests’ rather than those of any affected adult. Since 1997 the Labour government has introduced institutional changes that have separated the overall provision for children between the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health.²¹⁷ Latterly, County Children’s Services Departments oversee a multidisciplinary approach to child welfare matters and facilitate consultation with education and health professions when specific case conferences are needed.

Aside from the issues of care for each child, central government has delegated regulation and funding to the Local Authorities as they implement government policies. The implementation of policy has varied from one Authority to another. In work with ‘looked after’ children, some Local Authorities have channelled resources towards family preservation. They may have taken a strategic decision to avoid the need for adoption where possible. Other Local Authorities have regarded long-term fostering more negatively and have worked towards adoption more readily.²¹⁸ These fundamental differences in ideology about adoption have led to a lack of consistency in implementing adoption policy, over the years.

Variation in implementing national policies also generates inconsistent approaches when assessment is made of any religious conviction amongst prospective adopters. Following the lead in American politics for using voluntary and faith-based groups for welfare work, Prime Minister Tony Blair strongly argued for co-operation with faith-groups.²¹⁹ Despite ‘reservations’ from some local authorities about involving religious-based organisations in welfare work, Mr Blair conceded that his government had ‘been too suspicious’ and ‘that it was a “misguided and outdated set of values” that demanded a straight choice between state and voluntary aid.’²²⁰ Amongst the strengths of faith groups were ‘far greater originality, sensitivity and initiative than government departments.’²²¹ Whilst this statement seemed set to strengthen the contribution of faith-based groups to social welfare work, there is no evidence to suggest greater levels of support or resources for these

²¹⁶ Hill, *op. cit.*, 40-1.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹⁸ Derek Clifford, Beverley Burke, Norman Goodwin, Lindsay Amuzu and Simon Ward, ‘Barriers to Adoption? Variations in the Use of Adoption by Local Authorities’, *Adoption and Fostering* 27, no.3 (2003), 20-30.

²¹⁹ Stephen Bates, ‘Blair Puts His Faith in Religious Partners’, *The Guardian* (30 March, 2001) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianpolitics/story/0,465450,00.html> (accessed 9 April, 2005).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

groups.

Whilst policy makers prescribe activities to ‘public servants’, in practice such prescriptions ‘convey discretionary powers to field-level staff.’²²² Various professional and personal dilemmas are apparent (see **section 3.2.3**). There are issues of professional autonomy, when dealing with individual clients, as opposed to policy-based concerns. This is highlighted when policies are accompanied by targets. In adoption, for example, there have been targets for the numbers of new adopters to be approved in a year and the length of time taken to approve any applicant. Some social workers have worked towards these targets in ways that are perceived as over zealous, intervening to remove babies from birth mothers in ways that are allegedly premature.²²³ Ideological opposition to adoption by some social workers also affects results.²²⁴

Following the White Paper published at the end of 2000, the Department of Health used its ‘Performance Assessment Framework’ to establish targets of care and costs for, amongst others, looked after children. In adoption work funding was geared to targets. For example, the London Borough of Bromley and the Government made a Local Public Service Agreement with a target for eighteen children to be adopted from care in 2004/05 and an incentive of £0.5 million additional funding if this target was exceeded, which it was.²²⁵ Additional funding for children’s services is always welcomed, yet the overhasty placement of a child with unsuitable foster carers or adoptive parents can have devastating consequences for the child. Adoption ‘disruption’, the term used when a placement breaks down, is an alarming and increasing presence in this field. Such was the pressure on this particular policy, whether by adverse media attention or lobbying by social work professionals and adoption agencies, that the Department for Communities and Local Government quietly released draft new ‘indicators’ in October 2007 that removed the adoption target with effect from April 2008.²²⁶

At the end of 2008, the Institute for Public Policy Research published a report in response to ‘a growing estrangement between the faith communities and a society increasingly characterised by individualism, cultural diversity and various kinds of

²²² Hill, *op. cit.*, 95.

²²³ For example, Ben Leapman, ‘Mother calls social workers’ removal of her baby inhuman’, *Sunday Telegraph* (22 July, 2007).

²²⁴ Clifford et al, *op. cit.*

²²⁵ London Borough of Bromley, Public Service Agreement – Adoption, http://www.bromley.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/adoption/psa_adoption.htm (accessed 17 February, 2007).

²²⁶ Department of Communities and Local Government, *National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions – Draft for Consultation, Annex C2: Children and Young People* (London: HMSO, 2007).

fragmentation.²²⁷ In a series of essays by leading religious figures, the report endeavoured to promote dialogue that was ‘more sensitive and less polemical’ between faith communities and government and move away from a focus on supposed fundamental disagreement towards areas of connection and mutual benefit. Not surprisingly, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor’s paper included references to adoption policy, citing it as an example of a ‘more aggressive and well-organised secularism’. This thesis is an attempt to encourage engagement between the faith community and others in adoption work, in the light of feelings about ‘intolerance and suspicion’.

This section has argued that national adoption policy in the past century was initially driven by Christian individuals and latterly dominated by political decisions that were not always well-conceived. Since family matters affect all people, public policy in this area is also influenced by what happens in society, especially when children are affected. This is shown by the effect of child abuse scandals or widespread concern about social worker interventions. The next section moves on to look at how social work as a profession rises to the challenge of moral and ethical decisions.

3.2.2 Social Workers and Ethical Practice

*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at points where people interact with their environments.*²²⁸

This definition of the social work profession was written in the past six years. It was, no doubt, influenced by the critical and fluctuating opinions of the general population over the past few decades. The definition includes many expressions of care for people that align with Christian values. The professional statement is humanitarian. The corresponding Christian action is one copied from the life and work of Christ. This section looks at the interaction of social work and faith with particular reference to behaviour and ethics. I will argue that whilst Christianity and social work are doing the same task there is a perception of difference and conflict. Mistrust and lack of knowledge do not foster engagement.

Since World War Two influential, professional groups involved in academia and the media have spoken for a ‘functional secularism’ that favours a ‘relativistic, liberal, or

²²⁷ Zaki Cooper and Guy Lodge (eds.), *Faith in the Nation: Religion, Identity and the Public Realm in Britain Today* (London: ippr, 2008)

²²⁸ British Association of Social Workers (BASW), *The Code of Ethics for Social Work* (Birmingham: Venture Press, 2002), 1.

progressive set of morals and values and heterodox religious beliefs.²²⁹ A dominant secular paradigm has developed in social work. David Hodge has argued that social work has neglected evangelical Christianity in particular, both in acknowledging its historical input and belittling its potential to have a valid role.²³⁰ The same neglect may be true for Roman Catholics, their doctrinal stance and consequent social action.

The radical social work movement of the 1970s, with its emancipatory thrust, left behind it both an understanding that being a member of society involved some compromise of human freedom and a keen desire to rid society of discrimination and prejudice. The childcare and mental health tragedies that were heavily publicised in the 1970s and 1980s forced social services to re-evaluate what was possible in effecting change in human lives. Social work experienced its own crisis of conscience. According to Graham Bowpitt it appeared that ‘without far-reaching claims to effect personal and social change, social work has little that is distinctive to offer.’²³¹ The problems of these decades generated an unhelpful and negative stereotype for social workers; one that has been difficult to move away from.

In an attempt to formalise some of its foundational guidelines for working with people, a set of social work ethics were drawn up in 1975. Though they have only existed in most professions in relatively recent years, Sarah Banks claims that such a code can be thought of as being a defining feature of a profession.²³² The code is the formulation of distinctive attitudes that can characterise the culture of a professional group. The constituent elements of the code make claims about conduct and behaviour, while setting standards for practice that may serve to protect social workers from external criticism. These are positive attributes. On the other hand, Banks argues that the existence of a code assumes a consensus between the public and professionals that is being challenged by both the values of the users and the individual values of the professionals.²³³ Inevitably such codes cannot be ‘morally or ethically neutral’ since it expresses the ‘occupational/professional, ideological and moral aspirations of their creators.’²³⁴ Nonetheless the leading professional body representing social workers in Britain has continued to develop these codes.

²²⁹ David R. Hodge, ‘Does Social Work Oppress Evangelical Christians? A “New Class” Analysis of Society and Social Work’, *Social Work*, 47, no. 4 (2002), 401-414.

²³⁰ Graham Bowpitt, ‘Working with Creative Creatures: Towards a Christian Paradigm for Social Work Theory, with Some Practical Implications’, *British Journal of Social Work*, 30 (2002), 349-364.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2nd ed. 2001), 84.

²³³ Ibid., 107, 111.

²³⁴ Ian Butler, ‘Critical Commentary: A Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research’, *British Journal of Social Work* no. 32 (2002), 239-248; Ian Butler, ‘A Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research’, *electronic Library for Social Care* (eLSC), <http://www.elsc.org.uk/socialcareresource/tswr/seminar6/butler.htm> (accessed 28 August, 2005).

The original code of ethics underwent a series of revisions. The 1996 version restated that the primary objective of social work was ‘for the protection of clients.’²³⁵ This objective changed in 2002 and became a code ‘to express the values and principles which are integral to social work, and to give guidance on ethical practice.’²³⁶ The 2002 code committed itself to five values and principles: human dignity and worth, social justice, service to humanity, integrity and competence. These principles can be easily endorsed by the Churches, who would find them to be based on inherently Christian concepts of regard and value for all humankind, as part of God’s creation. This moves the discussion on to how social workers interact with people with a faith, as guided by the code of ethics.

The code includes notes about ethical practice. Social workers ‘will give priority to maintaining the best interests of service users.’ Only in matters of ‘protection of others,’ situations which are ‘exceptional,’ will those interests be overridden.²³⁷ It may be necessary to declare a conflict of interest in order that a professional relationship should not be prejudiced. With reference to adoption, social workers are increasingly aware that they are considered to be in positions of ‘power’ and judgement by those being assessed.²³⁸ The relationship between the social worker making the assessment and the prospective adopter(s) is critical. By working within the code, the social work profession is able to stress that workers can be detached from their own strongly held values when assessing the values of others. Faith and religious practice is one area of discussion where an accurate understanding of involvement of the prospective adopters, by the assessing social worker, is in ‘the best interests of the child’. Issues of religion, race and culture are not easily separated, however.

At the turn of the millennium, the social work profession received criticism for being tied to ‘narrow sociologically-driven categories of race, gender and disability.’²³⁹ This view went beyond ‘political correctness’. The social work profession was perceived as having its own ideology.²⁴⁰ Issues of religion, race and culture are discussed in an adoption assessment, to respect the wishes of the birth family and the needs of the child. Matching in adoption can be a highly complex decision especially where multiple identities intertwine as they do

²³⁵ Banks, op. cit., 86; David Watson (ed.) *A Code of Ethics for Social Work: The Second Step* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 1.

²³⁶ BASW, op. cit., 1.

²³⁷ Jon Bolton, ‘Code of Ethics for Social Work’, *British Association of Social Workers* (25/04/2003), <http://www.basw.co.uk/printpage.php?articleId=2> (accessed 18 July, 2005).

²³⁸ British Association for Adoption and Fostering, *Assessment: Points to Consider for Those Assessing Potential Adopters and Foster Carers* (London: BAAF, 1998)

²³⁹ Graham McBeath and Stephen A. Webb, ‘Virtue Ethics and Social Work: Being Lucky, Realistic and Not Doing One’s Duty’, *British Journal of Social Work* 32 (2002), 1015-1036.

²⁴⁰ Hodge (2002), op. cit.

when religion, race and cultural factors are all present. In a review of the past 10 years, *Adoption and Fostering*, the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) journal for adoption professionals, has covered issues of religion and faith very rarely (see **chapter 6**). David Hodge criticised the profession for its lack of understanding about religion and faith: ‘Social work is losing touch with numerous ethnic and religious minority groups, and unless the profession deconstructs the ideology that informs it, it will be unable to provide services to or facilitate dialogue.’²⁴¹ He was particularly critical about the misunderstandings that social workers had about evangelical Christian beliefs. Combining these commentaries produces the view that whilst the core values are beyond criticism from user or professional alike, there is a case for more understanding about issues to do with religion and faith.

This section has argued that the code of ethics for social workers promotes the principle of professional detachment and objectivity. This should serve to foster an engagement with all parties involved in adoption work. Yet the nature of the objectivity required when it comes to assessing the religious and faith aspects of adoption work are not adequately covered by either the code of ethics or existing research. The next section pursues this idea further.

3.2.3 Social Workers and Religion

Professional social workers are trained to know how to respond to allegations of abuse or other offences, situations with which the worker has probably had no direct personal experience. In relating to matters of religion, however, if a social worker has no personal experience, they may additionally have had no special training.²⁴² Contrary to popular opinion, research shows that the general population has a much higher rate of belief, considers spirituality a major dimension in their lives and is more likely to be affiliated to religious bodies than do those in the ‘helping field.’²⁴³ David Hodge cites a range of surveys that indicate that an overall majority of social workers (57%) had ‘limited or no involvement in any organised religion or spiritual group’ and that they were perceived (75% and more) to be less religious by evangelical Christians in particular.²⁴⁴ Within the general population of either the United States or Great Britain, ‘belief’ or spirituality is highly nominal when statistics are examined. In Great Britain, census data shows that the category

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Margaret Crompton, *Children, Spirituality, Religion and Social Work* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), xiii.

²⁴³ Bruce Stewart, ‘Spirituality and Culture: Challenges for Competent Practice in Social Care’, in Mary Nash and Bruce Stewart (eds.), *Spirituality and Social Care: Contributing to Personal and Community Well-being* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2002), 58

²⁴⁴ Hodge (2002), op. cit.

‘Christians’ represent 72% of the population but those attending churches and active in their faith are far fewer.²⁴⁵

According to Margaret Crompton, training courses and academic curricula for social workers and others concerned with the care and welfare of children have not encouraged thinking about spirituality or faith.²⁴⁶ This is something that is explored in this thesis (see **chapters 5 and 6**). There are several reasons for including spirituality on social work courses: an understanding of each social worker’s personal approach to spirituality and religion; the need to be knowledgeable about a client’s religious, or spiritual worldview; and, the client’s right to have a culturally competent social worker.²⁴⁷ Gathering the views of a number of different scholars, Hodge finds that the Christian ethos fosters respect for human rights and tends to promote fundamental freedoms.²⁴⁸ Including more teaching about faith and spirituality would receive a welcome from many people in the faith community, irrespective of the specific belief of one group. More teaching would obviously benefit social workers with no personal engagement with faith.

Pragmatically, Margaret Crompton acknowledges the impossibility of all practitioners being familiar with the religion of every child with whom they might come into contact. She stresses the importance of access to information and advice.²⁴⁹ Professional detachment in this context means being aware ‘of both the intention of the narrator and the interpretations of the audience.’²⁵⁰ Narration and interpretation are special skills when dealing with children, indeed it is possible for birth parents to make special requests about the religious environment within which adoptive parents nurture their child when they discuss the future with adoption social workers. This further emphasises the broad need for education and awareness about religion and faith in social work training

Social workers face ethical dilemmas and tensions in their work with children, especially in the area of when to intervene and permanently remove a child, versus preserving and supporting the first family. In adoption work, the Children Act 1989 exacerbated such tensions.²⁵¹ Setting the child’s welfare as paramount prompts the question ‘what is best?’ A few potential outcomes will be contentious.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ci/nugget.asp?id=954> (accessed 3 September, 2005).

²⁴⁶ Crompton (1998), op. cit., 27.

²⁴⁷ Mary Nash, ‘Spirituality and Social Work in a Culturally Appropriate Curriculum’, in Nash and Stewart (eds.), op. cit., 137.

²⁴⁸ David R. Hodge, ‘Advocating for the forgotten human right: Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Religious Freedom’, *International Social Work* 49, no. 4 (2006), 431-443.

²⁴⁹ Crompton (1998), op. cit., 78.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 225.

²⁵¹ Stan Houston, ‘Moral Consciousness and Decision-Making in Child and Family Social Work’, *Adoption and Fostering* 27, no. 3 (2003), 61-70.

Both Graham Bowpitt and Terry Philpott have argued that the Christian faith can engage in complex decision-making because it has the ability to hold diverse views in tension. Bowpitt asserts that social work theory is heavily influenced by a secular narrative.²⁵² This might suggest that Christian groups would object to the thrust of arguments based on such theories, which is contrary to the point he is making. Philpott claims that ‘Christianity leaves the door fully open to the examination of conflicts, the challenge of new ideas and the creative tension that may be encountered upon the sure foundation of faith. Since social work is so often concerned with both/and answers rather than either/or questions, the values and philosophy of Christianity have as much place there as any other view.’²⁵³ It is amidst the possibly contentious areas of debate in adoption work, that much may be assumed in error especially when opinions are too-readily given labels that polarise and separate, such as secular and Christian.

Social workers who are themselves religious have inevitably found themselves in some compromising situations. It is difficult for social workers in secular agencies, working under statutory and professional constraints to honour their personal faith and their employer.²⁵⁴ These people have a recognisable responsibility to their employer. John Gladwin has written that this duty extends into society itself: ‘social workers have a duty to the organisation of the profession and from that to the organisation of our social order, which is responsible not only for the provision of the service we offer, but also, to a degree, for the conditions of life which give rise to our work.’²⁵⁵ It becomes apparent that each individual must appraise the contribution that brings about the greater good. This is a truly personal, ethical dilemma.

This section argues that despite social work and religion having a complicated history of interaction in the past few decades, they both place basic human rights and respect at the core of the service offered. These emphases accord with the thrust of many religious tenets, not least Christian respect for humankind. Understanding matters of faith in practice and not just concept, is fundamental to an ability to make a proper assessment of any client’s worldview. In a population with only nominal religious views, knowledge of faith and religion cannot be assumed to be innate to professional social workers. Deeper understanding about different perspectives can facilitate genuinely open debate. Engaging in

²⁵² Bowpitt, op. cit.

²⁵³ Terry Philpot, ‘Introduction’, in Terry Philpot, (ed.), *Social Work: A Christian Perspective* (Tring: Lion, 1986), 10.

²⁵⁴ Bowpitt, op. cit.; John Gladwin, ‘Good Social Organisation: Some Hard Questions’, in Philpot (ed.), op. cit., 41.

²⁵⁵ Gladwin, ‘Good Social Organisation’, in Philpot (ed.), op. cit., 47.

an open dialogue about how decisions are made by different adoption panels considering different cases, has the potential to dispel many myths about the moral and theological positions of those working in Christian adoption agencies and those working for Local Authorities.

For many Christian people, social workers and otherwise, complex dilemmas between different ideals came into stark relief when the Government decided to embark upon adoption reform. These debates were concluded with the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

3.3 The Adoption and Children Act 2002

*Under the new law, essentially only the legal concept of adoption – the irrevocable legal transfer of a child from the birth to the adoptive family with the consent of the birth parent(s), or a court decision to dispense with that consent – remains unaltered.*²⁵⁶

One year after the Adoption Act 1976 was fully implemented in 1988, a review body was established to revisit adoption law. In 1992, the Review of Adoption Law was published with the purpose of making adoption more child-centred and better supported, including a need to regulate inter-country adoption, a practice becoming more common as a reaction to the lack of availability of babies and very young children in this country. This was followed by two Conservative government White Papers on adoption: *Adoption: The Future* (1993) and *Adoption – A Service for Children* (1996), paving the way for widespread public and political debate. Controversial draft adoption legislation proposed for 1996 was abandoned amidst debate on family values surrounding the Family Law Act 1996.²⁵⁷

In 1997, there was a change of government. In the same year in the United States, the Adoption and Safe Families Act came onto the statute books, a law that undoubtedly had an influence upon the legislation that was subsequently presented by the Labour government at the end of the decade. The first piece of adoption legislation passed was the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999. Following the inquiry into child abuse within some Welsh Children's Homes and Dame Butler-Sloss's identification of 'drift in care' as the potentially damaging outcome of prolonged periods in care, attention was drawn to adoption as a strategy for removing some children from the system.²⁵⁸ The Prime Minister initiated a high-profile review of adoption matters in 2000.

²⁵⁶ Caroline Ball, 'The Adoption and Children Act 2002: A Critical Examination', *Adoption and Fostering* 29, no.2 (2005), 6-17.

²⁵⁷ Caroline Bridge and Heather Swindells, *Adoption: The Modern Law* (Bristol: Jordan Publishing, 2003), 24.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

The White Paper *Adoption: A New Approach* was published in December 2000, containing eighty-five recommendations. These were incorporated into the draft Adoption and Children Bill that had its first reading in March 2001. Alongside plans for considerable financial investment, these recommendations included specific targets for increasing the number of adopters and reducing the number of looked after children. Modernising the legal framework included establishing a national adoption register of all children waiting for adoption and the provision of adoption allowances for adopters needing financial support. Access to post-adoption support recognised the ongoing needs of adopted children and their families. All those involved in the adoption process, from birth families onwards and including the court system, were to be part of a consultation about new National Adoption Standards.

The proposals were not without controversy. Media attention was drawn towards both the Prime Minister and the Junior Minister for Health, Paul Boateng.²⁵⁹ Boateng expressed concerns over issues of race, age, class and smoking being a fixation of social workers despite BAAF evidence to the contrary.²⁶⁰

After a decade of White Papers, consultation and draft Bills, the need for new legislation was overwhelming. Adoption was no longer a provider of babies for the childless but a provider of stability and permanence for children no longer living with birth parents, many of who would otherwise languish in care for protracted periods. The Adoption and Children Act was passed in November 2002. Overall its key themes were summarised as: identity, flexibility, fairness and well-resourced practice experience.²⁶¹

In many instances, aspects of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 were uncontroversial. There was recognition that much consolidation in legislation affecting children was overdue. Christian people could not object to many plans that would increase the welfare provision and future stability of many looked after children.

As far as adoptive parents were concerned, improvements proposed included post-adoption support from Local Authority Adoption Services, including financial assistance where appropriate, before during and after the adoption of children. Adoption affects a large number of stepfamilies. Legal confusion for this situation was replaced with a law stating that parental responsibility can be acquired by a stepparent, without adoption by consent of both birth parents of a child. The parental responsibility of the other birth parent is not

²⁵⁹ Caroline Ball, 'Regulating Inclusivity: Reforming Adoption Law for the 21st Century', *Child and Family Social Work* 7 (2002), 285-296.

²⁶⁰ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Getting 'a grip': New Labour and the Reform of the Law on Child Adoption', *Critical Social Policy* 22, no. 2 (2002), 174-202.

²⁶¹ Ball (2002), *op. cit.*, 285-296.

removed nor are inheritance rights affected. Increasing numbers of children were being brought into this country by adoptive parents and the new Act tightened legislation that applied to these cases. Overseas adoption will only be recognised if the overseas country meets certain prescribed criteria. The Act made restrictions on bringing children into the country with a view to adoption, without adherence to specified procedures. It strengthened safeguards concerning advertising and the involvement of adoption agencies. Prospective adopters must undergo the same procedures as apply to children adopted in this country.

The Act also paid due attention to the needs of birth families. The issue of 'placement with consent' was addressed where consent of *both* birth parents is required before an adoption order can be made. This offered an unmarried father, one registered as the child's legal father, an opportunity to be included in decision making about his child. On the other hand, if no birth parent could be found or the birth parent(s) was incapable of giving agreement, the Act made provision for the court to decide if the advantages to the child of becoming part of the new family are significantly greater than any alternative option for caring for the child.

Aspects of contact between adoptive families and birth families were also addressed in the new legislation. It was recognised that this should be an evolving arrangement and that the court having oversight of the child's needs should have the right to consider proposals for contact during placement and after adoption as two separate arrangements. Some aspects of contact needed careful monitoring and the Act established a new role for special guardians where an adoption order can be made to give limited parental responsibility to certain individuals and thus maintain relations with, say, birth parents but exclude them from some areas of responsibility. Information about birth families to an adopted person or about adopted people to a birth family member would be accessed through consultation with an adoption agency who could advise and guide affected individuals appropriately. This built on the Adoption Contact Register established under the Children Act 1989.

These points concerning adoptive parents, birth families and issues surrounding contact were uncontentious, arising as they did from well-informed adoption practice developing in this country and abroad. The ethical concerns that did cause debate both in the media and in the Churches were those affecting child welfare directly and adults who wanted to adopt children. These two areas require particular attention.

3.3.1 The Welfare of Children Being Adopted

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 stated that decision-making in adoption matters had the child's welfare as the paramount consideration. This included minimising delays and intervention and encompassing the child's wishes, specific circumstances and existing relationships. On the surface, few people would criticise this declaration. For example, prospective Christian adopters have a desire to care for children in a way that is encouraged by Christ's teaching. Their hope for the well-being of a child will be evident irrespective of their ultimate suitability for the task ahead. The specific implications of the Act were, however, far-reaching.

The relevant legal document when discussing parenting, child welfare and adoption was the Local Authority Circular: *Adoption – Achieving the Right Balance*.²⁶² This underlined the Adoption Act 1976 which made it a statutory requirement to have regard for the wishes of birth parents for the religious upbringing of the child. It stated that a 'child's ethnic origin, culture, language and religion are significant factors to be taken into account when adoption agencies are considering the most appropriate placement for a child.'²⁶³ The Circular confirmed that 'placement with a family of similar ethnic origin and religion is very often most likely to meet the child's needs as fully as possible.'²⁶⁴ According to the National Minimum Standards for Adoption, the child's 'ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.'²⁶⁵

Adoption, however, cannot be refused because of a religious difference between applicants and the birth mother alone, and where religious heritage is mixed it is acknowledged that a good match with the adopters' religious observance will rarely be possible.²⁶⁶ A shortage of adopters may be one reason why a religious match could not be respected.²⁶⁷

Many of these statements are pragmatic and not contentious. What exercises prospective adopters and their assessing social workers, however, is how welfare is delivered to a child within the new home when the child's religious background is not specified and the prospective adopters' worldview is defined. Within the National Adoption Standards,

²⁶² Local Authority Circular (98)20, *Adoption – Achieving the Right Balance* (London: HMSO, 1998)

²⁶³ Ibid., para. 12.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., para. 13.

²⁶⁵ Department of Health, *Adoption: National Minimum Standards* (London: HMSO, 2003)

²⁶⁶ Fergus Smith, Roy Stewart and Deborah Cullen, *Adoption Now: Current Law Including Regulations, Guidance and Standards* (London: BAAF, 2003), 3.

²⁶⁷ LAC (98)20, op. cit., para. 19.

religion is no ground for ‘automatic exclusion’ of prospective adopters. It states that ‘while ethnicity and religion were recognised as important, the quality of relationship with the prospective new family should also be emphasised.’²⁶⁸ For many Christian adopters, ‘the quality of relationship’ offered is as much a part of their faith as any other aspect of parenting. How the interweaving of faith and lifestyle is understood is critical to the adoption assessment process. Social workers and adoption panels can wield much power and influence when making this judgment. Questions they may rightly wish to ask include: Is it in the best interests of a child to be brought up by these people? Is it in the best interests of the child to be brought up in a Christian household? The sense that being raised in a religious household might in anyway jeopardise the welfare of a child is open to debate, especially if a religious outlook is viewed negatively.

3.3.2 Issues of Adult Eligibility to Adopt Children

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 confirmed the Government’s intention to expand the range of adopters. The Act stated that applications might be made jointly by a married or unmarried couple, or by a single person. This clause enabled cohabiting heterosexual or homosexual couples to apply, in addition to a stepparent or partner of a child’s parent. The issue caused intense lobbying and debate from some religious and pressure groups. However, ‘sustained, well-articulated pressure from BAAF and almost all the leading child care organisations persuaded the Government’ to make changes.²⁶⁹

The ‘religious and pressure groups’ included the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christians, many of whom cited strong statistical evidence why co-habitation was an unstable relationship within which to raise children and why homosexual relationships were unsuitable. Strong feelings about these issues have not abated with the years and latterly, with the Equality Act 2007, more media attention has been drawn to the doctrinal stance of the Roman Catholic adoption agencies who refer applications from same-sex couples to other agencies, rather than assessing them in-house. At the heart of the matter, are views about what constitutes a ‘good’ family.

The Act permits adoption by a couple (relationship unspecified) or one person. They must be over the age of 21 years. Paragraph 45 of the Act addresses ‘suitability of adopters’:

1. Regulations... may make provision as to the matters to be taken into account by an adoption agency in determining, or making any report in respect of, the suitability of any persons to adopt a child.
2. In particular, the regulations may make provision for the purpose of

²⁶⁸ Department of Health, *Adoption: National Adoption Standards for England*, op. cit.

²⁶⁹ Ball (2005), 6-17.

securing that, in determining the suitability of a couple to adopt a child, proper regard is had to the need for stability and permanence in their relationship.²⁷⁰

The key words are: suitability, stability and permanence. These words carry different emphases for Christian people than for those with no faith. *Permanence*, for example, would always be indicated by marriage. Marriage would be seen as indicating *stability*. This couple would be seen as *suitable* parents because of their evident commitment to each other and, if they were childless, they were nonetheless heterosexual and in such relationships children may be born naturally. It is for these reasons, views held especially dear by Roman Catholic people, that some voluntary adoption agencies have found themselves unable to accept applications from couples who are not married. Until 2007, voluntary agencies have had the right to set their own eligibility criteria in the knowledge that this would exclude some applicants, applicants who would be referred to another agency.²⁷¹

In summary, the Act upholds assessment of applicants for reasons of suitability, stability and permanence, all of which are positive factors in relationships. The specific nature of some relationships divides Christian people. This creates an adoption environment that is confusing to many non-Christians, since some Christian adoption agencies have welcomed all applicants and some have not. These are not just denominational differences of opinion but also theological differences. Whether sociological factors, experience and reason should dominate the tradition of a Church or the importance of scripture in this debate, is an issue examined in **chapter 7**.

3.4 Adoption in the Twenty-First Century: The Issues for Christians

The issue of justice and fairness is central to adoption: justice and fairness for children who have no permanent homes, rather than fairness to prospective parents who cannot have children. This chapter has looked at how adoption work has developed over the past century as all those involved at national and local levels have strived to be just and fair for children and adults alike. Historically, the voices of adults have dominated adoption matters. Despite strong assertions that adoption work is now ‘in the best interests of the child’, adult voices continue to be heard. Adoption work has been subject to both political and popular trends. Christian adoption work has adapted to legal and professional changes, whilst also accepting decisions that are challenging to traditional opinions, though not always

²⁷⁰ *Adoption and Children Act 2002* (London: HMSO, 2002), para. 45.

²⁷¹ Smith et al, *op. cit.*, 87.

willingly or without comment. This chapter sets the contemporary context for the arguments made in the remainder of this thesis: arguments about the work of adoption agencies; about the nurture of children in a Christian home; about the assessment of religious parents and about the nature of the family.

Legislation in children's work and in adoption has typically lagged behind current trends in family life. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, society moved away from traditional lifestyles, values and institutions. Freedom of choice led to contraception, abortion, divorce and lack of interest in the institutional Church that represented traditional family life. Several high profile media cases concerning children who suffered at the hands of their abusive parents generated understandable bureaucracy for social work departments who now had child protection issues to add to an increased need for fostering services and mandatory adoption work. Family Placement Teams in Local Authorities are increasingly busy departments. Throughout these decades voluntary adoption agencies have always been able to claim greater levels of specific adoption experience and expertise than their Local Authority equivalents (see **chapter 4**).

Adoption agencies need to act within the law; this much is obvious. The Adoption and Children Act has introduced specific challenges. Is the way forward to accept the changes in child welfare and the eligibility to adopt children by unmarried couples? Is the way forward to defend traditional family structures? How should Christians contribute to contemporary adoption work when some core values are being challenged? Can Christians be distinctive in adoption work today?

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 have set the backdrop to the history, theology, social work practice and legislation that enable these questions to be answered. **Chapter 4** now addresses the work of Christian Adoption Agencies by exploring their ability to work within the legal system while still being true to their distinctiveness as Christian organisations. Following this **chapter 5** discusses the children who are at the centre of adoption: their spirituality; their identity as individuals; and, the potential of Christian parents to offer homes with a difference. The final two chapters look at adoption social work and how Christianity is assessed in the approval process (**chapter 6**), and lastly the issue raised by the Adoption and Children Act: how radical or how traditional should adoptive families be so that they work for 'the best interests of the child' (**chapter 7**).

4 Christian Adoption Agencies: Theory and Reality

*Agency: a business or an organization that provides a particular service especially on behalf of other businesses or organizations*²⁷²

The phrase ‘Christian Adoption Agency’ describes an organisation, a service, and a faith. The organisation is regulated by external authorities but authorised by the Church. It provides adoption services. In the contemporary situation, such agencies are spiritually, morally and financially accountable to the parent Church but primarily their work is determined by the influence, legal and financial, of secular authorities. In this chapter, I will argue that Christian Adoption Agencies already offer a distinctive service. They operate in a secular world and they do so with neither a pious exclusion of secular standards nor with an unconditional accommodation of them. The potential for Christian adoption agencies to be more effective practically and missiologically could exist if they had increased support from the Church. A theology of engagement can be used to examine where the work of these agencies align with all other adoption agencies and where certain aspects of the work are distinctive.

This is the first of four chapters that looks at areas of tension between Christian organisations, individuals and the adoption system. This chapter examines the role of the agency, others will address the needs of adopted children; the tensions and responsibilities of being an adoptive parent; and fourthly, challenges to the traditional concept of ‘family’ as it applies to adoption.

As described in **chapter 2**, the work of Christian childcare organisations was pioneering and hugely influential upon legislation and social work practice. Today’s Christian adoption agencies are still active and influential. There is a lingering question, however, of how much difference their Christian ‘identity’ makes to the way in which they work.

At the heart of effective Christian work is a sound theological footing. Using the ‘theology-in-action’ theological reflection tool, section **4.1** examines four constructions for a Christian agency: three with specific denominational heritages and one original idea using a theology of engagement (**4.1.4**). Having identified how a Christian adoption agency may exist in today’s legal and social framework, without unconditional acceptance of secular norms, the reality of today’s practice is critically compared to the new construction in section **4.2**. This will establish the current viability of the ‘new’ agency. Section **4.3** examines the future potential for Christian adoption agencies to make a distinctive contribution in

²⁷² http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7/index1a.pl (accessed 14 August, 2007).

outlook (4.3.1), professionalism (4.3.2) and faith (4.3.3). A concluding section (4.4) summarises the work that ultimately succeeds in placing children in new families.

4.1 Theological Patterns For Being a Christian Agency

Throughout history there has been an enduring problem of how to be faith-full in a faith-less environment. The perennial issue is whether involvement in society inevitably corrupts belief. For Churches involved in social action, operating options range from complete integration and acceptance of external standards to total separation and detachment from them. This section uses denominational emphases and histories to extract theological themes that can characterise different approaches to working with social welfare issues. These characterising themes are then used as a foundation to develop a new model of theological engagement that has a distinctive missiological emphasis (4.1.4).

4.1.1 Roman Catholicism: The Application of Church Teaching

*Religion and the reality of the past teach that the structure of social life, such as marriage and the family, the community and professional groups and the social relationships of personal property, are essential calls which secure man's freedom and, along with it, man's share in the progress of history. Hence, they cannot be tampered with and their essence cannot be the subject of arbitrary revision.*²⁷³

The sanctity of scripture and the teaching of church leaders have both contributed to the values and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. This applies most notably to matters dealing with marriage and the family. It extends to attitudes towards abortion, contraception and divorce. In the mindset of the Roman Catholic Church, those elements of society that are foundational to freedom and progress 'cannot be tampered with.' This attitude also works to restore 'the essential calls' that the wider population may abandon. The results can be seen in the proactive efforts of Catholic people in the social and political arena.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic teachings have developed into a consistent, social theory. From the founding of Caritas in 1897 to the establishing of CAFOD in 1961, Catholic people have organised themselves to provide relief, secure the dignity of the human person and to combat dehumanising poverty. This has been achieved through the direct involvement of the Church in areas beyond the church doors.

Catholic action is seen as applying the teaching of Christ to the social problems of the world. This is done through the Popes and the Bishops, as the Church's official teaching

²⁷³ Pius XII, Christmas Message (1956), cited in Rev C.C. Clump, *A Catholic's Guide to Social and Political Action* (Oxford: Catholic Social Guild, 4th ed. 1963), 10.

body. One of the primary vehicles for this emphasis is through the social encyclicals within which the ‘Popes emphasise social charity as the indispensable concomitant to social justice.’ Whilst this is not a specifically Catholic idea, ‘Catholics more than others have emphasised its place in social reform.’²⁷⁴ This is enacted in words, advocacy and speeches, and in practical activity, aid distribution and parish work.

Speaking in 1958, Pius XII said, ‘Men ought not to look on each other as strangers, rather they should consider themselves as members of one great family... The Christian is helpful to all, just as each member of the human body is there for the well-being of all the rest.’²⁷⁵ This was entirely consistent with the teaching of Leo XIII, nearly sixty years earlier, when he said:

If, as We desire with all Our heart, the highest possible peak of well being for society and its members is to be attained through fraternity or, as it is also called, universal solidarity, all minds must be united in the knowledge of Truth, all wills united in morality, and all hearts in the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ. But this union is attainable only by Catholic charity, and that is why Catholic charity alone can lead the people in the march of progress towards the ideal civilization.²⁷⁶

This sets out a clear, natural confidence in the validity of the calling for Roman Catholic people to charitable, loving work towards a shared morality.

Within the past 50 years, John Paul XXIII issued an encyclical with wide relevance to social teaching: *Mater et Magistra*. In this document, he addressed how the Church should relate to matters of state influence, especially with their ability to exercise any authority over the family and its conduct within society.

The contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error. True, if a family finds itself in exceeding distress, utterly deprived of the counsel of friends, and without any prospect of extricating itself, it is right that extreme necessity be met by public aid, since each family is a part of the commonwealth. In like manner, if within the precincts of the household there occur grave disturbance of mutual rights, public authority should intervene to force each party to yield to the other its proper due; for this is not to deprive citizens of their rights, but justly and properly to safeguard and strengthen them. But the rulers of the commonwealth must go no further; here, nature bids them stop.²⁷⁷

Only in ‘grave’ circumstances should the state intervene in family matters. John Paul contended that to do so in any other situation was unnatural.

²⁷⁴ Rev John F. Cronin, ‘The Catholic Approach to Social Action’, *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 10, no. 3 (1949), 152-158.

²⁷⁵ Cited in Clump, op. cit., 8.

²⁷⁶ Apostolic Letter to French Bishops by Pius X, *Notre Charge* (August 15, 1910), <http://www.fisheaters.com/apostolicmandate.html> (accessed 25 January, 2008).

²⁷⁷ *Rerum Novarum* (May, 1891), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html (accessed 25 January, 2008).

Building upon the principle that ‘individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution,’ John Paul wrote that Catholic social doctrine should be taught in all Catholic schools and added to the religious instruction provided by all parishes and the Association of the Lay Apostolate. ‘It must be spread by every modern means at our disposal: daily newspapers, periodicals, popular and scientific publications, radio and television.’²⁷⁸

The Church today is faced with an immense task: to humanize and to Christianize this modern civilization of ours. The continued development of this civilization, indeed its very survival, demand and insist that the Church do her part in the world. That is why, as We said before, she claims the co-operation of her laity. In conducting their human affairs to the best of their ability, they must recognize that they are doing a service to humanity, in intimate union with God through Christ, and to God's greater glory.²⁷⁹

In this way the Catholic Church explicitly formulated norms of conduct within society and would expect to do so through ‘penetration of and influence upon secular groups.’²⁸⁰ The Church stated that the service of Roman Catholic people within wider society would be a direct response to their faith and the teaching they received.

Of the five variants of operating within secular society that H. Richard Niebuhr cites in *Christ and Culture*, traditional Catholicism would be placed within the category ‘Christ above culture’ since it ‘suits those who would synthesize Christ and culture and then live at ease in an amalgamated world that gives a certain kind of allegiance to Jesus, but not a whither/or way. For them both/and rules.’²⁸¹ There is a double role for the Church within this view, as it acts as both a religious institution and a social organisation; it participates in liturgical and worship rituals and organises itself for social service.

This distinctive Christian teaching has a potential to lead Catholic leadership to clash with emerging ‘secular elites.’²⁸² It has been argued that the Catholic Church ‘has distanced itself from the Christ above politics model’ and this would be especially true in the past few decades.²⁸³ Where secular legislation is in direct contradiction to the Church’s teaching, as in the case of the necessity for adoption agencies to open their books to all adults regardless of marital status and sexual orientation, the Church becomes more radical and more akin to a ‘Christ against culture’ position. Yet there is a need for a strong expression of Christian

²⁷⁸ *Mater et Magistra* (May, 1961), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater_en.html (accessed 25 January, 2008).

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Cronin, op. cit.

²⁸¹ Martin E. Marty, ‘Foreword’ in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins/Harper San Francisco, 2001), xvii.

²⁸² Martin, David A., ‘Religion and Public Values: A Catholic-Protestant Contrast’, *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 4 (1985), 313-331.

²⁸³ Robert Benne, ‘Christians and Government,’ in Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 334.

values and doctrines; as Niebuhr says, ‘It must be given for its own sake, and because without it other Christian groups lose their balance.’²⁸⁴ The assertion of clear, Christian teaching about how to both think and work in areas of social responsibility is a highly valuable contribution to the Christian community as a whole.

One can interpret the Roman Catholic Church as applying canonical narrative theology to its teaching: God is in action through scripture and through his people. It is clear, that there is a need to restore society to the values set out in the Church’s teaching when there is a drift in standards and practice. There is also a clear responsibility for Catholic people to speak out and to offer active service in accordance with this teaching. This is a mandate for social and political action.

Roman Catholic social teaching is self-confident and theologically assertive. It is, therefore, seriously challenged by the requirement that the rules defining the engagement of the Church with the general population should be controlled by secular authorities.

4.1.2 The Church of England: A Serving Organisation

The Church of England has a complex history of engagement with social issues in the United Kingdom, heavily influenced by its role as the established church and theological tensions within itself. No one type of Christian engagement with welfare issues emerges. Social work in an Anglican context is distinct from that of the Roman Catholic Church inasmuch as if the latter is evident as action in obedience to church teaching, the former has ‘worked more through ad hoc, lay initiatives.’²⁸⁵ I would contend that these initiatives were embedded into the organisational structure of the church.

Lloyd Morrell, Bishop of Lewes, wrote about the founders of the Magdalen Hospital, who, in 1758:

...exhibited a humane and constructive approach to the problems in the social order which they were attempting to solve, and from the very first the “penitent prostitutes” who sought refuge in its walls were treated with respect and kindness and the whole regime exhibited, even from those early days, a reverence for human personality, even when degraded and depraved by vice.²⁸⁶

In the same book, John Hughes, Bishop of Croydon, wrote about the ‘pioneering work of the church’ in attending to the needs of the alcoholic.²⁸⁷ In reality both men were affirming the work conducted by a few passionate Christian individuals who happened to be Anglicans. Within these accounts are hints at the place of vocation that is a characteristic of

²⁸⁴ Niebuhr, op. cit., 68.

²⁸⁵ Martin (1985), op. cit.

²⁸⁶ J.H.L. Morrell, ‘Moral Welfare Work: A Sketch,’ in Peter Smith (ed.), *The Caring Church* (Derby: Peter Smith, 1964), 100.

²⁸⁷ John Hughes, ‘The Church and the Alcoholic,’ in Smith (ed.), op. cit., 51.

Methodism's engagement with issues of social responsibility (see 4.1.3).

In 1959, seventy per cent of Moral Welfare work was with unmarried parents. Specifically, money was paid by Local Authorities to Diocesan Moral Welfare Councils for work with unmarried mothers. The work involved both 'rehabilitation' and an 'increasing educational element.'²⁸⁸ This 'Rescue Work' broadened out 'into the widespread and multiform growth' of the Board of Social Responsibility, which replaced the Church of England Moral Welfare Council in 1961. The perception of the work that the church required of itself is captured in its nomenclature: Rescue, then Moral Welfare, and then Social Responsibility.²⁸⁹ In reality and in name, the church moved itself from being saviours to citizens with regard to social work. The activity was co-ordinated by committees under the chairmanship of a member of the clergy or a Bishop.

Over relatively few decades the church stopped being the primary provider of social care, to offer disinterested and professional social work and expertise. Bishop Morrell's essay questioned whether it was necessary to continue the work in the light of the 'progress of the statutory services of the Welfare State.' Three reasons were given why it should: the 'ineluctable duty' for Christians to 'penetrate' statutory services with Christian ideals and methods; the widening vision for the Church to see what social services entails; and, finally, the fact that the Church should never see social improvement as an end in itself but rather have its sights set 'beyond this world.'²⁹⁰ Here the Church of England comes close to Roman Catholic teaching about Christian duty to do works of charitable service out of a deeper sense of call. The notion of 'penetrating' secular groups is a direct echo of terminology, linking the two denominations. The call to serve, however, is much less strongly articulated in the Church of England, and the work is primarily left to dedicated Diocesan groups.

The Board for Social Responsibility published a report in 1969, following a 1966 resolution by the House of Clergy seeking clarification about the role of clergy in the area of social responsibility. The report was needed because 'rapid social change and renewed theological insights have combined to make necessary a fresh appraisal of the role of the Church in the whole field of social responsibility and particularly in the area of personal social services.'²⁹¹

Whereas 'complementary' working between churches and 'the professional social work services of the local authorities' was true for some, the report noted the increasing

²⁸⁸ Morrell, 'Moral Welfare Work' in Smith (ed.), op. cit., 105.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 101-2.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 102-4.

²⁹¹ *The Church and The Social Services: A Report by the Board for Social Responsibility of the National Assembly of the Church of England* (Oxford: Church Army Press, 1969), 9-10.

absence of Christians in what was perceived as a Christian responsibility.²⁹² The report was written at a time in the 1960s when the influences of individualism and secularism, noted in the introduction to **chapter 3**, were particularly strong. The report made the following observation:

A problem arises from the fact that Christians are endeavouring to live a style of life which causes them to be dubbed 'respectable'. This description 'respectable' causes them to hesitate to undertake such things as the provision of lodgings for the homeless boy discharges from Borstal or Approved School... The problems resulting from these factors lead to the puzzlement of social workers: they see a lack of concern where such a lack is least to be expected.²⁹³

If this represented mainstream thinking within the Church, then a further struggle with how to be socially responsible is found in papers detailing the attitude of evangelical Christians many of whom had a home within the Church of England. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, it has been estimated that three-quarters of all charitable organisations were evangelical 'in character and control.'²⁹⁴

Some Evangelicals desired to work within their traditional allegiance to scripture. In the first half of the twentieth century... 'The tendency to withdrawal was most marked among Evangelicals of a more conservative stamp. Anglicans of the Keswick school, by and large, needed little convincing that social reform lay beyond their province.'²⁹⁵ There was a list of issues to campaign upon: housing, industrial relations, alcohol and gambling. 'Voices were occasionally raised on behalf of the unemployed, but the trend among conservatives to deal with moral questions rather than broader social problems was a feature of the times.'²⁹⁶

Internationally, gatherings of Evangelicals were exhorted to 'look to the Scriptures for guidance as to what they should do, and how far they should go in expressing [their] social concern, without minimising the priority of preaching the Gospel of individual salvation.'²⁹⁷ This same Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission met in 1974 and had much stronger support for social responsibility and gave it 'a place of prominence' in the final covenant alongside 'subjects as dear to evangelicals as the authority of Scripture, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and evangelism.'²⁹⁸ Writing in 1979, John Stott commented that the distinction between evangelism and social action was often artificial and that social

²⁹² Ibid., 24.

²⁹³ Ibid., 25.

²⁹⁴ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 120.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 214.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 214.

²⁹⁷ Rene Padilla and Chris Sugden (eds.), *How Evangelicals Endorsed Social Responsibility (Texts on Evangelical Social Ethics 1974-83 (ii) – A Commentary)* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1985), 5.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 10.

action could and should be a result of evangelism.²⁹⁹ From 1980, a Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility reported that evangelism and socio-political involvement were both to be regarded as part of Christian duty.³⁰⁰

This may appear to have little to do with adoption work yet as families became more diverse and less 'traditional' in shape, so the Evangelical wing of the Church of England began to involve itself directly and indirectly with decisions to place children in unconventional situations.³⁰¹ Holding fast to the authority of scripture, Evangelical churches have become amongst the largest churches in the country and are well funded, able to conduct extensive research and lobby politicians in efforts to persuade them of values that are distinct from the thrust of secular society. David Martin comments that, 'One has witnessed since the sixties, ...the rising power of conservative evangelicalism vis-à-vis the establishment in the mainline Protestant churches.'³⁰²

Looking at historical realities of work and also theological tensions, there are two approaches towards social responsibility. Like the Roman Catholic position the Evangelical wing of the church may incline towards a radical position that sets their faith-position beyond a pressure to conform to liberal, secular values, as it wishes to assert different standards. More in accord with mainstream Protestant thinking, however, is a position where Christians simply 'get their hands dirty' and serve others as modelled by Christ. In so doing they have an incarnational, self-sacrificing role, seeking neither credit nor reward. The Church of England aspires to create and demonstrate a way of working that moves society into a new place, but at a rate that is far too slow, passive and unbiblical for some of its members. 'Getting dirty hands', however, is a characteristic of an Anglican response to social action irrespective of the place along the theological spectrum from which it originates. Anglicans work in organisations, diocesan or otherwise, that enable them to serve others.

Summarising, the theological emphasis for engaging in social work from an Anglican perspective seems to be one of accommodation in both organisational terms and in terms of being Christ to the people (though this latter point can be argued differently between the different theological wings of the church as indicated). In this way it is more about being 'salt' (Mt. 5.13, Mk. 9.50, Lk. 14.34), something that both preserves worth and improves that with which it comes into contact. It is a ministry of structured service.

²⁹⁹ Cited in Padilla and Sugden (eds.), *How Evangelicals Endorsed Social Responsibility*, op. cit., 12.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁰¹ The adoption of a boy by a lesbian in Autumn 1990, placed by Newcastle City Council, received considerable media attention when an assessing (and opposing) medical doctor was the wife of Evangelical Anglican Rev. David Holloway.

³⁰² Martin (1985), op. cit.

4.1.3 Methodism: Vocation

Both of the two constructions of Christian agency for generating social action described so far require people to be motivated by a sense of Christian duty and call, but neither have it as the primary feature of their denominational approaches.

Methodism has its beginning in the Evangelical revival that swept across England during the latter half of the eighteenth century. John and Charles Wesley were founders of the movement and preached that ‘works’ such as caring for the poor, for prisoners, for widows and orphans were as essential as faith to Christian living. John Wesley’s last known letter was to William Wilberforce and urged the abolition of ‘that execrable villainy’ slavery.³⁰³

Membership of Methodism was drawn from predominantly working class people and, operated with a flat, non-hierarchical structure giving decision-making authority to its members. Methodism still believes in its ‘priesthood of all believers’ some of whom are set apart for specific tasks. It has high regard for accountability and for the seeking of personal holiness. ‘Wesley was concerned to communicate the gospel to “plain people”. Spirituality was to be worked out in small groups.’³⁰⁴ Before the 1870s the doctrines of the holiness movement were restricted to Methodism. The individual should strive towards Christian perfection, a complete ‘death to sin.’ This sense of personal responsibility and depth of calling is evident in social work that was originated by Methodists:

Methodism gave people a sense of status when society gave little or nothing. It gave scope for office (for women as well as men), opportunities to exercise talents and a skill in speech and organisation which was often carried over into politics of a liberal or radical kind, even if Conference did not support it.³⁰⁵

Conversion released people’s gifts and graces to serve God and serve other people.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodism had developed strong associations with education and with ‘Sunday School’ in particular, leading them to argue against state education, fervently believing that each Christian society [church or chapel] should educate as large a proportion of poor children as it could.³⁰⁶ Ultimately, Methodism was behind the woman primary school teacher, ‘an influence upon British life of immense importance.’³⁰⁷ Another activity that was to have far-reaching and beneficial consequences in some communities was the fact that, by the nineteenth century, Methodism wholeheartedly

³⁰³ Cited in John Munsey Turner, *Wesleyan Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005), 3.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

identified itself with the 'total abstinence' temperance movement and campaigned in places where drink caused severe problems.³⁰⁸

In the 1870s Rev Thomas Bowman Stephenson and two colleagues developed what was to become the National Children's Home (NCH). Alongside this Stephenson founded the Sisters of the Children who worked in the homes and in some way fulfilled his vision of an order of women used by the Church. It was also an outworking of a vocation to serve the church and society.

Further evidence of individual initiative was found in London and the work of Hugh Price Hughes. In 1887, he was appointed the first Superintendent Minister of the West London Mission. Hughes had been advocating a 'new model of evangelism suited to the masses of the city' derived from his blend of evangelical theology and socialist ethics. The Church released him from the normal pattern of ministry to develop this work in the West End. His was a 'social gospel' generated by experience. Together with his wife Katherine, Price Hughes developed practical programmes for the poor, 'the largest and most complex mission to the urban masses of any nonconformist church'. The Mission established crèches for working girls, one of Britain's first Hospices for the dying, and many other practical programmes.³⁰⁹

With a calling beyond working with children, the Wesley Deaconess Institute was founded by Stephenson in 1890. This order of ministry had service and pastoral work at its core from the outset, favouring this approach above church leadership and preaching. The Diaconal order was suspended in 1978 before being reopened to men and women in 1986, as the Methodist Diaconal Order. It continues to offer a model of living, engagement in society and servant ministry. Again, Methodism is seen to be a church committed to combining individual vocation with social action.

In the nineteenth century, gambling was a spiritual issue for Methodists and was ranked alongside alcohol as a threat to the moral, financial and spiritual well-being of the poor. In 1936 Conference issued a 'Declaration on Gambling' which argued that 'belief in luck cannot be reconciled with faith in God'. As with all decisions of Conference, this became the view of the people called Methodists, was adopted as a guiding principle for individual conduct and then became a matter that the Church would campaign on nationally as a matter of social justice.

Inevitably, some aspects of the work became built into the Connexional

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 37.

³⁰⁹ http://www.wlm.org.uk/wlm_hist.htm (accessed 19 January, 2008).

organisation. In this way the Methodist Church came to have parallels with the Church of England who operated with a church structure for social responsibility from the outset. The official group 'Mission alongside the Poor' became part of Methodist Home Missions. Later, in the 1940s, Methodist Relief and Development Fund became the specific denominational body co-ordinating overseas and third world work. In 1943, Methodist Homes for the Aged was also established as an independent charity to which Methodism gave financial and spiritual support. Just like NCH, its independence enabled people passionately committed to this work to spearhead and channel initiatives while being honoured and accredited by the Church.

Methodist ministers were able to remarry couples from the late 1940s, though it was left as a matter of personal conscience whether they felt able to do so. This appears to create a paradoxical attitude towards some social issues since Methodism appears 'strict on some moral issues, like the use of alcohol, gambling and Sunday observance, while appearing more liberal on matters like marriage, divorce and the family.'³¹⁰ Theological division and diversity is a characteristic of the Church of England but is also present in the other mainstream denominations.

It is possible to reflect on this history and discern a characterising emphasis upon individual church members finding a vocation to serve Christ in specific areas of community life. Having generated a tradition for this type of service, it is easier for people within this denomination to continue hearing of this type of work. It is perpetuated by observed example, as well as by a specific response to God's call.

Rather than veering towards the more radical approaches of the Roman Catholic Church, Methodism is inclined towards some of the same perspectives as the Church of England. Yet because Methodism is distinctively Arminian in tradition, understanding that God's Grace is for all, this 'should enable Methodism to combine what can be called a generous orthodoxy with a concern for the inclusive nature of the church.'³¹¹ Indeed, some would argue that the very fact that in its birth Methodism created a means by which 'men and women of thrift, frugality, reliability and initiative (who) could move marginally and occasionally much higher up the social scale,' it was developing 'a secularisation of Evangelical Arminianism into religious respectability combined with responsibility.'³¹² This broad acceptance of the value of all people generates a theologically liberal view of family.

Aside from this, a distinctive emphasis on personal responsibility can be found in

³¹⁰ John Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England: 1932-1998* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998), 30

³¹¹ Munsey Turner (2005), op. cit., 84.

³¹² Ibid., 34.

the approach of the Methodist church to social justice issues. There is a deep sense of individual responsibility and vocation to be found in its history. This is a third theme, offering a different type of influence for constructing a Christian agency. People are encouraged to be open to God's call and take up the challenge of service. The Church has acted as a spiritual umbrella, affirming and releasing the gifts of others. The characterising theological theme found here is one of promoting a sense of vocation.

4.1.4 A New Christian Adoption Agency: Modelling a Theology of Engagement

*They will be salt and leaven in the political process. The greatest political calling of the Church is to prepare the laity for their worldly callings.*³¹³

This quotation encourages lay people to recognise a calling into a political or secular world. To facilitate their response the Church is required to work at 'preparation'. In the context of adoption, this is about finding prospective parents and linking them to children who are freed for adoption. At a time when the numbers of prospective parents is reducing, the Church may need to ask itself questions about how it is working to expand the numbers of those who come forward for assessment.

In **chapters 2 and 3**, the sections on history of adoption and adoption agencies reflected back on a journey that goes some way towards a Christian adoption agency answering the question: Who are we? In this section, a 'new' way of envisaging a Christian adoption agency considers a pathway to the future that answers the question: 'Where are we going?' This section is primarily addressed to Christian critics of current adoption practices who home in on specific approval practices that offend their concept of 'the family'; issues which are addressed in **chapter 7**. The proposals may not seem 'new' to practicing adoption agencies, but they offer a new practical and theological approach, an intentionality, to the Churches, that can encourage a positive confidence rather than a perception of silent retreat. This section uses a theology of engagement to broadly examine what Christian adoption agencies bring to adoption work and then secondly to examine what wider society requires of an adoption agency. The real work of adoption is achieved in the areas of overlap yet it can also be seen that there are distinctive additional elements provided by virtue of the faith background of the Christian agencies.

In sections **4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3** Roman Catholicism, the Church of England and Methodism were seen to have offered different emphases to social action. It makes sense to

³¹³ Benne, 'Christians and Government,' in Meilaender and Werpehowski (eds.), op. cit., 340.

integrate such strengths within a new approach. The strengths were:

1. Church teaching
2. Dedicated service
3. Promoting a sense of vocation

These are three aspects of working that are brought by the Church to adoption work. The 'goal' of adoption work is to secure a permanent and secure family life for a child who has no stable experience of parenting.

In the case of 'Church teaching', what is taught is not the doctrinal position of one denomination but the Christian virtues that enable the goal of adoption work to be attained. The Gospel principles of loving your neighbour, caring for the orphan and sharing hospitality are the dominant principles of work in the adoption field. The scriptural basis of this model is found in texts upholding justice, love and nurture of orphans (Deut. 10.17-19 cp. Lev. 19.33-34; Ex. 23.9. See **2.2.1**) and the more expansive neighbour-love found New Testament teachings, such as in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.25-37). This parable illustrates inclusive love, while demonstrating that Christian love does not draw boundaries between church and family. The actions of the Samaritan are unilateral and nonreciprocal. They provide for physical and emotional security without specifying any spiritual outcomes. The promotion of the well-being of others is set on a par with a sense of self-regard. In acting as a 'good neighbour', the agency is the 'bearer and representative of the divine compassion.'³¹⁴ Barth continues:

As the Bible sees it, service of the compassionate neighbour is certainly not restricted to the life of the Church in itself and as such. It is not restricted to those members of the Church who are called and recognisable as such. Humanity as a whole can take part in this service. The Samaritan in the parable shows us incontestably that even those who do not know that they are doing so, or what they are doing, can assume and exercise the function of a compassionate neighbour.³¹⁵

Church teaching thus promotes adoption work with all vulnerable 'strangers': birth families, children and prospective adoptive parents.

Social responsibility in an Anglican context produced an example of 'dedicated service'. Adoption work is conducted on the basis that all children need to be permanently attached to a parent or parents. Just as modelled in the parable, the work is primarily about service to others. It is cross-cultural. It also transcends the normal rules of dialogue between the giver and receiver of the kindness, since the care continues beyond the initial provision.

³¹⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Part 2, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. A.T. Mackay, T.H.L. Parker, H. Knight, H.A. Kennedy and J. Marks (London: T & T Clark, 1956), 416.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 422.

God's work is done through service. The provision of the level of service is determined by choice and by the values that are prioritised. With a strong work ethic and sufficient resources, a high level of service provision can be attractive to people who wish to adopt: people who seek outcomes like 'family dignity, a child's experience of joy, [and a] parental sense of social and intrinsic value.'³¹⁶ In contemporary adoption work, the opportunity to offer post-adoption support, a range of counselling and psychological help, training and advice, all witness to an ability to specialise that can exceed the professional capacity of departments who need to address a broad range of child-support issues. These additional 'services' also testify to an ability to keep the goal of adoption in mind while adapting to a changing culture.

Yet, the provision of service alone will not and cannot be the totality of God's mission in the world.³¹⁷ Christian people, of whom Methodists have been shown to be a Church with a specific story to tell, operate with a sense of vocation. On hearing of the needs of the community, people can be called to respond and offer their gifts. This is true within the Churches' constituency and extended to wider society. The story of those awaiting adoption can trigger a response from those who feel they can offer their gifts as parents. Whereas Churches may speak to Christian congregations using stories of family life taken from daily life and Biblical life, publicity about adoption for, say, *National Adoption Week*, draws in the whole cross-section of society.

Fourthly, as an additional and separate part of social responsibility brought by the Churches, funding and spiritual support can be a means of engaging with adoption issues. Churches can offer spiritual support to all prospective adopters and those in adoption social work through prayer. Churches are recognised for generous charitable giving from congregations and also through denominational resources. Without these support systems, neither historical nor contemporary adoption work would exist.

Engagement with adoption matters by wider secular society when they seek dialogue with faith-based organisations, addresses the same core areas though with some different emphases. There are obvious needs for compliance with statutory requirements for both

³¹⁶ Linda Campbell, 'Church and Civil Society: Social Compact', in Sullivan and Leppert (eds.), op. cit., 83.

³¹⁷ The Anglican Consultative Council developed the 'Five Marks of Mission' between 1984 and 1990, and though these are now set for revision in order to better reflect that mission is done in a particular context, they include one mark that is apposite, namely that mission is 'to respond to human need by loving service', <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm> (accessed 7 July, 2008). The Methodist Church uses a statement of four principles that define a distinctively Methodist approach to Christian life, including 'service', where 'the Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice', <http://www.methodistchurch.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=11#SERVICE> (accessed 8 July, 2008).

adoption work and the employment of people who manage and carry out the tasks. A secular report outlining the future of voluntary services in the childcare sector favours ‘non-judgmental approaches to children and families’. They offer this positively since voluntary, often faith-based, agencies have a regard for generosity of spirit, being ‘seen as an intermediary between the individual and the state, organisations in the sector are acknowledged by users, funders and by local and central government as offering less stigmatising opportunities.’³¹⁸

To comply with values indicating that they are a ‘good’ agency, as assessed by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), an agency needs to use innovative ways to attract and recruit adopters from as wide a section of the community as possible to maximise the availability of appropriate families to match the needs of children waiting for adoption.³¹⁹ This is a challenge to some Christian adoption agencies since there is a belief that they sometimes do not have the kind of placement that a Local Authority may need.³²⁰ Whilst Christian adoption agencies can work more with their own constituencies, this is a specific encouragement to ensure that those on an approved list of adopters encompass as wide a cross-section of society as possible.

Finally, the ‘good’ agency also needs to demonstrate: decision-making, support services and effective management. Management of public services have ‘emphasised the importance of managerial approaches... and put a premium upon financial and performance management.’³²¹ If the agency is to perform at its best, it not only needs to function with the right ethos but also the right level of funding.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the ‘resultant approach in pictorial form.

³¹⁸ *The Future of Children’s Services: A View From the Voluntary Sector* (London: NCVCCO, 2003), 4.

³¹⁹ Commission for Social Care Inspection, *Adoption: Messages From Inspections of Adoption Agencies* (Newcastle: CSCI, 2006), 7.

³²⁰ Clifford et al, op. cit.

³²¹ Stephen P. Osborne, ‘Managing the Coordination of Social Services in the Mixed Economy of Welfare: Competition, Cooperation or Common Cause?’ *British Journal of Management* 8 (1997), 317-328.

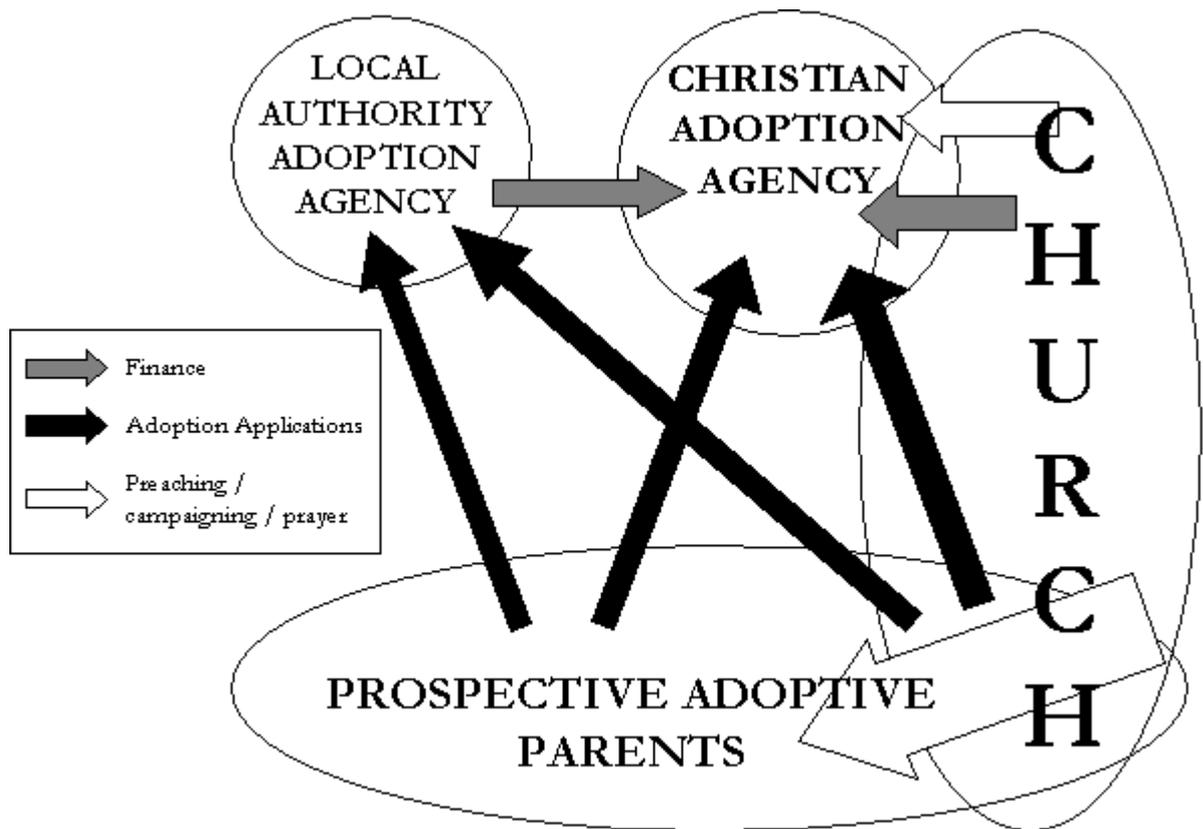


Figure 4.1. Pictorial Representation of Contemporary Christian Adoption Agency

The diagram shows activity that is distinct from any existing styles of work in one primary respect: the activity of the Church is more evident.

Prospective adopters might apply to any adoption agency, irrespective of their founding origins. This is indicated by the solid black arrows. The Church offers spiritual support to all prospective adopters, as indicated by the white arrows. Those who worship in Christian communities hear the message of adoption need and potentially respond to increased levels of awareness. They can ‘pull’ the agencies to work alongside them as their interest increases. Those who are ‘outside’ the Church apply to the agency voluntarily through hearing this and wider encouragement. The Church simultaneously ‘pushes’ the adoption agencies by increased funding and by raising the profile of their work. This is indicated by the grey arrows. The Christian adoption agency receives funding from Local Authority income by being able to match its approved adopters with ‘looked after’ children awaiting adoption.

In summary, the challenge to the Churches in adoption is to preserve an ethos of non-judgement and expand the numbers of approved adopters. Christian adoption agencies already engage with adoption matters with a history of Church teaching, dedicated service, a sense of vocation and, fourthly, spiritual and funding support. The totality of this

engagement with adoption can produce a ‘new’ approach that enhances the role of the Church.

It would obviously be futile to establish an agency in contravention of the law. It is equally self-defeating for a *Christian* adoption agency to renege on fundamental Christian principles by making unconditional accommodation of all secular practices. Contemporary work in the adoption field by the state and the Church has to accept that the Church has a culture of her own and that there are limits on ‘inculturation.’ Whilst the Church may assimilate some elements of contemporary thinking to do this work, it cannot assimilate others without self-destruction.³²² Andrew Kirk has written, ‘A heightened awareness of the benefits and harm of cultural identity is fundamental for Christians seeking to live by the Gospel: their attitude to cultural and ethnic difference may be either a positive or negative witness to Jesus Christ.’³²³ In other words, a Christian adoption agency can offer something distinctively Christian by virtue of its ethos and professional standards, provided that it adequately maintains a permanent and creative tension between the work of creating adoptive families and faithfulness to the Gospel. The challenge is always how to be relevant to the world and how to maintain its identity in Christ.³²⁴

Working in a prescribed context can mean ‘universalising one’s own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it.’³²⁵ In this case, the message of the Gospel becomes something derived *from* the context rather than brought *to* the context.³²⁶ It is a position that may distort the true Gospel. When inculturation is considered specifically, David Bosch finds that ‘in the West the inculturation process has been so “successful” that Christianity has become nothing but the religious dimension of the culture – listening to the church, society hears only the sound of its own music.’³²⁷ There is nothing distinctive about this approach. Recognising the need to engage with others, whilst respecting different opinions, is a challenging locus. The Church should come to adoption work with a positive confidence knowing that whilst the state can rightly insist on certain aspects of work, it can perform that task in a distinctive manner.³²⁸ The next section is a comparison of the reality of the work of today’s Christian adoption agencies with

³²² Robert W. Jenson, ‘Christ as Culture 1: Christ as Polity’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 3 (2003), 323-329.

³²³ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 79.

³²⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 427.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 428.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 430.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 455.

³²⁸ Tony Abbot, ‘Church, Civil Society and Politics’, in Sullivan and Leppert (eds.), *op. cit.*, 4.

the four aspects of being a Christian adoption agency identified above.

4.2 Contemporary Christian Adoption Agencies: An Analysis

The four components of being a Christian adoption agency that employs a ‘new’ approach, as described in section 4.1.4 are:

1. Church teaching
2. Dedicated service
3. A sense of vocation
4. Spiritual and funding support from the Church

It is possible to test this theoretical combination of factors with current adoption agency practice and compare theory with reality. This comparison will serve as a test of the potential of the ‘new’ approach since I have suggested that it adds distinctiveness. Each component is taken in turn and results used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an approach based upon a theology of engagement.

Data on contemporary adoption agency practice was gathered using the research methods described in section 1.3. The survey (see Appendix 1) yielded twenty-three responses. Table 4.1 indicates the denominational mix of respondents. Non-denominational entries are responses from agencies founded as Christian organisations but now run by secular groups.

	Frequency	Percent
Roman Catholic	9	39.1
Anglican	5	21.7
Methodist	4	17.4
Non-conformist	2	8.7
Ecumenical	1	4.3
Non-denominational	2	8.7
Total	23	100

Table 4.1. Denominational mix of Christian Adoption Agencies responding to survey

The following four subsections align with the four components outlined at the end of section 4.1. It will be seen that the content of the subsections varies significantly. This, in itself, indicates a bias towards some activities in preference to others.

4.2.1 Church Teaching

This aspect of being a Christian agency has its origins in the example of the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on social responsibility (4.1.1). The Roman Catholic Church teaches its people through the Pope’s encyclicals and the preaching of the priesthood. This creates a consistent outlook in the Church’s welfare work, while it builds confidence

amongst the Catholic people.

Applying this idea to adoption work would anticipate that each denomination would deliver teaching about adoption matters: the theology; the process; the reality of adoptive family life; and the vocation of some parents called to this work. The data shows that there is very little evidence for this as an organised, church-wide activity. One would expect denominational differences, for historical reasons, some of which were identified in section 4.1, yet it is significant that the attention given to adoption work by the national Churches is extremely weak.

There is evidence for specific commissioning and thanksgiving services from several agencies (see 4.2.4). These are regional, usually at diocesan level. They are aimed at recognising the work of a specific agency rather than teaching about adoption. NCH produce material at Christmas and on 'NCH Sunday' in July each year. They distribute this to active ministers and local preachers within Methodism. The use of this resource is not mandatory and the material is not about adoption work alone but it is illustrative of the potential for a national group of agencies to help the 'grass roots' church congregation, providing both education and actively encouraging prayerful support for work with vulnerable children.

One of the reasons why attention to adoption remains weak may be historical. The stigma attached to adoption that was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, and the church's attention to the unmarried mothers and illegitimate children has not served to establish a foundation for a more positive, dynamic engagement with a new story of hope and vocation. The swift decline in the numbers of babies available for adoption, following this period, has reduced the attractiveness of adoption. Adoption has become associated with the minority of childless people, rather than a parenting option for any couple or adult. These elements of adoption compound the existing unease the Church has with new family shapes. The Church has mostly had a vague understanding of the theology of the family that has only become clearer in fairly recent years.

With a renewed understanding of the theology of adoption and the theology of the family, churches should have something new to say: there are resources for Church teaching. Understanding contemporary adoption work and building relationships with adoption agencies can facilitate this message, enabling a distinctively Christian approach to be taken in adoption work. It also directly reaches a constituency who are not well-educated about adoption matters and who, if they were to respond, would build a stronger association

between the Church and adoption. The current ability to deliver distinctiveness in adoption work, is discussed in section 4.3. It could be greatly augmented if the Church accepted adoption work as part of its greater opportunity to serve the community.

4.2.2 Dedicated Service

The second component of the ‘new’ approach has its origins in Anglican social responsibility that created diocesan groups to handle work with vulnerable people. By establishing a regional council or committee the Church could guarantee that some attention was paid to an identified need. This was a top-down approach, not unlike the one created in Roman Catholic dioceses, yet unlike the bottom-up approach within Methodism that also succeeded in establishing a nationwide coverage of work with vulnerable children.

The analysis of Christian adoption agency work under this heading is not about the effectiveness of any one organisational structure but rather a review of the numbers and geographical distribution of Christian adoption agencies, irrespective of their sponsoring denomination. What emerges is that adoption agencies continue to exist as distinct bodies linked to their denominations, while recognising the need to come together in groups to share best practice and future strategies. If Christian agencies were to make an impact in adoption work, there should be a firm foundation for future development.

The BAAF database indicates that there are thirty-six Christian Adoption Agencies operating in the United Kingdom.³²⁹ The Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) consists of thirty-six approved voluntary, independent agencies, twenty-three of which have Christian foundations.³³⁰ This equates to 64% of the CVAA having Christian origins. Several adoption agencies have multiple offices around the country, for example, NCH has six adoption offices and the Roman Catholic Children’s Society centred on Southwark operates out of several separate offices in the South East.

- **Anglican Agencies**

There are forty-three Anglican dioceses in England, many of which have been historically involved in adoption through the work of ‘Moral Welfare Officers’ or Boards of Social Responsibility though they are not directly involved now. The Children’s Society used to be active in adoption work (see **chapter 2**). The longest serving Children’s Society agency (in the East Midlands) is now part of the Coram Family of independent adoption agencies

³²⁹ http://www.baaf.org.uk/agency_db/noflash_textonly/frameset_noflash.htm (accessed 12 December, 2004).

³³⁰ http://www.ncvcco.org/our_work_networks_record.asp?title=Consortium+ov+Voluntary+Adoption+Agencies&id=31 (accessed 29 August, 2007).

and not part of the Church of England.

The active Anglican agencies are: Adoption Matters North West, Dioceses of Chester and Blackburn (a merger in 2007); Durham Family Welfare, Diocese of Durham; Families for Children, Diocese of Exeter (an ecumenical agency); Parents and Children Together (PACT), Diocese of Oxford; and Family Care, Diocese of Southwell. The Diocesan Adoption Agency Group also includes the Church of Ireland Adoption Society and the Manx Churches Adoption and Welfare Society.

- **Roman Catholic Agencies**

There are twenty-two Roman Catholic dioceses in England and almost all have connections to an adoption agency. Active adoption agencies in England and Wales include: Father Hudson's Society, Archdiocese of Birmingham; St David's Children's Society, Archdiocese of Cardiff; Nugent Care Society, Archdiocese of Liverpool; and several agencies working under the title Catholic Children's Society. If dioceses do not have an adoption agency they would refer applicants to adjacent Catholic organisations.

- **An Ecumenical Agency**

Families for Children, Exeter is an agency founded by the merger of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Diocesan adoption agencies in Devon and Cornwall and promotes itself as a voluntary Christian Charity, not disguising its origins or spiritual outlook.

- **Methodist Agencies**

NCH – The Children's Charity was once known as National Children's Homes. It continues to have connections with Methodism, although it is officially, administratively independent. NCH's adoption work covers the whole of the United Kingdom and works from five centres: South East (based in Horsham), Midlands (based in Birmingham), South West (based in Bristol), Yorkshire (based in Leeds) and in London there is a very successful 'Black Families Project' whose remit is to find adoptive families for black children. It uses one framework for all its activity and has one overall web site. In 2008, there are moves to re-brand NCH as 'Action for Children.'

- **Non-Conformist Agencies – Barnardo's**

Barnardo's operate nationally with an acknowledged adherence to the Christian faith and a general ethos and set of values that uphold the United Nations Charter of Children's Rights and respect for all people. Barnardo's have six adoption projects across the England and Wales (though many other centres for various work with children and families): Jigsaw Project, London; Barnardo's Family Placement, Newcastle; Barnardo's New Families, Shipley; Barnardo's New Families, North Wales; Midlands New Families (Barnardo's),

Halesowen; and, Barnardo's Derwen Project, Cardiff.

Reflecting upon this information it is possible to see how, notionally, national coverage is achieved by regional centres for NCH and Barnardo's, while there are separate specialist diocesan centres for the Roman Catholic and Anglican agencies. Realistically, prospective adopters usually approach an adoption agency that is geographically close to their home, for ease of access during the assessment process. It may be easier to work with a Local Authority adoption agency. In some circumstances, Christian adoption agencies further away may be more attractive to some prospective adopters (see chapter 4.3.3).

In 2007, the future of Roman Catholic agencies became less certain following the passing of the Equality Act that legislated for no restrictions to be placed upon prospective adopters. This ruling went beyond that which a Roman Catholic agency could support on doctrinal grounds, so potentially it threatens their future. The information gathered here features the successful ecumenical collaboration of Families for Children in Exeter, which does open its books to all applicants in a way that can be supported by its Roman Catholic oversight group. This situation could be duplicated elsewhere to preserve the experience of Roman Catholic adoption workers within a Christian environment.

Attention should also be drawn to the unique Black Families project run by NCH in London, where they run a service dedicated to a particular niche opportunity, seeking to match black children with black adopters.

Overall, national Christian adoption agency work is vulnerable due to its scattered nature. Locally, however, the work can be very strong. Through reputation and consistency of activity, some Christian adoption agencies are the sole adoption agency for an area by virtue of having a service contract from the Local Authority for this work (Durham Family Welfare is a case in point, having a service contract for all adoption work undertaken by the Darlington Authority). There are ecumenical possibilities to preserve adoption work and opportunities to examine niche markets for matching children with adopters. Because Christian adoption agencies are specialists, not providing a general spread of children's welfare work, they are ideally situated to build upon the strengths of the existing organisation if they are sufficiently well supported. This is analysed in section 4.2.4.

4.2.3 A Sense of Vocation

The third component of the proposed approach for a Christian adoption agency was a strength of the Methodist system for encouraging recognition of a personal call to service

as a Christian. In the adoption field, this can be work as an adoptive parent but also, for this section, work as an adoption social worker. There is also a sense in which an adoption agency itself has a specific mission or call to the work it does.

In talking about their employing agency, one social worker said that Christian staff are measurably different in their level of persistence and endeavour; they seek ‘wholeness’ and ‘go the extra mile’ – phrases that betray a deeper commitment to the task. Yet workers are ‘ruthless and thorough.’ This worker believes that Christian faith is at the heart of this level of professionalism:

Within a Christian agency we are seeking ‘wholeness’ and there is something extra offered by Christian agencies in this regard... We have many clients from diverse Christian traditions: mainstream, conservative, liberal or charismatic. Within these are extremes and it’s all down to individual matching. Clients value optimism, the agency ‘going the extra mile’, trust, not a commercial response, commitment to children for life... because we have a Christian philosophy. We share a privileged journey, we have more humanity in our process yet we are every bit as ruthless and thorough.³³¹

Within the past twenty years, the identities of Christian adoption agencies have changed. No longer is the work about something ‘Diocesan,’ now it is about working with children. This is true of all the Anglican agencies. Oxford Diocesan Council for Social Work is now Parents and Children Together (PACT) and Chester Diocesan Adoption Services is Adoption Matters. Name changes are much less frequently encountered in the Roman Catholic agencies whose use of a saint’s name or the word ‘Catholic’ immediately betrays their connection. The association of ‘NCH – The Children’s Charity’ with Methodism is well known in Methodist circles but is not instantly recognisable to anyone else. The caring, even Christian, ethos of Barnardo’s is widely recognised from its name and history yet the current literature stresses its multi-faith work before the fact that it works from a background of specifically Christian values.

The telephone interviews with agency directors pursued this matter and concluded that to provide an adoption service the agency’s role must be plain and clear to applicants and that words like ‘Diocesan’ are simply confusing.

We changed to Adoption Matters because if you wanted to have a press release, to use the media more appropriately... in a local paper, so in Macclesfield or Stockport or Runcorn or Warrington, they didn’t want to see something coming from Chester. The further you got away from Chester the more difficult it was, so we changed our name and increased our publicity and media profile by considerable percentages by local newspapers willing to take up something that said Adoption Matters rather than something that said Chester Diocesan Adoption Services. I don’t think it was necessarily to do with the ‘Diocesan,’ it was to do with ‘Chester.’ So I don’t see that we changed our name as a diminution of our Christian thing, we still hold traditionally to that: the Bishop is still our chair, the Synod still appoints five of our trustees, a number

³³¹ Social Worker (3) in telephone interview.

of our staff are Christian and we are proud of our heritage and where we have come from but in the world that we live in today we've got to try and maximise our potential for publicity.

If someone rings me and says who do I work for, and I say Chester Diocesan Adoption Services, well what's that? Then they say how do you spell it...! People haven't a clue what [Diocesan] means, they've got no mindset about what a Diocese is and what a Diocesan organisation is. Adoption is about adoption and if someone asks me who do I work for, then I say, 'Adoption Matters,' then they are not under any illusion that it's about adoption and that it matters! I think it's much more constructive for people to say it like that, than an amorphous body that just because it says it's Diocesan doesn't say it's Christian either.³³²

The ecumenical agency had an obvious need to create a shorter title when two denominational, diocesan groups came together and:

...hunted for words that could say that we were a Christian organisation because that is important and we don't want to move away from that. Our new name is more desirable and more attractive and we were one of the first to make a change in this way. What we want to be able to do is welcome 'anybody and everybody' and we do find some people saying that even though we are not practising Christians we wanted to come to a Christian agency. If they have a child placed with them through this agency we write to them to remind them that we are a Christian agency and that we hope they will bring up the child within the Christian faith.³³³

Whilst Catholic Diocesan Children's Societies are usually recognisable by their name, they also seek to attract people of all faiths and none, so feel a need to emphasise that point verbally:

We deal with all faiths and no faiths – our name says who we are and when social workers come for interview I explain that we are a Christian agency 'but you don't have to be.' Less than a quarter of our families are Catholic, so it's not a big feature. These days prospective adopters 'shop around' for the agency they can work with – they select an agency. We know that. They look on the Internet and attend information evenings. It is competitive; it is a marketplace; we are in 'the real world.'³³⁴

These directors were keen to be recognised as Christian and knew that being so was an acceptable form of 'religiosity,' as cited in section 4.1.4. They also knew that the marketplace demanded that they 'maximise publicity' and that branding, naming the product, was a key factor. The 'product' is adoption.

The survey sought information about how the agency acknowledged its Christian heritage and how central the Christian faith was to its work. Figure 4.2 quantifies those categories selected by each agency indicating visible evidence of the place of faith within the agency.

³³² Norman Goodwin, Chief Executive, Adoption Matters North West.

³³³ Caroline Davis, Chief Executive, Families for Children

³³⁴ Ruth duBois, Principal Officer Family Placement Services – Catholic Children's Society: Arundel and Brighton, Portsmouth and Southwark.

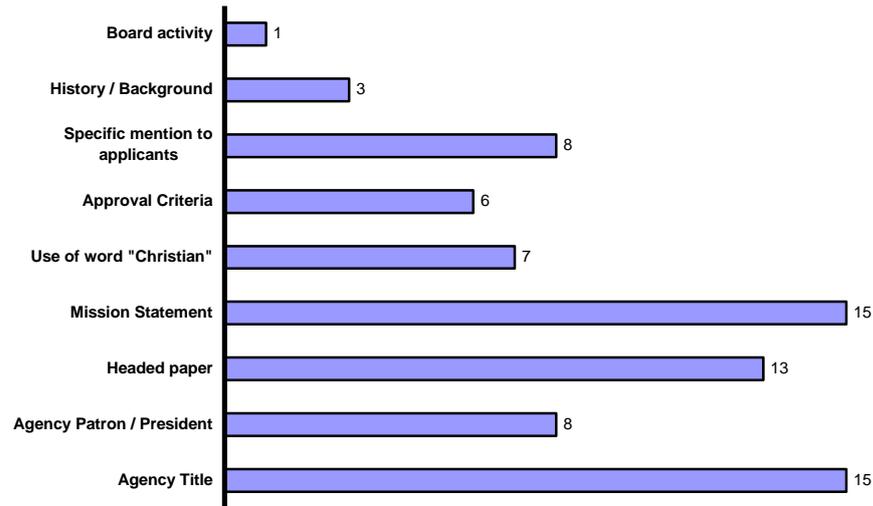


Figure 4.2. How Christian Heritage is Made Evident

Mission statements provide an opportunity for adoption agencies to clearly state their vocation and activity. Fifteen respondents felt that their mission statements were evidence of their Christian heritage. Other means for owning their faith-foundation included their title, headed paper, and on occasion specific mention to prospective adopters. These responses indicate a preference for indirect methods above direct methods of communicating Christian interest and concern in the adoption world, but it also indicates that the agencies' Christian heritage is not deliberately hidden.

It can be concluded that Christian adoption agencies have a meaningful relationship with their historical past and the potential of their future. The way in which the Christian element of the task is 'promoted' is subtle. Using contemporary marketing techniques, they are branding themselves for the twenty-first century. This may seem to diminish their 'witness' to some yet with the attitude and commitment of their staff, the Christian adoption agencies' true vocation is perceptibly different from those without a faith basis for their work.

4.2.4 Spiritual and Funding Support

This is the final subsection comparing the reality of contemporary adoption work by Christian adoption agencies with the theoretical approach proposed in section 4.1.4. The element of 'spiritual and funding support' did not come from an identified strength of a denominational activity but was added to others to offer a greater level of responsibility and ownership of adoption work to the sponsoring denominations. The thrust of this effort would be to encourage a missiological and ministerial dimension to the work through the practical input of resources and the spiritual encouragement of prayer and raising of

awareness.

It is possible to analyse levels of attachment and loyalty to a sponsoring organisation from the published literature. Amongst Anglican agencies, Family Care does not declare its connection with the Diocese of Southwell, preferring to stress its professional range of services; its welcoming and innovative stance. Events organised, however, include 'Diocesan services' which would indicate a Christian connection to those who knew what this might involve.³³⁵ Durham Family Welfare also majors on provision of adoption services but has an introductory page that states that 'we are the adoption agency for the Church of England in the Diocese of Durham, but we also work with people of all faiths or none and with all sections of the community.'³³⁶ This indicates much more allegiance to the Church, as does the Chairman's Report for 2005-2006 that acknowledges the service as 'Gospel work.' Parents and Children Together (PACT) acknowledges its work within the Oxford Diocese in its Annual Report's (2005-6) opening sentence and also its link from the Diocesan web site³³⁷, though intriguingly not on its own web site.³³⁸ It has a logo that subtly blends the diocesan logo with its own, though this would be lost to the uninitiated.

Roman Catholic agencies make it very clear to those reading their literature or accessing their web site that they are Catholic and adhere to this ethos. For them, the issue is to stress openness and dispel notions that their faith stance is excluding. For example, St. David's Children Society in Cardiff states that: 'while we have a Catholic ethos, adoption applications are welcomed from people of all faiths, including those of no faith.'³³⁹ Families Are Best and the ecumenical (Roman Catholic and Anglican) agency, Families for Children, make a similar statement, as well as stating that 'we are a Christian charity and this underpins everything we do.'³⁴⁰ Somewhat uniquely, Father Hudson's Society has a strongly Christian mission statement:

Father Hudson's Society, developing as the social care agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, offers services to people in particular need, in order to improve their quality of life. Christ's command to "love one another as I have loved you" underpins our work with children, young people, adults and families, without favour or discrimination.³⁴¹

NCH's Methodist heritage is acknowledged on the 'Our history' part of its web site yet for a charity with strong Christian foundations it contains no obvious Christian messages

³³⁵ <http://www.familycare-nottingham.org.uk/> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³³⁶ <http://www.dfw.org.uk/introduction.htm> (accessed 19 July, 2007).

³³⁷ <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/bsr/justcare/pact.html> (accessed 18 July, 2007).

³³⁸ <http://www.pactcharity.org/blogcategory/Adoption/> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³³⁹ <http://www.stdavidscs.org/> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³⁴⁰ <http://www.familiesforchildren.org.uk/> (accessed 18 July, 2007).

³⁴¹ <http://www.fatherhudsons.org.uk/> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

or emphasis within statements about vision, purpose, values, and operational mission.³⁴² This bears comparison to Barnardo's who clearly state that they are a multi-faith organisation yet who also give credit to their ethos in their 'Basis and Values' statement by declaring that 'Barnardo's derives its inspiration and values from the Christian faith.'³⁴³

With regard to funding, the adoption agency survey asked for an indication of the main sources of funding, ranking the three main sources. The pie chart in Figure 4.3 weights the responses across all the choices offered.

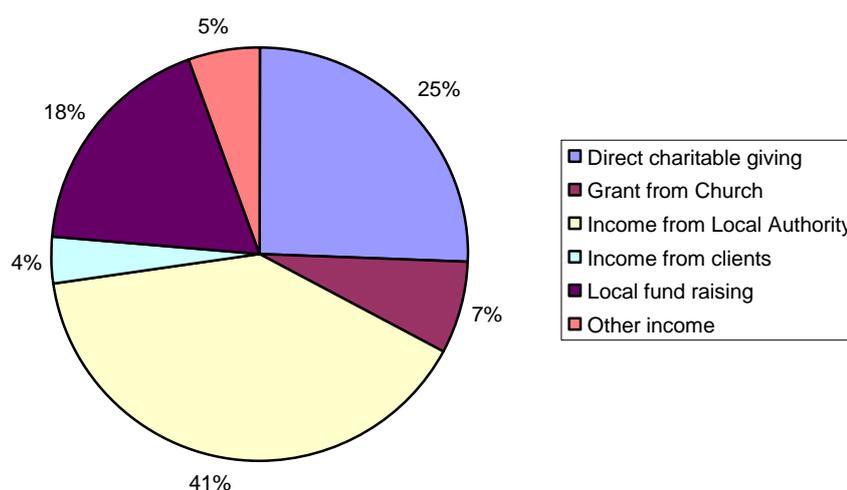


Figure 4.3. Distribution of All Funding Sources

The figure indicates that the income from Local Authorities is the greatest source. Seven per cent of income was directly attributed to grants from the Church and it would be likely that some of the 25% received as charitable gifts had connections with Christians also. In the survey, 91% of agencies indicated that income from Local Authorities (LAs) was the primary source. For voluntary adoption agencies who are members of the CVAA the placement fee is fixed by the National Joint Council. The fee has an additional London weighting and is paid in line with BAAF Form H guidelines. For sibling groups, the fee is increased one-and-a-half times for two siblings, two times for three siblings and for each additional sibling, another one-quarter times the fee.³⁴⁴

It is evident that the financial relationship with the Local Authority is critically important to the present and future work of voluntary agencies – they provide the children! Telephone interviews explored if this made directors feel vulnerable:

Having Local Authority income as the primary source is not like 'having all your eggs

³⁴² <http://www.nch.org.uk/aboutus/index.php?i=319> (accessed 18 July, 2007).

³⁴³ http://www.barnardos.org.uk/who_we_are/basis_and_values.htm (accessed 18 July, 2007).

³⁴⁴ <http://www.cvaa.org.uk/authorities/fees.php> (accessed 14 August, 2007).

in one basket.’ Funding comes from inter-agency fees i.e. placing of children from the Local Authority with parents that have been approved by the voluntary agency and also service level agreements where the agency offers specific services to the LA in return for income. Also there may be a specific, one-off contractual arrangements giving income to the agency.³⁴⁵

Local Authority is the most significant source of income – about eighty per cent – but it is not the only source. We also do fund raising and have income from the Diocese and from schools. We do not feel particularly vulnerable. We’ve been there for so many years and weathered periods of anxiety and have lobbied government. They have effectively said, ‘We really value the contribution of the voluntary adoption agencies but you have got to pay your way and work alongside Local Authorities and be alert to their needs.’ They provide the children.³⁴⁶

Overall, spiritual support varies within that which is owned and admitted by Christian adoption agencies. For some agencies, more adoption work is possible by promoting the ‘product’ rather than the ethos. The ethos drives strong professionalism and positive attitudes to the work, so it does make a difference. Receiving prayer support from sponsoring bodies and ongoing, active interest could be important even if it is understated. As for funding, a lack of vulnerability is expressed but undoubtedly more income can generate more promotional work, awareness raising and ultimately more prospective adopters. The Church could enable its agencies to be more effective in spreading the message of adoption both to the general population and a specifically Christian population, if it increased its funding levels and promotional investment.

This section has compared the reality of contemporary Christian adoption agencies with possible ‘new’ approach based upon a theology of engagement that accedes to some proposals from wider society whilst attempting to preserve some distinctively Christian elements. It finds that the effort of the agencies is strong despite the relatively weak attentions of the sponsoring denominations. Agencies are distributed thinly across the nation but are effective in specific locations and in specific contexts. Agencies recognise and value their Christian heritage and in accommodating their place in the field of adoption, wrestle with the tensions generated by being a faith-based organisation in a secular environment. Weak areas of comparison were those where the sponsoring Church could do more to promote and teach about adoption and where it could do more through funding and spiritual support.

The analysis in this section suggests that teaching about adoption in churches is minimal and localised, rather than co-ordinated nationally and emphatic. Christian heritage is

³⁴⁵ Norman Goodwin

³⁴⁶ Ruth duBois

not deliberately hidden but neither is it intentionally promoted. The Christian ethos of adoption agencies is, however, strongly recognised by both employees and Local Authorities. There is a reputation for enduring, valuable relationships with clients and also for the employment of professional, experienced social workers.

This chapter now moves on to discuss where Christian distinctiveness can be found in adoption work and the benefits that could exist if more adoption work originated in faith-based adoption agencies.

4.3 The Potential for Distinctiveness

From prayer to social and political activity as expression of brotherhood, recognition of Jesus in the deprived, love of the marginalised neighbour and service of the coming kingdom seems in many ways a necessary and relatively clear step for Christians to take.³⁴⁷

What is ‘relatively clear’ is that working with the marginalised is a costly activity that becomes a vocation for some Christians. Christians should be found in community projects and in politics. Organisations founded on Christian principles carry the ethos of self-giving service even when individuals within the organisation may have other beliefs.

So far this chapter has looked at the theological and historical characterising features of Christian social welfare work and a new approach was proposed as a result. Secondly, the chapter compared the ‘new’ with the real situation, concluding that agency work was effective and could be even more so if the national Churches added their emphasis and tangible support. In this section, I wish to assert that the present contribution of Christian adoption agencies is understated. The work is distinctive in three aspects:

1. Christian agencies have a distinctive outlook to adoption work from that of Local Authorities who are regulated in the same way;
2. Christian agencies have a distinctive professionalism that has been validated by external sources; and,
3. Christian agencies have a distinctive faith.

Evidence from the various data sources is used to support these assertions. Throughout the arguments, the possibility for the agencies to compromise on faith issues, accommodating secular themes, is high. Yet the evidence suggests that the Christian faith makes more impact than it may be credited for.

³⁴⁷ Enda McDonagh, *The Demands of Simple Justice* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 82-4.

4.3.1 Distinctive Outlook

At its most basic level, adoption work is about relationships: the relationship between the prospective adopters and the assessing social worker, and the relationship between the adoption agency and the Local Authority (LA) placing the child.

Aspects of assessment of prospective couples are made by all adoption social workers in line with BAAF form F1 and the agency adoption criteria. The length of time taken to make an assessment is usually specified as less than one year, but the number of interviews, duration, tone and questions explored are all about the relationship that is established between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s). Once approved, this relationship continues and the social worker is able to ‘represent’ the adopter(s) to those who desire to place a child or children for adoption, other social workers. The latter will work for a Local Authority, so the quality of the relationship (non-financial) between the agency and the LA will be a factor in the future of many placements.

From the survey with Christian adoption agency directors (see Appendix 1), frequent meetings with LAs are typical. These authorities were not always ‘local’ to the agency geographically, since voluntary agencies are working to place children with *their* approved adoptive parents, and the children could come from anywhere in the country. In a year, most agencies met with LA representatives monthly or every other month. Two agencies indicated regular meetings with nine different LAs.

When asked to characterise the relationship, given some suggestions, an even spread of descriptions resulted, shown in Figure 4.4. The largest number of agencies indicated that ‘professional’ would be a good description of the relationship.

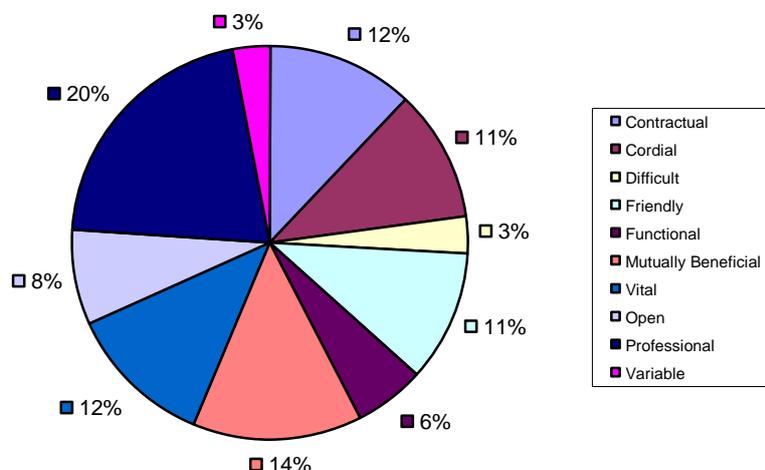


Figure 4.4. Characterisation of the Nature of Relationship with a Local Authority

When asked to state which aspect of the agency’s relationship with the LA was valued above all others, and given no suggestions, the phrase ‘mutually beneficial’ was the greatest choice. This was amplified to indicate that collaboration and co-operation was good; sharing resources such as training days or information evenings were useful; and sometimes adoption preparation groups for prospective parents were run jointly. These were all indications of a healthy, non-competitive relationship. Geographically based, co-operative consortiums are increasingly common in adoption work nationally.

The questionnaire asked the respondents to offer information about how their approach differed from that of the LA, an open question, and then to indicate from a range of responses what they would assess as a distinctive feature. Figure 4.5 shows a bar chart of responses given to the question about distinctive features.

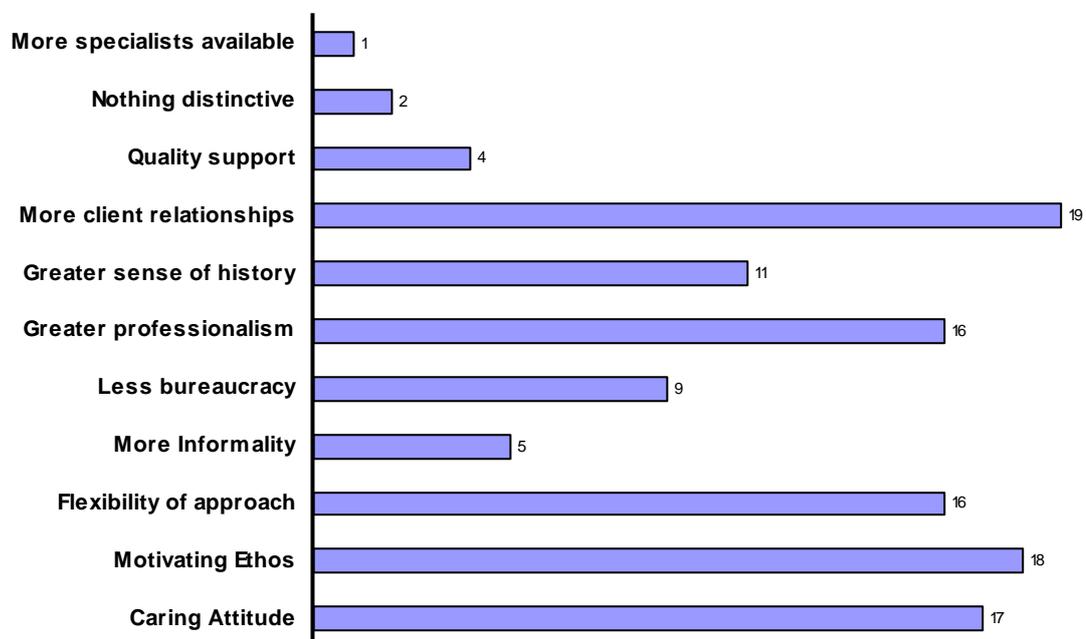


Figure 4.5. Voluntary Agencies’ Distinctive Features Compared to Local Authorities

The three leading indications in the chart show a depth of engagement with adoption issues that are highly desirable to prospective adoptive parents as they anticipate assessment. In terms of a differing approach, one respondent offered the opinion that ‘the LA at times struggle to provide high quality adoption services partly due to the demands of child protection priorities, low staff numbers, etc.’ Broad statements were made about LAs being less responsive and less specialised and two statements mentioned the faith of prospective adopters:

I think the LA is less likely to encourage adopters to have a ‘lifelong’ relationship with

them: they are less likely to affirm their faith, although some do; they are more likely to match adopters with children in their care, than promoting nationally.³⁴⁸

We believe that we have a closer relationship with our families because of how we are organised and our smaller, friendly approach to them. We also value people's religious beliefs, seeing them as a positive strength rather than something to be suspicious of.³⁴⁹

Surveyed agencies mentioned that they had specialist skills in adoption work, rather than needing to be competent in the broad gamut of child social work issues. Such a specialisation is based upon two factors: social work exclusively in adoption, and working with adopters preparing to be placed with 'special needs' children. It became apparent that LAs readily find adopters for very young children and babies, from those people who have been approved by the LA itself. This left a number of children, freed for adoption, that were more difficult to place due to age, ability, emotional background, race, having siblings, etc. This was the pool of children that many voluntary adoption agencies worked with, seeking to link their own approved adopters with these 'hard to place' children. A quantification of all the statements is given in Table 4.2.

	Frequency	Percent
Less specialised	4	17.4
Less responsive	2	8.7
Less personal	6	26.1
Working with younger children	1	4.3
Local not national	4	17.4
Others	3	14.0
Total	20	87.0
Missing	3	14.0
Total	23	100.0

Table 4.2. Differences in Approach Between a Local Authority and a Voluntary Agency

In telephone interviews, agency directors were asked about whether the future of voluntary adoption agencies lay with placing 'hard to place children'?

Basically, yes, 'some Local Authorities are becoming more able to place easier to place children...' Voluntary agencies are placing older children and sibling groups. 'Of 8 sibling groups of three and above (which is 24 children) all but one of those were placed by the voluntary sector. So yes, I also think that the voluntary sector are placing some of the more difficult children but we are also placing some easier to place children for some Local Authorities who maybe don't have their act together.'³⁵⁰

The statement is basically true but it is too simplistic. Certainly the LA do place children that are 'not so difficult.' If it is easy to place children within the LA's own resources they certainly do so.³⁵¹

The statement is too simplistic but it is true in part! The last relinquished baby we

³⁴⁸ Agency (9)

³⁴⁹ Agency (14)

³⁵⁰ Norman Goodwin

³⁵¹ Caroline Davis

*placed was six years ago. The LA comes to us if they want a Catholic link or if they simply have no family available and want a family quickly. It's not always about a degree of difficulty. It can be about race and culture or increasingly about mental health problems in the background.*³⁵²

In the run up to the latest adoption legislation, LAs were subject to media and government criticism of 'alleged incompetence, thought to be demonstrated by unacceptable variations in adoption rates.'³⁵³ Prime Minister Tony Blair initiated a Review of Adoption. This found that 'too many' had poor performance in releasing children from foster care into adoptive families.³⁵⁴ A target was set to increase adoptions of children by 40% in a five-year period. Central Government provided financial incentives. This produced an increase of 38% in the number of adoptions in the five years to March 2005.³⁵⁵ This target system was also subject to strong criticism since some social worker interventions were judged to be premature.³⁵⁶ One Christian agency made a press release:

In light of the current debate about children being removed from their families to boost adoption targets, we wish to make the following statement: PACT will only be party to seeking an adoptive home for a child once the panels and courts have found that adoption is in the child's best interests following rigorous assessment.³⁵⁷

In contrast to other agencies, the stability of relationships possible between the Christian adoption agency and adoptive families may encourage lower levels of adoption disruption. For example, Adoption Matters record that 'less than five per cent of placements break down, compared with a national average of around twenty per cent, thanks in part to our thoroughness and our dedication, preparation and support.'³⁵⁸

Overall, the relationship with Local Authorities is vital to the future work of Christian adoption agencies. It is by virtue of excellence in service delivery, expertise and cultivating a pool of adopters willing to respond to children with special needs that they continue to be viable. One American survey summarised the work of faith-based social services and argued:

religiously-based groups provide more effective social services than secular agencies because their religious character motivates a supportive and caring attitude on the part of staff and volunteers that is transmitted through relationally-based programs aimed at transforming lives.³⁵⁹

³⁵² Ruth duBois

³⁵³ Clifford et al, op. cit.

³⁵⁴ Prime Minister's Review of Adoption, Performance and Innovation Unit (2000), <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/downloads/su/adoption/adoption.pdf> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³⁵⁵ CSCI, op. cit., 11.

³⁵⁶ For example, Ben Leapman, 'Mother calls social workers' removal of her baby inhuman' in *The Sunday Telegraph* (22 July 2007).

³⁵⁷ http://www.pactcharity.org/News/News/PACT_Statement/ (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³⁵⁸ <http://www.adoptionmatters.org/> (accessed 30 August, 2007).

³⁵⁹ Helen Rose Ebaugh, Paula P. Pipes, Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Martha Daniels, 'Where's the Religion? Distinguishing Faith-Based from Secular Service Agencies', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42, no. 3

This is true for Christian adoption agencies in the United Kingdom. They have a distinctive attitude to relationships, illustrated by care and endurance. The depth to which these qualities are found in Christian adoption agencies is testimony to both their specialism and their faith. It is a distinctive outlook.

4.3.2 Distinctive Professionalism

The previous section demonstrated the efforts of Christian adoption agencies to deliver services by building strong relationships. Data supporting this argument, drawn from survey material and telephone conversations, could equally well have supported the argument that Christian adoption agencies worked at the highest possible professional standards. A more credible assessment of this assertion, in the eyes of those who may mistrust faith-based agency work, can be made, by using data taken from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) who conduct independent investigations.

Between April 2003 and March 2006 all one hundred and fifty local council and thirty-three voluntary adoption agencies in England were visited by the CSCI.³⁶⁰ The Care Standards Act 2000 introduced identical inspection arrangements for local council adoption services as voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) for the first time.³⁶¹

There was an overwhelmingly positive report for VAAs, within which grouping Christian organizations are in the large majority. Several of the strengths of these agencies, taken from the report, can be understood as ‘professional’ qualities:

- VAAs that have a more specific remit, generally meet or exceed the required standards.³⁶²
- VAAs are good or excellent at providing support to birth families.³⁶³
- ‘In a quarter of local councils a lack of adoption expertise resulted in poor understanding of permanence planning.’³⁶⁴
- ‘Prospective adopter reports are described as satisfactory or good in a third of local councils and half of voluntary agencies. The best reports are informative, analytic and evidence the competencies required of adoptive parents. The agencies that produce the best reports employ experienced and well trained staff

(2003), 411-426.

³⁶⁰ CSCI, op. cit., 1.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

³⁶² Ibid., 4.

³⁶³ Ibid., 4, 24.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

and ensure that they are supervised and monitored by experienced managers.³⁶⁵

- 'In general, standards of adoption practice are better when managers and staff are not also undertaking fostering work.'³⁶⁶ This is a common occurrence in LA family placement teams whereas voluntary adoption agencies are adoption specialists.
- 'The quality of the adoption manager is crucial to the functioning of adoption services. The most effective managers have extensive knowledge and experience, are passionate about adoption and committed to achieving excellent adoption services.'³⁶⁷ Again, VAAs are adoption specialists.

The inspection produced a checklist of good practice and it is clear from the full set of surveys conducted for this thesis (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3), that a dedicated, experienced adoption service such as those provided by Christian adoption agencies conform to best practice. For example, in the CSCI report, under the question: *What makes for most effective management of adoption services?* best practice is given as:

Adoption agency staff, including social workers for children, are well qualified and experienced. They are able to give appropriate priority to adoption work and organised so that children and birth families do not experience unnecessary changes of worker.³⁶⁸

LAs have not only come under pressure from the high standards demonstrated by VAAs in adoption work, but also in their creativity in employing people with specific skills such as play therapy, behaviour management and a variety of therapists and other specialists.³⁶⁹ 'VAAs have a tradition of pioneering developments to redress identified shortfalls in practice and VAA representatives were more likely to report on innovative projects than local authorities.'³⁷⁰ As a voluntary agency, a Christian adoption agency can build into its structure and working practice, methods that are imaginative and productive and less fraught with imposed bureaucracy. This augments existing high standards of care. It is good to recognise the strengths that independence offers: flexibility; relationships with service users – individual, long term, offering choices; non-judgmental approaches to children and families; innovation and creativity.³⁷¹ These are positive examples of dedicated service and a full engagement between a Christian agency in a secular environment.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 36.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

³⁶⁹ Alan Rushton, 'Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies' Arrangements for Supporting Adoptive Families: A Survey of UK Practice', *Adoption and Fostering* 27, no. 3 (2003), 51-60.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ *The Future of Children's Services*, op. cit., 4.

When expressed as a 'percentage of agencies meeting minimum standards' ninety per cent of the inspection criteria were met by more than 50% of voluntary agencies compared to only 54.6% of inspection criteria for 50% or more of LAs. 60% of the inspection criteria were met by more than seventy per cent of voluntary agencies compared to only 10.7% of inspection criteria for 70% or more of LAs; a difference of nearly 50% at this very high level of operation.³⁷² 64% of the membership of the Consortium of Voluntary Agencies (members total thirty-six agencies) are Christian in their foundation, and the CSCI had information from thirty-three VAAs. It is therefore possible to assume that this positive affirmation applies to many Christian adoption agencies. Irrefutably VAAs have received strong external validation for their distinctive approach and professionalism.

4.3.3 Distinctive Faith

The survey conducted for this thesis can be used to provide support for the assertion that Christian adoption agencies are distinctive because they are Christian.

A range of six possibilities was offered to adoption agency respondents as a means of helping them to assess a characterisation of influence that the Christian faith had upon their work. Figure 4.6 shows this diagrammatically, indicating that the background influence of faith, possibly coupled with an influence from secular society, dominated this critique, rather than a preparedness to be faith-saturated. The results indicate a full engagement with the environment within which adoption work must be conducted. One director indicated that he was 'faith-centred' whereas he felt his staff would be 'faith-secular'.

³⁷² LAs were not assessed on 'right to make a complaint', 'financial viability' or 'financial processes.' CSCI, op. cit., 41-2.

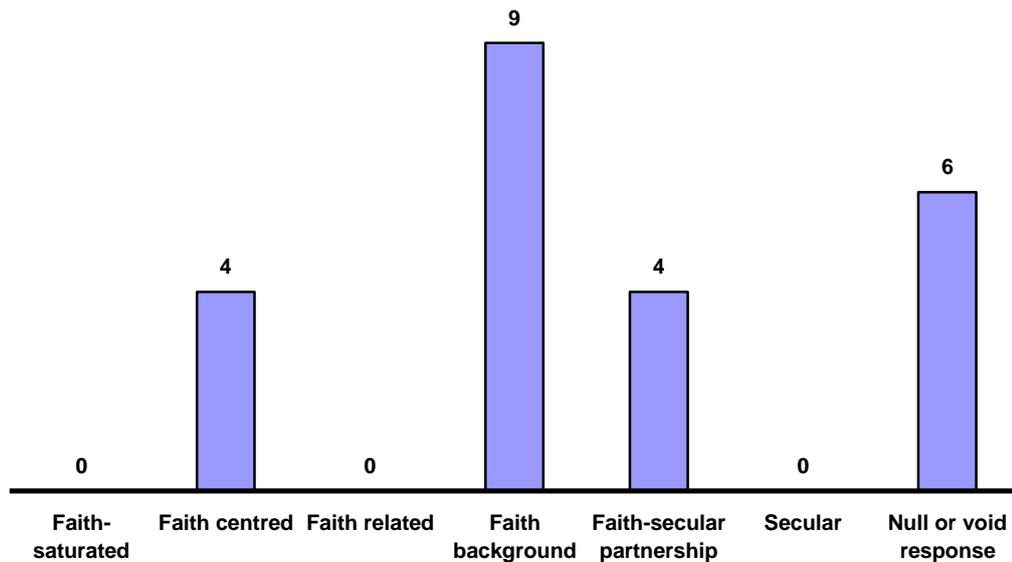


Figure 4.6. A Characterisation of the Influence of the Christian Faith Within an Agency

This area was further explored in telephone interviews and produced comments that illustrated that it was the Christian ethos of the adoption agency that had most effect:

I think we acknowledge the roots and foundations of our organisation; values are important. I think how we've got here, the history and distinctive identity is there... I just feel that it's how we treat people... that sense of how we manage our relationships with people, how we treat people where they are at, which is a Biblical principle... And lots of people come to us having had a rough deal from other people. I hope that we treat people with a more caring, Christian attitude.³⁷³

When we have been inspected, the report often points out the strengths of the relationships within the organisation and the general ethos. It is very difficult to articulate why we feel distinctive... Two new, highly experienced and respected staff have joined the agency from Local Authorities and they have both been absolutely amazed at the way we are 'so open.' They could not believe the depth and openness of the relationships that they saw between workers and adoptive parents. One said that in all her years of work within her LA she had never worked like that.³⁷⁴

We have a very stable staff group; they are our greatest resource. I would stress that we are professional social workers and that our ethos feeds our professionalism. We have a very low turnover. We work in a way in which we recognise the skills of our workers; we offer good conditions, training, high standards, different pressures to Local Authorities (not 'no' pressure).³⁷⁵

Separately, the survey asked whether Christian Adoption Agencies had something distinctive to offer. Sixty-five per cent of respondents said they did. It is possible to correlate these answers to responses characterising the Christian emphasis of the agency. Table 4.3 shows that the stronger the feeling of Christian identity, the more likely the agency was to answer positively about being distinctive in a Christian way.

³⁷³ Norman Goodwin

³⁷⁴ Caroline Davis

³⁷⁵ Ruth duBois

		Christian distinctiveness		Total
		Yes	No	
Characterisation of Christian faith	Faith centred	4	0	4
	Faith background	7	1	8
	Faith-secular	3	1	4
	Unspecified	1	4	5
Total		15	6	21

Table 4.3. Cross-tabulation of Characterised Faith Position and Statement of Christian Distinctiveness

It was also possible to explore if any denomination perceived its Christian ministry to be more emphatic than any other, as measured by the way the work was characterised in faith terms. Table 4.4 indicates that there is a spread of denominations across each faith position so that no specific result can be drawn. The work of adoption agencies of any denominational background incline towards the secular end of possible answers.

	Characterisation of Christian faith				Total
	Faith centred	Faith background	Faith-secular partnership	Unspecified	
Roman Catholic	3	2	3	1	9
Anglican	1	3	0	1	5
Methodist	0	1	0	3	4
Non-conformist	0	2	0	0	2
Ecumenical	0	1	0	0	1
Non-denominational	0	0	1	1	2
Total	4	9	4	6	23

Table 4.4. Cross-tabulation of Denominational Background with Indicated Faith Position

When asked to explain a positive reply about Christian distinctiveness, five categories emerged: a sense of family; respect for all faiths and beliefs; care and attitude towards others (incarnational love); the desire to relate to a Christian organisation; and the affirmation of the faith of the service users. Several respondents gave statements about high standards and commitment levels and the influence of a Christian Board of Trustees. The ethos of a Christian agency would embrace attitudes of respect for all members of the adoption triangle.

Table 4.5 cross-tabulates these measures with agency denomination and shows that a distinct spirituality is no indicator of a particular view of Christian witness in this field.

	Measure of Christian distinctiveness					Total
	Sense of family	Respect for all faiths and beliefs	Incarnational love	Some want a Christian organisation	Affirmation of faith in service users	
Roman Catholic	2	1	2	0	1	6
Anglican	0	0	2	2	0	4
Methodist	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ecumenical	0	0	1	0	0	1
Non-denominational	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	2	2	5	3	1	13

Table 4.5. Correlation of Denominational Background and Measures of Christian Distinctiveness

Christian distinctiveness, attitudes and methods combine to be a form of mission and witness. Penny Edgell Becker recognised this in her work with different church congregations, stating that:

bundles of understandings about mission and identity in local cultures make a difference in what sociologists call organizational process and outcomes, or, in more common language, how decisions are made, how conflicts arise and are resolved, how goals are set and programs developed.³⁷⁶

She found that ‘core tasks are not separable from identity but are constitutive of it... “Who we are” is defined by “what we do” and “how we do things here”’.³⁷⁷ This was found in anecdotal evidence when adoption workers had moved from a LA agency to a Christian agency, as cited above, and is only one way of proving that a Christian ethos creates a distinctive environment within which to work even when it is classified as a ‘background’ factor. A theology of engagement stimulates dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, promoting work that embraces the core values and goals of each party, yet it does not prevent one party bringing additional, valuable contributions that are part of its original distinctiveness. Undoubtedly, the faith aspect of these adoption agencies makes a fundamental difference to their effectiveness. It may be subtle, difficult to articulate, but it is measurable.

4.4 Twenty-First Century Adoption Agencies

*The inherent dynamism and characteristic qualities of social and political commitment and service where it is really focussed on human beings, whether directly and personally or indirectly through complex structures, carry that commitment and service on to the source of human value and otherness, the transcendent God.*³⁷⁸

This chapter has discussed the activity of the Christian adoption agency in three

³⁷⁶ Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

³⁷⁷ Becker, op. cit., 181.

³⁷⁸ McDonagh, op. cit., 84.

ways: a theological reflection looking at historical and theoretical approaches; a comparison between a 'new' approach for an adoption agency and the reality of today; and finally, a defence of the Christian adoption agency for those who may consider the work to be insufficiently Christian.

A defence is required for those who would address the secularising influences of working within state legislated areas by offering a radical model such as that illustrated by Niebuhr's *Christ against culture*.³⁷⁹ Yet there are models of service in the world that are recognisably Christian and endorsed by secular environments. In these agencies faith is 'in the blood': 'Where's the religion? Everywhere. Religion infuses agency self-presentation, personnel, resources, decision-making processes, and interactions with clients and among staff in faith-based agencies.'³⁸⁰ The challenge to continue to be distinctively Christian and remain active in adoption work is ongoing.

Christian adoption agencies operate as charitable businesses. As such they are dependent upon income from external sources. The income is primarily from Local Authorities, who are themselves active adoption agencies. Each United Kingdom citizen acts as both user and taxpayer and the Government assesses best value. In other words, 'he who pays the piper calls the tune.' Whilst many Christian people would find any compromise this causes unacceptable, the thought of there being no or increasingly diminishing numbers of Christian adoption agencies is equally unpalatable to an organisation that should lead the way in dedicated community service.

Christian adoption agencies frequently specialise in 'hard to place' children. This is a laudable aspect of adoption work; it values the worth of all children and upholds the desirability that the most vulnerable and needy should be nurtured in a permanent home. In business terms, it helps to meet a demand and secures an income stream. In Christian terms it is supporting rejected and undervalued children. This is a good place for Christian adoption agencies. Despite references to showing dignity to all people and love and compassion in adoption work (see **4.3.3**), not one agency expressed this work as being distinctive in theological or Christian terms, despite the fact that it comes closest to the reasons why passionate nineteenth century evangelicals founded adoption agencies. This is one of several potential niche areas for Christian adoption agencies.

Stanley Hauerwas argues that Christians should not downplay their distinctiveness in matters of social ethics, something that is very tempting when working for justice when

³⁷⁹ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, 45-82.

³⁸⁰ Ebaugh et al, *op. cit.*

cooperation with non-Christians is required.³⁸¹ This chapter asserts that using a theology of engagement, an approach of which Hauerwas is critical (see **section 1.2**), enables the Church to work in adoption without losing distinctiveness. Elsewhere Hauerwas writes:

Too often, in an effort to appear socially relevant, the church has accepted the world's agenda about what "real" politics involves. Thus, calls for us to serve the world responsibly have too often resulted in the church simply saying to the world what the world already knows. We thereby end up trying to secure a "justice" that is only the continuation of some people's domination over others.³⁸²

For the adoption agency, possible domination comes from ideas about parental rights and who should be able to adopt. Christian adoption agencies must work within the law, whilst not fearing to challenge societal trends. After all the goal of adoption is alike to the goal of the Church in respect of building stable family life. Christian adoption agencies should be recognised for their uniquely thorough contribution to building family life. The Church should support them in this task, helping them to find adopters through both its teaching and its funding support.

Christian adoption agencies work at the interface of the church and the state: the sacred and the secular, using a theology of engagement. One possible way to decrease the gap between the sacred and the secular is by the use of the word 'spirituality.' Spirituality is an under-recognised dimension of being an adopted child. **Chapter 5** moves on to address this and other aspects of those who need adopters: the children themselves.

³⁸¹ Hauerwas (1983), *op. cit.*, 99.

³⁸² Hauerwas (2001), *op. cit.*, 104.

5 The Adopted Child: Healing and Wholeness

*In working with young people...,
do not try to call them back
to where they were,
and do not try to call them
to where you are,
as beautiful as that place
may seem to you.
You must have the courage
to go with them to a place
that neither you nor they have ever been before.*³⁸³

This quote from the introduction to *Christianity Rediscovered* is relevant to this chapter in its poetic explanation of how parents walk can alongside a child, so that they both travel to a new place. For the Masai in the book, this was about Donovan's patience in enabling them to discover Christianity in the context of their own culture. For the parent of an adopted child, it is about enabling a child to discover a sense of wholeness that embraces their identity: emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual.

This chapter is about the hidden dimensions of the adopted child. It will serve two purposes: for Christian adopters and their adopted children it argues that Christianity is a faith in which they can have confidence since it can provide meaningful narratives and support for their family experience. Christianity has the potential to heal the wounds of adoption. Secondly, for adoption social workers it will argue that a Christian spirituality has the ability to bring wholeness to the complexity of being an adopted child. The means of engaging in a useful dialogue between social workers and Christian family life is through consideration of what constitutes a meaningful spirituality. Christianity can make a meaningful contribution.

The chapter looks at three areas of life for the child:

1. The spirituality of the child. Being recognised as a spiritual person can bring inner healing to a vulnerable child. The inherent vagueness of 'spirituality' may build a bridge between the secular engagement with faith and specifically Christian understanding.
2. The adoptive identity of the child. This is theology-in-action, drawing on material that shows how Christian theology relates to the inner complexity of understanding oneself as an adopted person.
3. The nurturing of the adopted child. In **section 5.3** practical aspects of parenting

³⁸³ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle From the Masai* (London: SCM, 1982), vii.

vulnerable children are discussed and the way in which engaging with spirituality is a positive tool. This is a practical and pastoral reflection of the contemporary picture from a Christian perspective.

Throughout the chapter there is an awareness that people can have a spiritual life without any faith. Such people can be wonderful adoptive parents. The exploration of life in all its fullness and mystery by parents with adopted children is at the heart of the argument for healing and wholeness. For example, it is possible to imagine a conversation about a flower or a view or an animal and ponder the creative action that brought it into being. This dialogue comes close to something more intimate, when the questions become: Why me? Who am I? In life-giving ways, adopted child and adoptive parent can travel to a place ‘that neither you nor they have ever been before.’

5.1 Spirituality and the Education and Nurture of Children

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”³⁸⁴

Adopted children, more than children in their first families, may ‘break easily’, have ‘sharp edges’ and need to be ‘carefully kept’, and yet through the power of love they may yet become ‘Real’ to themselves and to other people. This section (5.1) argues that a child’s unique identity is shaped by an acceptance of each aspect of their being and that a neglect of the spiritual dimension is not ‘in the best interests of the child.’ Children are individuals and as such are physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual beings. All of these elements need integration if one is to form a wholesome identity. This need to work towards acting in ‘the best interests of the child’ and to acknowledge the place of spiritual nurture is recognised in international and national legislation, from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Education Act 1989.

5.1.1 What is Spirituality?

Human spirituality describes the well-being and inter-relatedness of the emotional, cognitive and intuitive self, which includes sensitivity to the transcendent.³⁸⁵

The word ‘spiritual’ originated as a Christian term, used by people very much aware

³⁸⁴ Margery Williams, *The Original Velveteen Rabbit* (London: Egmont, 1992), 10-11.

³⁸⁵ John Bradford, *Caring for the Whole Child: A Holistic Approach to Spirituality* (London: The Children’s Society, 1995), 3.

of the transcendent God. It is found in Paul's letters and also in Peter's (for example: Rom. 1.11, 7.14; 1 Cor 2.13, 15.46; 1 Pet. 2.5). From this beginning, Sandra Schneiders claims that the use of the word 'spirituality' has changed over the last few decades, to become 'a generic term for the actualisation in life of the human capacity for self-transcendence, regardless of whether that experience is religious or not.'³⁸⁶ Spirituality is not merely an emotional or psychological matter. Spirituality is cognitive and reflective. Spirituality is undoubtedly about beliefs, yet it is hindered by the perception that it is exclusively a religious issue. Belief systems can include humanism, secularism, nature worship, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and so on. All of these have the ability to engage with human existence in a spiritual way, not always in a religious way. It is possible to be spiritual without talking about God.³⁸⁷ The religious part of spirituality relates to a devotional aspect and leads to union with God, and not the human or practical aspects of spirituality, though these are inter-connected.³⁸⁸ The interconnection is vital to a Christian spirituality. Schneiders defines Christian spirituality thus:

Christian spirituality is the life of faith, hope, and love within the community of the Church through which we put on the mind of Christ by participating sacramentally and existentially in his paschal mystery. The desired life-integration is personal transformation in Christ which implies participation in the transformation of the world in justice for all creatures.³⁸⁹

A holistic awareness of oneself has value and is as widely acceptable in a secular society as much as in a religious one. Such awareness engenders 'a desire to behave justly, to care for others, and to be concerned for the environment.'³⁹⁰ From the secular world, a family therapist defined spirituality as:

the sum of experiences and attributions of a personal nature which tend to liberate "dis-spirited" individuals from hopelessness, isolation, anxiety, and aimlessness and open space for living purposefully, hopefully, compassionately, and in harmony.³⁹¹

This ties in closely with humanistic concepts of spirituality which include:

aspirations, moral sensibility, creativity, love and friendship, response to natural and human beauty, scientific and artistic endeavour, appreciation and wonder at the natural world, intellectual achievement, physical activity, surmounting suffering and persecution, selfless love, the quest for meaning and values by which to live.³⁹²

³⁸⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (2003), 163-185.

³⁸⁷ David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* (London: Jessica Kingsley, Rev. ed. 2006), 63.

³⁸⁸ Bradford, op. cit., 13-24, 34.

³⁸⁹ Schneiders, op. cit.

³⁹⁰ David Hay, 'Why Should We Care About Children's Spirituality?', *Pastoral Care* (March 1998), 11-16.

³⁹¹ Ingeborg E. Haug, 'Spirituality as a Dimension of Family Therapists' Clinical Training', *Contemporary Family Therapy* 20, no.4 (1998), 471-483.

³⁹² Janet Seden, 'BBC Child of our Time: Child Spirituality,' on http://www.open2.net/childofourtime/tv_pages/art_child_spirituality_1.htm (accessed 23 February, 2005).

A study of schoolteachers defined four dimensions of spirituality: inner, social and moral, environmental and transcendental.³⁹³ A nurse practitioner defined spirituality as ‘personal beliefs, transcendent experience, and principles; religion is subsumed under spirituality and is viewed as an organised system of beliefs or a practice of worship.’³⁹⁴

Spirituality is inherent to all beings, a ‘biologically inbuilt constituent of what it is to be human.’³⁹⁵ Spirituality is relational, connected and seeks for meaning and wholeness; it ‘is the source out of which scientific curiosity, philosophy and ethics grow, as well as religion.’³⁹⁶ Spirituality can be an experience of the sacred, illuminating the lived experience and can be measured in self-worth or a state of being content. In matters of health, spiritual awareness ‘may catalyse a positive sense of self-perceived good health.’³⁹⁷ David Hay and Rebecca Nye have compared perceptions of spirituality with religion, finding that spirituality is seen as ‘much warmer associated with love, inspiration, wholeness, depth, mystery, and personal devotions like prayer and meditation.’³⁹⁸

Nicholas Lash has noted the increase in books available in this whole area, describing them as, ‘thick mists of something like “mysticism”’ and something that seems to ‘flourish with positively tropical luxuriance.’³⁹⁹ Despite writing about *The Church and the State We’re In*, Lash stoically manages to avoid the use of the word ‘spirituality’ as an aid to describing developments. It is as though he denies the whole concept. Philip Sheldrake laments his stance, claiming that ‘mysticism has often been interpreted as the most radically inward form of Christian spirituality.’⁴⁰⁰ Sheldrake feels that, ‘Christian spirituality has been marred by an emphasis on privatised interiority.’⁴⁰¹ Lash would agree on this specific point. For him spirituality needs to avoid vagueness and be grounded in practical, tangible reality.

There is vagueness in the understanding of ‘spirituality’. It is a problematic notion that is not universally accepted as a concept. This said it is a term widely used in the general population, by Christian and non-Christian people alike. For this reason alone, it can form a bridge between the secular mind and those who fully accept the place of the transcendent.

³⁹³ Sally Elton-Chalcraft, ‘Empty Wells: How Well Are We Doing at Spiritual Well-Being?’ *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 7, no. 3 (2002), 309-328.

³⁹⁴ Mimi McEvoy, ‘An Added Dimension to the Pediatric Health Maintenance Visit: The Spiritual History’, *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 14, no. 5 (2000), 216-220.

³⁹⁵ Hay (1998), op. cit.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ruth A. Tanyi, ‘Towards Clarification of the Meaning of Spirituality’, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 39, no. 5 (2002), 500-509.

³⁹⁸ Hay and Nye, op. cit., 19.

³⁹⁹ Nicholas Lash, ‘The Church in the State We’re In’, *Modern Theology* 13, no. 1 (1997), 121-137.

⁴⁰⁰ Philip F. Sheldrake, ‘Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic’, *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (2003), 19-37.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

This bridge of spirituality can be a meeting place between a non-believing social worker and Christian prospective adopters or between a Christian adoption agency and a wide population of applicants. Most importantly, all parties need to recognise the value of nurturing spirituality in a child.

5.1.2 Child Development and Spirituality

Children recognise themselves in a mirror from about eighteen months to three years. With this self-awareness comes an additional sense of ownership of time and place, expressed through the beginnings of language skills. Hereafter, socialising with others and recognising uniqueness and personal abilities compared with others, creates more skills while beginning to build self-confidence and esteem. ‘Three-, four-, and five-year old children are on the move. They are looking for answers to their questions. They are learning to play and they are playing to learn.’⁴⁰²

Aside from the obvious emotional, physical and intellectual development it is possible to identify emerging explorations of being a spiritual person. In a study of the spirituality of preschoolers, three modes of *being* were identified: sensitive, relational and existential. These represent facets of a child’s existence.⁴⁰³ The sensitive mode is expressed through activity: verbally, physically, facially, creatively in drawing. These are embodied aspects of personality and identity. The relational mode is evident in a child’s behaviour with an adult: presence or absence, closeness or distance. This is shown in affirmation, affection, forgiveness, preferring one adult to another, and combining effort. The existential mode is shown through engagement with the here and now, time and space, imitations and symbolisms, imagination.

Before school, children use pretend play ‘to interiorise the symbol systems of their community... Such play allows children to appropriate and modify the symbols they intuit or perceive according to their own understanding of their life experiences.’⁴⁰⁴ For children this young, and up to the age of seven years, Jean Piaget calls this ‘pre-operational’ thinking, understanding that children would move from a world of guessing and imagining towards something more fixed or ‘concrete.’⁴⁰⁵

Between the ages of five to seven years there seems to be a marked shift in children’s

⁴⁰² Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family and Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 78.

⁴⁰³ Elaine Champagne, ‘Being a Child, a Spiritual Child’, *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 8, no. 1 (2003), 43-53.

⁴⁰⁴ Karen Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 12.

⁴⁰⁵ J. Piaget, *The Child’s Conception of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1929)

engagement with the world.⁴⁰⁶ Children are learning to read and write. They become more able to respond to stories that may explain their world and life.⁴⁰⁷ In the years approaching puberty at about eleven or twelve, children develop stronger communication and relational skills. In these years, knowledge of the world expands; how they understand both moral and spiritual concerns.⁴⁰⁸ From this point, ‘children begin to develop a mythic-literal faith. They build a repertoire of story, ritual, values, and expectations for moral behaviour from their faith community.’⁴⁰⁹ If their community is agnostic, atheist or humanist this same repertoire will have a different focus.

Until age nine, children view God as having magical qualities, working miracles that can adjust natural laws. They experience awe and wonder. They have a strong sense of good and bad.⁴¹⁰ Between ten and twelve years, their approach adjusts to become more scientific and social and religious perspectives begin to compete in their thinking.⁴¹¹ In research with nine to eleven year olds, teachers who wished to develop ideas of spirituality with children used dreams as a discussion starter. It was found that dreaming about God is not uncommon for this age group. Dreaming plays a role in the spiritual and/or religious lives of the dreamers. Widespread disbelief in dreams, despite the notable fact that Freud and Jung worked in the field, makes dreaming about God especially difficult to admit.⁴¹²

Basing her summary on the work of James Fowler, Margaret Crompton states that adolescence is about relationships and the larger environment.⁴¹³ Whilst not exclusive to this age group, this can be a time for seeking answers to some of life’s ‘big questions’, for example, What happens when I die? Why am I here? Piaget called this stage of development ‘propositional thinking’ since it is a time for exploring abstract or symbolic concepts and various hypotheses can be explored and tested. David Hay argues that it is increasingly difficult for some ideas to be tested within the education system since exploration of spiritual matters ‘is vulnerable to the effects of a destructive suppression or even repression as children enter into adolescence.’⁴¹⁴ He states that ‘it is around the age of twelve that children in Western culture typically have their first serious induction into the scientific tradition of the Enlightenment, often accompanied by explicit religious scepticism. That

⁴⁰⁶ May et al, op. cit., 79.

⁴⁰⁷ Yust, op. cit., 12; Crompton (1998), op. cit., 38.

⁴⁰⁸ May et al, op. cit., 82-3.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁴¹⁰ Yust, op. cit., 12.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹² Kate Adams, ‘God Talks to Me in My Dreams: The Occurrence and Significance of Children’s Dreams About God’, *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*, 6 no. 1 (2001), 99-111.

⁴¹³ Crompton (1998), op. cit., 38.

⁴¹⁴ Hay (1998), op. cit., 11-16.

children are now often receiving scientific instruction from a much younger age may have the effect of inhibiting spiritual awareness at an even more sensitive, vulnerable stage.’ Hay argues that spirituality is deliberately excluded from our education practice.⁴¹⁵ The more that developmental theories are applied to religion, the more reasonable it becomes to dissolve and rationalise away personal experiences; in particular, spirituality in children and young people is perceived as immaturity or inadequacy. Yet the reality is that the contrary is true. For some young people ‘an alteration in their spirituality was associated with their increased knowledge.’⁴¹⁶

In summary, children are spiritual beings from their earliest existence. Their ability to engage with this aspect of their humanity can be encouraged or suppressed depending upon those with whom they are with. Moreover the value of the spiritual life of children has been recognised beyond religious groups. It is also true that children who have faced difficult life experiences, experiences that have the potential to affect mental health, will benefit from this kind of engagement. John Bradford offers a helpful summary of these thoughts:

For a human being, especially a child or young person, to have a full quality of life, spirituality in all its aspects must be nurtured and affirmed. For children or young people who have been marginalised or who have suffered deprivation in every way, the need for such nurture and affirmation in human spirituality is all the more pronounced.⁴¹⁷

5.1.3 Children’s Spirituality

*Parties... shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.*⁴¹⁸

So far this section has established that spirituality is a broad term with a meaning that can bridge the gap between secular and faith worlds. Spirituality is an area of engagement in relating to children. The preceding discussion has described how spirituality is an inherent part of a child’s experience that may include a specifically transcendent dimension, as well as offering a route to better mental health and well-being. This section concludes by examining what the spiritual *needs* of a child are and how they are addressed.

The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child 1989 mentions aspects of spirituality in articles 17 (see quotation above), 23, 27 and 32 and religious ‘rights’ in articles 2, 14, 20, and 30. John Bradford has summarised these statements thus:

⁴¹⁵ Hay and Nye, op. cit., 57.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁴¹⁷ Bradford, op. cit., 72.

⁴¹⁸ ‘UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’, Article 17, on <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (accessed 3 June, 2007).

1. The right to the opportunity for a close and loving parental bond.
2. The right to a cultural and physical environment that promotes a sense of security.
3. The right to day-to-day circumstances that allow the exercise of imagination, creativity, wonder and reflection.
4. The right to a social context that is affirming and supportive.
5. The right to age-appropriate inclusion as a participating member in family and community affairs.⁴¹⁹

Article 27 recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. It is the primary responsibility of the parent(s) or others responsible for the child, within their abilities and financial capacities, to provide the conditions of living necessary for the child's development. Spiritual matters are also referred to in article 17 (access to appropriate information), 23 (disability) and 32 (child labour). It can be argued that the intention of these articles is to fully integrate spirituality with all other aspects of life.⁴²⁰

Spiritual development is, however, not mentioned in relation to key articles such as protection from abuse (19) or education (28). It is inconsistent that spiritual development is required for an adequate standard of living but absent from physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment.⁴²¹

Article 20 makes special reference to children placed away from their birth families and asks that due regard should be paid to the 'ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.' This is pertinent to issues of adoption and a commitment to maintain the birth parents wishes in sustaining some aspects of the child's original heritage. Article 8 seeks to preserve the identity of the child and to act if it has been unlawfully removed. Adoption is not mentioned in this context but may be exempt due to lawfully changing the identity of the child upon adoption, which is nonetheless a loss to the child with an inherent psychological impact. **Section 5.2** looks at the whole area of adoptive identity from a theological and psycho-social perspective.

As mentioned above, the article on education (28) in the Convention is primarily about access for all children and not about broader interpretations of welfare. In the United Kingdom, however, the educational importance of spiritual development has existed in law from the Education Act 1944. Teachers have to be aware of the importance of spiritual

⁴¹⁹ Bradford, op. cit., 5-7.

⁴²⁰ Crompton (1998), op. cit., 5.

⁴²¹ 'UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,' on <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm> (accessed 23 February, 2005).

welfare in both their school's community and for each pupil specifically.⁴²² The Education Reform Act 1988 asks for matters of spirituality to be on the curriculum of every school, which should be 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum which... promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society.'⁴²³ OFSTED (1994) also had a discussion paper concerning spiritual development.⁴²⁴

In summary, the requirement to meet the spiritual needs of children is laid at the door of both parent and state. Responsible adults in multiple contexts need to have the creativity necessary to nurture the imaginative life that can help children manage adversity and build emotional resilience. With this aptitude, children have a heightened 'sensing' facility, enabling them to be more aware, sensing ideas of moral importance, values, mystery and awe, meaning or connectedness.⁴²⁵ Not all parents find this easy. Neglecting a child's sense of justice, truth and mystery may leave pain and hurt that generate strong reactions which are both unacceptable to society and have potentially tragic consequences. The selection of parents for children who await adoption is a highly responsible task, since these marginalized and deprived children may have spirituality needs that are 'all the more pronounced'.⁴²⁶

As stated earlier, spirituality is closely linked with belief and also with morality and ethics. Sandra Schneiders claims that 'religion is the optimal context for spirituality.'⁴²⁷ Most religious belief systems include teachings about the value and dignity of life, including respect and care for children in the family and in the community. Some misunderstandings about religious practice are prevalent and may have a detrimental affect in an assessment process connecting adults with vulnerable children. For example, there is a stereotype linking evangelical Christians and strong parental discipline (see **section 6.2.2**). Many more Christian people would wish to be associated with a spirituality that affirms the sense of unique individuality (Isa. 43.1); that places children within a family (Jn. 8.35) and within the love and care of a community (Jas. 1.27). Within this community everyone is valued, whatever their life experience or origins.

Adopted children have inherent needs to place their life's experience within a stable

⁴²² Bradford, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁴²³ Education Reform Act 1988, Chapter 1 'The Curriculum', http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts_1988/Ukpga_19880040_en_2.htm#mdiv2 (accessed 19 February, 2005).

⁴²⁴ OFSTED, 'Promoting and Evaluating Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development' (London: HMI (2125), 2004), <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=3598&type=pdf> (accessed 8 March, 2005).

⁴²⁵ Hay and Nye, *op. cit.*, 63-78.

⁴²⁶ Bradford, *op. cit.*, 72.

⁴²⁷ Schneiders, *op. cit.*

and secure framework that is life-giving and not disabling. Since they are no longer with their first family, this experience can be traumatic: emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The next section argues that Christian theology has much to offer an adoptive child who searches for a new sense of identity. This is followed by research evidence in **section 5.3** that shows how Christian adoptive parents work practically and pastorally in addressing the spiritual needs of their children.

5.2 A Theology of Identity

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1.27)

Philip Sheldrake promotes a strongly Christian spirituality and uses it to offer theological insights into the experience of life today. He writes:

The Christian spiritual tradition promotes a form of practical, yet profoundly theological, knowledge known as discernment. Indeed, discernment effectively bridges that unhelpful distinction that is so often made between knowledge (conceived as information) and wisdom (conceived as insight to live by).⁴²⁸

Theological engagement with contemporary issues can appear to be more rigorous than an engagement through the lenses of spirituality yet both seek knowledge and wisdom. This section moves from spirituality and the adopted child, to a theological reflection upon the identity of the adopted child. It attempts to find knowledge and wisdom about the adopted child from a theological perspective. Their disrupted start in childhood gives them an atypical experience that defines them throughout their life. How does a Christian theology understand this? Where is God when life begins in such an unconventional way?

Nancy Newton Verrier is a clinical psychologist and mother of one natural daughter and one adopted daughter. In her work, Verrier has found that many adoptees 'have voiced a concern about their lack of feeling connected to any spiritual life. Others have delved into a church or religious group with fervour and enthusiasm.'⁴²⁹ Her research and counselling experience with adoptees have indicated that when adoptees explore their own sense of identity, spiritual or otherwise, it is part of a journey with three parts: victim, survivor, participant.⁴³⁰ These three aspects of adoptive identity set the framework for this section.

5.2.1 The Adoptee as Victim

When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took

⁴²⁸ Philip F. Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and the Integrity of Theology', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 7 (2007), 93-98.

⁴²⁹ Nancy Newton Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 2003), 352

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

him as her son. She named him Moses. (Ex. 2.10)

But Moses said to the Lord, 'I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue... O my Lord, please send someone else.' (Ex. 4.10, 13)

The Biblical story of Moses features abandonment and adoption.⁴³¹ Involving oneself imaginatively in this story, the emotional vulnerability and low self-esteem of Moses might be assumed to be a part of Moses' innate personality but is conceivably part of the impact of his early life experience and separation from his birth mother.⁴³²

A child who cannot spend their life with those who conceived them, the first family, the original community, has a damaged sense of identity. They may be physically mismatched with a family, a factor drawing attention to difference, or psychologically affected by their placement experience. 'Attachment disorder' is a phrase used to describe disorders of behaviour and social relationships that arise from a failure to form normal attachments to primary care giving figures in early childhood. It covers a very large number of problems including being indiscriminately affectionate with strangers, lacking the ability to give or receive affection, lacking a conscience, being inappropriately demanding and clingy, showing signs of a guilt complex or passive aggression. The closeness of caring relationships that would normally be considered to be crucial for healthy social, emotional and personality development seem to be rejected or resisted. Thus a child with attachment disorder can place many demands upon an adoptive parent. The presence of this issue for an adopted child also makes them a victim of their circumstances. Historically adoptions have been subject to secrecy and anonymity, both of which were an effort 'to shield children from the presumed stigma of "illegitimacy" or "bad blood" associated with being born out of wedlock, being infertile, or having a child outside of marriage.'⁴³³ The permanency of this stigma was found on certificates of baptism, confirmation, marriage and death.⁴³⁴ Up until the 1970s, illegitimacy was variously connected with pity, scorn and charity and seen as the result of sinful behaviour.⁴³⁵ With societal prejudice of this type surrounding adoptees, developing a sense of value and self-worth is

⁴³¹ This section assumes that Moses is an authentic historical figure. This is a fact about which 'some scholars have been very sceptical' others much less so. See Richard Coggins, *The Book of Exodus* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), 10-11; Ian Wilson, *The Exodus Enigma* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 142f.

⁴³² Verrier (2003), op. cit., 360.

⁴³³ Harold D. Grotevant, Nora Dunbar, Julie K. Kohler and Amy M. Lash Esau, 'Adoptive Identity: How Contexts Within and Beyond the Family Shape Developmental Pathways', *Family Relations* 49, no. 4 (2000), 379-387.

⁴³⁴ John Witte Jr., 'Ishmael's Bane: The Sin and Crime of Illegitimacy Reconsidered', in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 284.

⁴³⁵ As cited in the Apocrypha: Wisdom of Solomon 3.16-17, 4.6.

difficult. The traditional view of the Church has not made life easier.

Children who are abandoned have identity issues with added layers of complexity. Amongst the issues foundlings face are a lack of knowledge about a birth date, original name, ethnicity and so on.⁴³⁶ They have no sense of where their life began and no known biological roots. For these children there can be no ‘matching’ process where social workers make an attempt to place children with adoptive parents by examining potential ‘appearance, interests, intelligence, personality or other traits.’⁴³⁷

Adoptees live without genetic markers.⁴³⁸ Society perceives a biological relationship within a family as being indissoluble ‘and of a mystical nature that transcends legal or other kinship arrangements.’⁴³⁹ The process of matching physical and mental traits supports the mystical nature of a genetic connection for family bonding and thus successful attachments of adopted children and parents.⁴⁴⁰ Hereditary factors can promote a sense of belonging and security that is impeded for adoptees.⁴⁴¹ Inter-country adoptions raise particular issues for children as they naturally question self-identity and ask ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who do I look like?’

The adoptee must also discover a satisfactory answer to the question: ‘Why was I adopted?’⁴⁴² Adoption involves loss that is a source of stress for a child and ‘increases his or her vulnerability for emotional and behavioural problems.’⁴⁴³ Being ‘given up’ may feel like rejection, especially if siblings are not placed for adoption.⁴⁴⁴ The older the child being considered for placement, the more likely their experience of inadequate parenting and exposure to experiences of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, poverty, substance abuse, depression and so on. Moves within the care system may add emotional damage.

In her book *The Primal Wound*, Nancy Verrier summarises the experience of adoption

⁴³⁶ Audrey Mullender, Anita Pavlovic and Victoria Staples, ‘I have no beginning and no end’: The Experience of Being a Foundling’, *Adoption and Fostering*, 29 no. 2 (2005), 53-65.

⁴³⁷ Grotevant et al, op. cit.

⁴³⁸ Verrier (2003), op. cit., 169.

⁴³⁹ Miall (1987) op. cit.

⁴⁴⁰ Julie K. Kohler, Harold D. Grotevant and Ruth G. McRoy, ‘Adopted Adolescents’ preoccupation With Adoption: The Impact on adoptive Family Relationships’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64 (2002), 93-104; Katarina Wegar, ‘Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research, and Practice’, *Family Relations*, 49 no. 4 (2000), 263-370.

⁴⁴¹ Janet L. Hoopes, ‘Adoption and Identity Formation’, in David M. Brodzinsky and Marshall D. Schechter (eds.), *The Psychology of Adoption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 152.

⁴⁴² Elsbeth Neil, ‘The Reasons Why Young Children Are Placed For Adoption: Findings From a Recently Placed Sample And a Discussion of Implications for Subsequent Identity Development’, *Child and Family Social Work*, 5 (2000), 303-316.

⁴⁴³ David M. Brodzinsky, ‘A Stress and Coping Model of Adoption Adjustment’, in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.) op. cit., 6.

⁴⁴⁴ David Howe, David Shemmings and Julia Feast, ‘Age at Placement and Adult Adopted People’s Experience of Being Adopted’, *Child and Family Social Work*, 6 (2001), 337-349.

in one word: ‘traumatic.’⁴⁴⁵ The trauma exists because of separation from the birth mother, an event that destroys an inbuilt sense of being whole. She writes:

For the child relinquished at the primal phase of development when the mother not only plays the role of the child’s Self but actually is that Self, we may be dealing not only with the loss of the “primary love object” but with the loss of part of the Self.⁴⁴⁶

This loss is frequently made manifest in sadness and depression. There is also the possibility of feelings of guilt, shame and sorrow, arising from inappropriate feelings of responsibility for the experience of adoption and possible bereavement about being unable to live with the birth mother. The abandoned child will pass through stages of grief including rage, protestation, hopelessness, detachment and finally, hopefully, resignation and attachment to the substitute mother.⁴⁴⁷

Verrier’s work is supported in other research. One programme focussed upon the emotional world of the foster child or adoptee and found that ‘the breakdown of the personality into pathological acting-out is triggered in the here and now by something often quite inoffensive, but is caused at root by traumatic events in early life – neglect, abuse, premature separation(s) from the primary carer.’⁴⁴⁸ An alternative coping mechanism exists at the other end of the emotional range, when adoptees may be very quiet and compliant, fitting into every situation and being a people pleaser.⁴⁴⁹

Attachment is the enduring emotional closeness that binds families, enabling children to be brought to independence and to parent in their turn. It is the template for emotional rapport, fundamental to all successful relationships. As victims of the process of adoption, children do best when they build good attachments to the new family and, maybe through the new family, to a relationship and attachment to a spiritual parent or mentor.

A secure sense of personal worth and value may enable an acceptance of God as a parent with whom they can make a strong attachment.⁴⁵⁰ Children require a robust mental representation of both themselves and significant others to develop a secure self-image.⁴⁵¹ Jesus can be stylized as a ‘victim’ for his redeeming work on the cross, his undeserved death.

⁴⁴⁵ Nancy Newton Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway, 1993), 16.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁴⁸ Christine Bradley and Andrew Hardwick ‘Assessing the Emotional Needs of Children and Young People: Using a Need Assessment Framework’, in Andrew Hardwick and Judith Woodhead (eds.), *Loving, Hating and Survival: A Handbook for all Who Work With Troubled Children and Young People* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 115.

⁴⁴⁹ Verrier (2003), *op. cit.*, 156.

⁴⁵⁰ Pehr Granqvist, Cecilia Ljungdahl and Jane R. Dickie, ‘God is Nowhere, God is Now Here: Attachment Activation, Security of Attachment, and God’s Perceived Closeness Among 5-7-Year-Old Children From Religious and Non-Religious Homes’, *Attachment and Human Development*, 9, no. 1 (2007), 55-71.

⁴⁵¹ Simone A. de Roos, ‘Young Children’s God Concepts: Influences of Attachment and Religious Socialisation in a Family and School Context’, *Religious Education*, 101, no. 1 (2006), 84-103.

Though his childhood is sparingly described within scripture, the small, rural community's awareness of his unconventional conception would be a factor in the relationship he experienced with others during his early years (Matthew 1.16,18-24). Elements of identification between the adopted child and the early life of Jesus, offer some basis for exploring parallels between birth-stories with built-in unknowns and stigmatisation. Moses, had issues with self-esteem, yet God persisted in using him to lead the Israelites. God models the role of the Christian adoptive parent in persevering with the one who had low self-worth, yet became the highly regarded lawgiver. God similarly stands alongside Joseph, the earthly, adoptive father, who brings up a child who does not identify him as 'Father' in all Jesus' teachings.⁴⁵²

Through Joseph as an adoptive father, the Davidic line is passed on to Jesus, a fact that can only be accommodated through adoption.⁴⁵³ In Jewish circles one had only to acknowledge that a male child was a son to make adoption a binding arrangement despite it not (even today) being legally recognized within Jewish communities. This arrangement would have served to reduce the stigma of Jesus' conception. Entering into the story imaginatively, it would have facilitated Joseph's own capacity to deliver the love and security to a child that could have promoted good attachment and self-acceptance. This is, of course, conjecture, yet it could have been played a part in Jesus' own ability to discover his self-identity and explore a sense of incarnate difference as he matured.

The acceptance of an adoptive identity is also possible through the therapeutic work of Jesus in modelling forgiveness to those who inflicted his wounds. The journey away from guilt and shame may include maturity: the adult adoptee accepts it was not the fault of the child in being relinquished for adoption.⁴⁵⁴ The acceptance of a sense of bereavement by an adoptee and the new family may enable the feeling of sorrow to be replaced by something more positive.⁴⁵⁵ The journey through these feelings may include forgiveness, leading to joy in the present and hope for the future. These are specific aspects of a owning a Christian identity. Through engaging with these concepts, it is possible that a Christian family or community may enable an adoptee to abandon a sense of being a victim.

Without the full cooperation and self-giving of parents, the victim status of adopted

⁴⁵² Arthur Peacocke (amongst others) argue that Joseph is most likely Jesus' biological father: Arthur Peacocke, 'DNA of Our DNA', in Arthur Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith? Selected Essays* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 2004), 221-228.

⁴⁵³ Yigal Levin, 'Jesus, 'Son of God' and 'Son of David': The 'Adoption' of Jesus into the Davidic Line', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 28, no. 4 (2006), 415-442.

⁴⁵⁴ Verrier (2003), op. cit., 112.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 126.

children can persist. It can then extend to include the adoptive parents who become victims of their relationship with their children.⁴⁵⁶ It takes adoptive parents with special resources to maintain a personal sense of self-worth and value with children with attachment difficulties.

Whilst citing Biblical examples of adoption-like situations, it cannot be forgotten that Christian people themselves can accept a relationship with God as their adoptive Father. In circumstances where people have a good sense of personal identity and good attachment with others, being in relationship with God acknowledges him as Father, though he is not biologically related. Stephen Post asserts that Christianity is ‘a religion in which salvation occurs through “adoption” as a child of God by virtue of faith in an adoptee messiah relinquished to Joseph by a heavenly father.’⁴⁵⁷ This familial relationship of God as Father is upheld by the Church without qualification, leaving the descriptor ‘adoptive’ firmly back in the Bible. It can be considered that this may be due to the stigma of earthly adoption. Were God to be recognised more frequently as ‘our *adoptive* Father’, perhaps Christians would reflect differently upon God’s inherent love of all children.

This section has explained how the emotional and spiritual life of adoptees is affected by both their place in society and their possible self-perception as a ‘victim’. Inasmuch as Jesus himself had an earthly father and a heavenly Father, a contemporary adoptee exploring a sense of self can explore the parallels between the two birth stories. How this is done is dependent upon the contribution of adoptive families and the following section describes the role adoptive families have in adoptive identity development.⁴⁵⁸

5.2.2 The Adoptee as Survivor

*‘But when he came to himself he said, ‘... I will get up and go to my father.’
(Luke 15.17)*

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Greek word that translates as ‘came to himself’ (NRSV) or ‘came to his senses’ (NIV) has a literal sense of coming together as a whole, coming to ‘oneself’. The son reflects upon his circumstances emotionally and physically and makes a conscious adjustment to change. Likewise, it is possible for the adoptee to reflect upon circumstances so that s/he can survive the early trauma of placement and resolve to live life as an emotionally, cognitively and spiritually integrated person. Undoubtedly, the roles of loving adoptive parents facilitate this survival process. Like the previous section, this theological reflection brings Biblical stories and Church

⁴⁵⁶ Elizabeth Bartholet, *Family Bonds: Adoption, Infertility, and the New World of Child Production* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 164.

⁴⁵⁷ Stephen G. Post, ‘Adoption: A Protestant Agapic Perspective’ in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 172.

⁴⁵⁸ Grotevant et al, op. cit.

traditions to bear upon the lived experience of adoption encounters. It is a practical, actual and pragmatic approach that enables Christianity to engage with the reality of adoptive families.

In adoption research there is a ‘dominance of deficit approaches.’⁴⁵⁹ This ignores the multiplicity and complexity of the reality of family life. It unfairly compares the adoptive family with the traditional, nuclear family. The research can dwell upon ‘less’ rather than ‘more’. Elizabeth Bartholet, a lawyer and adoptive parent, claims that, ‘The language around adoption regularly conveys the... message that adoptive parenting relationships are less powerful, less meaningful, less loving than blood relationships.’⁴⁶⁰ An adoptive family ‘is culturally defined as a deviant family form’⁴⁶¹ and exists ‘somewhere on the spectrum between disastrously and modestly inferior to biologic relationships.’⁴⁶²

It is critical, therefore, that adoptive parents themselves are fully equipped for the reality of adoptive parenthood. Adoptive parents need strong, positive self-images of themselves as they try to help their children to develop their own adequate self-images and to deal with their problems.⁴⁶³

As mentioned in **5.2.1**, understanding the reason for the adoption is one way for adopted children to make sense of their own identity. For adoptive parents the quality of background information available will lead to different abilities to appraise and assess personal histories. ‘Taken away’ is better than ‘given away’; an inability to care is better than abandonment; extreme youth in the mother is better than rejection. The development of a child’s identity depends upon being able to construct a narrative that includes and explains their adoptive status. Negative attitudes of adopters towards the first family can make the adopted child’s discovery more difficult; ‘demonising birthparents is hardly likely to add to a child’s self-esteem.’⁴⁶⁴

David Brodzinsky proposes a ‘stress and coping model’:

that once children are able to begin to understand the implications of being adopted, usually around the age of six, a sense of loss is often experienced which leads to a less positive view of their adoptive status. In this model, how children cope with adoption-related stress is mediated by individual, environmental and biological factors.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁵⁹ Nola L. Passmore, Gerald J. Fogarty, Carolyn J. Bourke and Sandra F. Baker-Evans, ‘Parental Bonding and Identity Style as Correlates of Self-Esteem Among Adult Adoptees and Nonadoptees’, *Family Relations* 54, no. 4 (2005), 523-534.

⁴⁶⁰ Bartholet, op. cit., 167; also explored in Miall (1987), op. cit.

⁴⁶¹ Weegar, op. cit.

⁴⁶² Bartholet, op. cit., 181.

⁴⁶³ Miall (1987), op. cit.

⁴⁶⁴ Neil, op.cit.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

The different role of adoptive parents is not to be underestimated.

The placing of children at a young age increases the likelihood of a good attachment between adoptive parents and children. Relinquished infants cope well both cognitively and emotionally. The younger the child, the greater the chance that they will attach to the new parents and ‘use the available love and support of their parents in resolving identity tasks.’⁴⁶⁶ The desire for a well-integrated identity is paramount since it can be ‘indicative of optimal psychological functioning.’⁴⁶⁷ Yet, an identity does not emerge at a specific age or moment, since for any human being identity is not ‘a fixed entity’ that can be discovered.⁴⁶⁸

It is widely acknowledged that the adolescent years are the main times for identity resolution for all humans. This may be a critical point for any adolescent but there is no evidence to say that it is made more severe for adopted adolescents, even though some may have particular issues stemming from their life story.⁴⁶⁹

Christians use the idea of ‘story’ as an aid to personal growth and spiritual development. Christians can map a personal experience onto the life of Christ. A sense of self can emerge from an ability to incorporate personal history into a continuing narrative. Narrative can be ‘a vehicle for constituting reality and of conferring meaning on experience.’⁴⁷⁰ Through play and conversation children ‘are not only able to represent their understanding of the world, but also to make sense of it both factually and emotionally and to find their place in it.’⁴⁷¹ Such an activity may be the work of trained therapists but can also be a pleasure for a parent who relates to a child whose own journey into self-awareness needs to be handled with sensitivity. The Christian identifies with concepts such as the putting on of a new self and being renewed in knowledge (Col. 3.10). As mentioned at the beginning of **section 5.2** the seeking of knowledge and wisdom is a characteristic of the Christian spiritual tradition. ‘Knowing’ helps to write the autobiography. Equally, the potential to develop and mature is recognised (1 Cor. 13.11), alongside the contribution to personal growth made by those who care (1 Cor. 3.5-6). The true impetus for growth, cognitive and spiritual, lies with God and a relationship with him.

Since identity formation is connected to the quality of parenting, for any child,⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Passmore et al, op. cit.

⁴⁶⁸ Karen Winter and Olivia Cohen, ‘Identity Issues for Looked After Children With No Knowledge of Their Origins: Implications for Research and Practice’, *Adoption and Fostering* 29, no. 2 (2005), 44-52.

⁴⁶⁹ Janet L. Hoopes, ‘Adoption and Identity Formation’ in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.), op. cit., 159-60.

⁴⁷⁰ Jiryung Ahn and Margot Filipenko, ‘Narrative, Imaginary Play, Art, and Self: Intersecting Worlds’, *Early Childhood Education Journal* 34, no. 4 (2007), 279-289.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Hoopes, ‘Adoption and Identity Formation’ in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.), op. cit., 162.

then the ability to be an effective adoptive parent concerns the nurture of all aspects of personhood: personality, aptitude, creativity, intelligence and talent, and the recognition of the child's adoption.⁴⁷³ Just as a child individually copes with being adopted, so the family accommodates its adoptive identity.

Coping mechanisms within adoptive families can be grouped under the following headings: acknowledgement-of-difference (the family works with issues of adoptive identity and explores the issues together without judgment); insistence-of-difference (the family works with issues of adoptive identity and it is the pervasive factor in all dealings with the children, creating a disconnectedness); or rejection-of-difference (the family ignores issues of adoptive identity and attempts to function as a biological family).⁴⁷⁴ Of these, the former is more able to facilitate the route through self-awareness and into a means for survival as an adoptee. A positive self-concept is associated with a supportive and cohesive family relationship within which personal growth and individuation is permitted and encouraged.⁴⁷⁵ Positive self-image and self-appraisal are associated with 'a parenting style that encourages autonomy, communication, and independence of behaviour.'⁴⁷⁶

These are desirable outcomes for all children, yet adopted children with attachment disorders can reject and push away new carers. Some adoptive parents will be able to establish secure attachment but only through understanding, sensitivity and high levels of availability and cooperation. An undesirable outcome can exist when children with complex emotional histories, develop complex behaviour patterns in the new home. Sometimes 'avoidant, coercive, disorganized or controlling patterns of attachment' can generate low confidence and more disengaged forms of care giving by some adoptive parents.⁴⁷⁷

With an understanding of the journey to be undertaken with adopted children, before any placement has occurred, parents can offer themselves fully to the task and be more accepting of all possible outcomes. Research shows 'that *commitment*, and not a blood tie, is the more important factor in family life.'⁴⁷⁸ Here is a concept very familiar to Christian parents who see the extent of self-giving love modeled by Christ as something they work with in their own discipleship. Just as Christ forgives the unlovely behaviour of all Christians, so parents 'forgive those who trespass against us.'

⁴⁷³ Verrier, *op. cit.*, 383.

⁴⁷⁴ David M. Brodzinsky, 'A Stress and Coping Model of Adoption Adjustment' in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.), *op. cit.*, 18-22.

⁴⁷⁵ Hoopes, 'Adoption and Identity Formation' in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.), *op. cit.*, 155.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁷⁷ Howe et al, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷⁸ Charlene E. Miall, 'The Social Construction of Adoption: Clinical and Community Perspectives', *Family Relations* 45 (1996), 309-317.

Christians are committed to following the example of Christ. They are ideally pragmatic individuals when it comes to evaluating the parenting journey with adopted children. If Christian parenting is an outworking of love and self-giving, then this will be offered irrespective of the responsiveness of the child to aspects of faith. It is readily believable, and proven by research, that securely attached children have more positive, loving and less negative, rejecting God concepts than insecurely attached children.⁴⁷⁹ Motivated to be Christ-like, parents will offer the best relationship with the child they can, aware of the fact that this relationship, and the use of authority and discipline, has an influence on self-esteem and self-concept. It will influence how the children perceive God.⁴⁸⁰

Jesus, as a child, ‘grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him’ (Luke 2.40). Christian parents would hope and pray for an echo of this route to maturity in each child, knowing that ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me’ (Mark 9.37). To maximise the chances of survival for an adoptee, one needs parents who are self-giving and committed. John Hull offers insight that can act as a useful summary:

To say that the child is a child of God is similarly to offer an attribute of all children and is no more and no less external to the child than any other understanding of self-hood. So when the child is regarded as a child of God, he is being regarded precisely as an individual, and the one who loves the child *for these reasons* is loving the child *as he is* and for his own sake, and as an individual.⁴⁸¹

5.2.3 The Adoptee as Participant

*Our heart is restless until it rests in you.*⁴⁸²

The preceding sections have established that an adoptee’s identity can find some parallels in the life of Christ. Jesus’ example of commitment is a positive factor for adoptive parents that can lead to good attachment with children. The adoptee can move from feeling like a victim, towards becoming a survivor. This section looks at the wider social aspects of the adoptee, including church life and the ability to find peace through searching for the first family.

The story of any individual’s life is enmeshed with the story of the community from which their identity is derived: family, neighbours, church. It is a social identity. Parents carry the story of God in their practice and attitudes, while working with the Christian principle of

⁴⁷⁹ Simone A. de Roos, Siebren Miedema and Jurgen Iedema, ‘Attachment, Working Models of Self and Others, and God Concept in Kindergarten’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 4 (2001), 607-618.

⁴⁸⁰ Jane R. Dickie, Lindsey V. Ajega, Joy R. Kobylak and Kathryn M. Nixon, ‘Mother, Father, and Self: Sources of Young Adults’ God Concepts’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 45, no. 1, (2006), 57-71.

⁴⁸¹ John M. Hull, ‘The Value of the Individual Child and the Christian Faith’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 28, no. 3 (1980), 199-211.

⁴⁸² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

‘loving your neighbour as yourself.’ This can build self-worth and value within the adoptive child. Indeed Jesus refers to ‘neighbour’ frequently, demonstrating the community life that can bring individual fulfilment.⁴⁸³

True love for others is present when care is given outside of the immediate family home. A child can be nurtured within ‘a larger community of child rearers, all of whom share, to a great extent, a common child-rearing model and strategies for its implementation.’⁴⁸⁴ There is great value in parents of adopted children accepting responsibility without ‘ownership’ of each child. In other words, adoptive parents can accept the worth of the unique, individual adoptee without exerting control or attempting to live vicariously through the child. This ‘respectful recognition of relevant others’ builds self-respect and self-esteem in ways other than can result from independent reflection.⁴⁸⁵ This is illustrated in the way God offers his children independence and value, yet they are still protected and loved by him eternally.

Through this style of parenting, that includes the wider community of like-minded people, Sunday School, Youth Group, and also secular gatherings such as sports teams and music groups, there is freedom to learn and grow. Children can experience the fulsome love and affirmation of parents whilst simultaneously being a child. Participating in social groups ‘is about exploring the environment around them physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.’⁴⁸⁶

This does not neglect the work of the parent in the home, where more personal issues and actions are discussed and observed. Children learn God concepts from the influence of parental example.⁴⁸⁷ Yet, religious socialisation is an important contributor to children’s God concepts, very much what God intended for his people as they gather and share together.⁴⁸⁸ There is evidence to support the view that where there are negative feelings with parents then ‘a teacher can positively influence the development of a perception of God as a loving, kind friend.’⁴⁸⁹ There is a maturity that develops through socialising. All people are a ‘work’ in progress, spiritually and otherwise: ‘we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed’ (1 John 3.2).

⁴⁸³ Linda Woodhead, ‘Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1, no. 1 (1999), 53-72.

⁴⁸⁴ Naomi Quinn, ‘Cultural Selves’, *Annals of New York Academy of Studies* 1001 (2003), 145-176.

⁴⁸⁵ Helen Spencer-Oatey, ‘Theories of Identity and the Analysis of Face’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 39 (2007), 639-656.

⁴⁸⁶ Bill Stone, ‘A Vision of Childhood in the Twenty-First Century’, *Caring* (Churches Child Protection Advisory Service: Spring 2007), 5-7.

⁴⁸⁷ de Roos et al (2001) op. cit.

⁴⁸⁸ de Roos (2006), op. cit.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

Whilst nurturing an individual child includes time at home and time with others, and everyone has to grapple with issues of self-esteem and identity, the process of identity development is longer and more complex for adoptees.⁴⁹⁰ Adoption frequently features little that the person has chosen voluntarily. “The task of identity involves “coming to terms” with oneself in the context of the family and culture into which one has been adopted.”⁴⁹¹

A sense of self-identity through narrative and journey can offer some emotional and cognitive reassurance. Gerard Loughlin describes this as ‘entering the story, becoming a character within its storied world, [which] is then a matter of becoming part of the body that embodies the story.’⁴⁹² This can build wholeness in the mind of the adoptee. Linda Woodhead finds that God offers two modes of selfhood that converge:

the everyday, phenomenal, limited self (the self with a small ‘s’), and the true, unfathomable Self, which is the one with all (the self with a big ‘S’). For the boundless and sacralised self, the goal of human life is to break through the illusion which is the ‘self’ to the divine reality which is the ‘Self’.⁴⁹³

Searching for the ‘Self’ within a wider context can involve the adoptee needing to find the first family and meet the birth parents. The greater the levels of dissatisfaction within the adoptive family the more likely the adoptee is to search for the birthparents and seek a reunion.⁴⁹⁴ For some adoptees, there is a need for origins and the circumstances surrounding the placement to become a tangible reality rather than a description.⁴⁹⁵ David Brodzinsky suggests that it is at this point that the loss and bereavement of adoption will become real and grieving can start.⁴⁹⁶

The ‘search movement’ and post-adoption support services have grown rapidly in the last two decades.⁴⁹⁷ Their existence strongly identifies with an adopted persons’ psychological development and the formation of a sense of identity.⁴⁹⁸ It is also part of a journey within adolescence and young adulthood.⁴⁹⁹ In terms of identity, there is now the added task of integrating a biological identity with an adoptive identity after being reunited with the birth family. For some individuals this can produce results of lower self-esteem, than may exist for non-searching adoptees.⁵⁰⁰ For others there is a sense of resolution

⁴⁹⁰ Passmore et al, op. cit.

⁴⁹¹ Grotevant et al, op. cit.

⁴⁹² Loughlin, op. cit., 87.

⁴⁹³ Woodhead, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁴ Hoopes, ‘Adoption and Identity Formation’, in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.) op. cit., 160.

⁴⁹⁵ Verrier (2003), op. cit., 388.

⁴⁹⁶ Brodzinsky, ‘A Stress and Coping Model of Adoption Adjustment’, in Brodzinsky and Schechter (eds.) op. cit., 14.

⁴⁹⁷ Bartholet, op. cit., 171.

⁴⁹⁸ Kohler et al, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Passmore et al, op. cit.

including a new sense of being completed and whole.⁵⁰¹

It has been argued that identity is found by interacting within a community of like-minded people and that child rearing is more meaningful to each individual when families are integrated into networks of people. These networks may need to include the first families of adopted people to enable a fully integrated sense of self to be developed. Inasmuch as Christ came to understand the locality and nature of his Father so he stands alongside those whose complex beginnings need to be understood.

5.2.4 Made in the Image of God

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God. (Psalm 8.4-5)

Foundational to any theology of identity is the sense that humankind is made in God's image, astoundingly placed 'a little lower than God.' Inasmuch as each human being exists, we reflect a small subset of God's image. We are 'matched' to our heavenly Father in part, unique and not biologically connected. God speaks of his creation and formation of each person saying 'I have called you by name, you are mine' (Isa. 43.1). This intentional, intimate and very personal knowledge of humankind can bring a sense of meaning and relevance that may alleviate the lack of 'being wanted' that can haunt the adoptee.

Whereas other life traumas are accompanied by society's compassion and a seeking for justice, there has been a long standing view that adoptees should be grateful for their experience.⁵⁰² Society both stigmatises the adoptee and distorts what an adoptee should feel. The adoptee can feel a victim.

Christ as an adult was a victim through the rejection of other adults. Christ as a child can easily be imagined to be stigmatised by his peers, as he lived in a community knowing he was unusually conceived. Exploring this theological narrative can build a sense of identification and relevance to an adoptee. This can accompany a narrative psychology that may also focus on meaning-making.⁵⁰³

The adopted person is more able to function as a survivor when they have integrated their origins into their sense of self. This requires a sense of wholeness and not fragmentation, yet Linda Woodhead states that 'modern Christian anthropology frequently adopts from socio-cultural theory the thesis that modern selfhood is fragmented.'⁵⁰⁴ Alternatively, Leon Turner recognises 'a disharmony between the human sciences and

⁵⁰¹ Howe et al, op. cit.

⁵⁰² Verrier (2003), op. cit., 385.

⁵⁰³ Grotevant et al, op. cit.

⁵⁰⁴ Woodhead, op. cit.

theological accounts' that theologians find unacceptable.⁵⁰⁵ A theology of adoptive identity requires an integration of thinking that draws upon multiple sources. In so doing, a theology of adoption is inherently a theology of engagement since it works collaboratively with Christian and non-Christian material.⁵⁰⁶

The ability to survive as an adoptee is crucially related to the work of parents and their living demonstration of self-less love. This principle is understood through being made in God's image, that God is love (1 Jn. 3.16) and in the imperative to love one another (Rom. 13.80). Through Christ there is an eschatological dimension to the love of parents for adoptive children due to the obvious fact that there is no biological dimension to that love. Being in receipt of loving care and denying it to others can 'render them (and us) unable to care or to be cared for in the future. The loss is ultimately of the power for dignity, as well as of the reality of sanctity.'⁵⁰⁷ Adoptive parents act volitionally and not out of obligation. Likewise Christians should recognise the choice that their heavenly adoptive parent makes when he chooses to love his people.

It has been argued that the adoptee participates in the wider context of community and society in order to locate themselves better as individuals. It behoves the Church as part of society to ensure that adoptive families are not stigmatised as deviant or inferior to those created biologically. They should do this in recognition of their own adoptive identity. Only as part of the body of Christ, the Church, can we become fully human.⁵⁰⁸ This can be life-giving for society's vulnerable children and can also benefit the Church itself. In writing about *The Child in the Church*, the British Council of Churches said that, 'The Church that does not accept children unconditionally into its fellowship is depriving those children of what is rightfully theirs, but the deprivation such a Church will itself suffer is far more grave.'⁵⁰⁹

In a search for identity, the adopted person has a unique journey. The past and the present have to be integrated into the future. The Christian's journey builds towards eternity. It offers acceptance of individual identities and also promise and hope. The early part of the spiritual journey of the child is made in the company of parents whose influence, attitude and motivation is crucial. The spiritually engaged parent can make a significant contribution to the process of healing and wholeness so needed by the adopted child. The next section

⁵⁰⁵ Leon P. Turner, 'First Person Plural: Self-Unity and Self-Multiplicity in Theology's Dialogue With Psychology', *Zygon* 42, no. 1 (2007), 7-24.

⁵⁰⁶ Markham, *op. cit.*, 7-29.

⁵⁰⁷ Jackson, 'Suffering the Suffering Children' in Jackson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 201.

⁵⁰⁸ Woodhead, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰⁹ British Council of Churches, *The Child in the Church* (London: British Council of Churches, 1984), 17.

addresses how one type of spirituality, a Christian spirituality, might relate to adoption issues.

5.3 The Potential of the Christian Adoptive Parent

So far this chapter has looked at two aspects of relating to an adopted child that can bring healing and wholeness. Firstly, I have argued that children should be recognised as spiritual beings. Secondly, I have written about how an adopted child's identity can be made whole through a journey through stages characterised by being a victim, a survivor, and a participant. This concerns a Christian theological engagement with adoption; how adoption affects a person. It too can bring self-acceptance and healing. One way in which a child can engage with their spirituality and their identity is through a steadfast relationship with people close to them: their adoptive parents. Using literature from medical and Christian texts, this section argues that parents who are spiritual beings themselves, Christian people, are well equipped to help adopted children.

In many ways all parents are motivated by the same factors: procreation, generation, caring for others, an element of vocation, but the way in which the task is performed is determined by many internal and external influences: financial resources, support networks, mental and physical health, models of parenting and being parented and, of course, faith. **Section 5.3.1** discusses spirituality and good mental health. **Section 5.3.2** moves on to discuss how Christian parents could nurture spirituality in an adopted child. Finally, quantitative and qualitative data from a survey with adoptive and foster parents (see **Appendix 2**) is used to answer the question of whether the Christian faith was a factor in encouraging prospective adopters to apply to have a child. From the responses it is possible to gauge if the prospect of helping adopted children settle into a permanent, stable environment had a vocational element. In other words, does God call adults to offer healing and wholeness to children?

5.3.1 Spirituality and Good Mental Health

*The challenge for parenting is not just to help our children (and ourselves) to find their purpose or know who they are but to find the means to express it, to bring the vision into form, to find their voice.*⁵¹⁰

This quotation from a non-Christian book exploring children's spiritual life, is a statement encouraging parents to nurture children in skills of independence and confidence so that they can 'voice' their personal aspirations. Inconsistent parenting experiences may

⁵¹⁰ Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* (Makawao, Maui: Inner Ocean, 2003), 190.

interrupt this childhood journey, so that adoptive parents have a greater challenge when they seek to help children 'know who they are'. It can be a very stressful task for adults.

BAAF has published a book where some adoptive parents faced the stark realities of their own parenting experience. These parents had adopted children who had fairly severe attachment disorders. The parents met for music therapy and to answer the question about what they felt about being parents of such demanding children. They were able to identify feelings in common and to rank them. Some of their feelings were very positive, indicating personal growth amidst the emotional, often physical, difficulty they faced as parents; others were not surprisingly negative. A useful 'glossary of effects' was created and revealed several areas of concern for these particular parents' personal and relational spirituality. One descriptive term was 'lack of spiritual energy'⁵¹¹ where the word 'spiritual' was used to describe a lively human spirit, interested in the world. 'Lack of spiritual energy' meant losing the joy of life; observing deeper, fulfilling experiences belonging to other people and a sense of there being no energy left for anything other than their family. These parents related their specific parenting issues to ways in which their spirituality was negatively affected by parenting their adopted children. Spirituality here is a universal life-force, disassociated from religion and faith, yet still meaningful to adoptive parents.

Spirituality does not, however, seem to have a place in documents published by the Government. The Department of Health issued the 'Practice Guidance on Assessing the Support Needs of Adoptive Families' for examining developmental progress of adoptive children. Attention is paid to many aspects of the adoptive relationship including: health, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, self-care skills, parenting capacity, safety, stimulation and environmental factors. A statement is made about a child's identity which '...includes the child's view of self and abilities, self-image and self-esteem, and having a positive sense of individuality. Race, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability may all contribute to this.'⁵¹² The document emphasises the importance of building personal resilience, self-esteem and self-worth 'to overcome the affects of adversity' yet fails to recognise that spirituality and/or faith can meet these needs, promoting a completely individual and unique path to self-acceptance. A positive sense of spirituality may equip both adoptive parents and adoptees.

There is an extensive literature that recognises the importance of religion and

⁵¹¹ Megan Hirst, *Loving and Living With Traumatized Children: Reflections by Adoptive Parents* (London: BAAF, 2005), 90.

⁵¹² Department for Education and Skills, *Practice Guidance on Assessing the Support Needs of Adoptive Families* (Nottingham: DFES Publications, 2004)

spirituality within the mental health field.⁵¹³ Generally good mental health can be guarded by factors including: high intellectual ability and success, easy temperament, relationship with an adult who behaves as a ‘mentor’ (not necessarily a parent), special skills or talent, peer friendships, a supportive family.⁵¹⁴ An acknowledged spiritual life, with a religious belief or otherwise, is another protective factor. People who are ‘in touch with their spirituality appear to be in a better state of mental health than those who are not.’⁵¹⁵ It can be shown that experiencing ‘spirituality’ can allay existential anxieties, alleviate suffering and help to find meaning and purpose in life.⁵¹⁶

The positive association between mental health and spirituality has been extensively explored in a book of papers written by clinicians about the merits of including clients’ spiritual perspectives within a therapeutic relationship.⁵¹⁷ There is an evident overlap here between the problems identified in **sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2**, that are connected with attachment disorder in adoptees, and the mental health issues being addressed by these clinicians. In some cases it is openly acknowledged that health and spirituality cannot be separated. ‘When health problems also have spiritual dimensions, it is often unclear from whom one should seek help. The common border is exemplified by concerns such as value assets, guilt, forgiveness and grace, hope, acceptance, and developmental events that have been described as “spiritual emergencies”.’⁵¹⁸

Dilemmas within the inner person can affect outward behaviours and attitudes towards life. ‘Personal bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness is often cited as being particularly destructive to physical, mental and spiritual health.’⁵¹⁹ Tackling these psychological factors, by talking therapies and/or through positive experiences of family life offered by insightful adoptive parents, can encourage an improved sense of self. Some clinicians have even suggested that awareness of spiritual matters may inform their practice: ‘The relatively unexplored terrain of spirituality... may reveal new insights and approaches from which to forge a more complete behavioural science.’⁵²⁰

In **chapter 1**, it was observed that issues of relationship in adoption work dominated

⁵¹³ Haug (1998), op. cit., 471-483.

⁵¹⁴ Nisha Dogra, Andrew Parkin, Fiona Gale and Cray Frake, *A Multidisciplinary Handbook of Child and Adolescent Mental Health for Front-line Professionals* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2002), 117-119.

⁵¹⁵ Hay and Nye, op. cit., 30.

⁵¹⁶ Haug (1998), op. cit., 471-483; David Clarke, ‘Faith and Hope’, *Australian Psychiatry* 11, no. 2 (2003), 164-168.

⁵¹⁷ William R. Miller (ed.), *Integrating Spirituality into Treatment: Resources for Practitioners* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1999)

⁵¹⁸ William R. Miller, Carl E. Thoresen, ‘Spirituality and Health’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 9.

⁵¹⁹ John E. Martin, Jennifer Booth, ‘Behavioural Approaches to Enhance Spirituality’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 170.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

this thesis: secular and Christian relationships; parents and child; agencies and social workers. The subject of spirituality includes beliefs, good mental health and human relationships. It has been observed that:

‘The goal of spirituality is the alleviation of mental, emotional, and spiritual distress thought to be at least in part caused by the lack of an appropriate relationship with ultimate reality, most often signalled by and reflected in inappropriate relationships with other people and things.’⁵²¹

This quote does not mention a belief system specifically but people with a faith would want to include their belief in an understanding of ‘ultimate reality’.

Spiritual, ultimate questions include: Who am I? Why me? What did I do to deserve this? How can a good God allow this to occur? Within an examination of spiritual sensitivity, David Hay and Rebecca Nye describe this type of questioning as ‘value-sensing’.⁵²² Value-sensing includes delight and despair, ultimate goodness and meaning. These aspects of spirituality lend themselves to offering ideas about God as a possible answer to questions about purpose and identity. These have obvious relevance to those who are adopted and find themselves in new families, unrelated to the place of beginning. Adoptive parents who have a faith have already answered some ultimate questions for themselves. This equips them to offer some credible thoughts for children to consider, in a way that is more instinctive than those who have never considered issues such as life after death, hope for the future, forgiveness for wrongdoing and so on. In Christian spirituality, God helps people to discover themselves as they discover who he is. There is a concept of being on a journey through earthly life now, followed by eternal life beyond.

The ability to communicate with God who is invisible yet present is essential. Prayer is known to be part of the life experience of many non-religious people, though also ‘prayer is a quantifiable phenomenon that is central to most people’s spiritual and religious lives.’⁵²³ Prayer has been shown to be both meaningful and transformational to both the one prayed for and the pray-er.⁵²⁴ The nature of prayer is something that changes with maturity. As a child becomes an adolescent, ‘prayers become progressively less focussed on requests for changes in life circumstances and more colloquial in nature, focusing on (a) changing and coping with their own feelings about life circumstances and (b) increasing intimacy with God.’⁵²⁵

A sense of hope and the ability to build an optimistic disposition can be fundamental

⁵²¹ Ernest Kurtz, ‘The Historical Context’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 20.

⁵²² Hay and Nye, op. cit., 63-78.

⁵²³ Michael E. McCullough, David B. Larson, ‘Prayer’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 102.

⁵²⁴ Michael E. McCullough, David B. Larson, ‘Prayer’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 99.

⁵²⁵ Michael E. McCullough, David B. Larson, ‘Prayer’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 96-7.

to making healthy psychological adjustment to unusual circumstances.⁵²⁶ ‘Faith and hope are fundamental to life and unavoidable in any meaningful dialogue with troubled people.’⁵²⁷ Commenting on the ability of a ‘dull child’ to engage with spiritual matters and thus defy the normal pattern where mental age has a bearing on interest levels, one researcher noted that:

if he comes from a home where religion is practiced actively by attendance at church, in the encouragement of private prayer and where the subject of religion is discussed from time to time, the motivation will probably be higher than if he came from a home where religion is treated with indifference.⁵²⁸

In summary, a great weight of literature exists that supports the view that a healthy spirituality can promote good mental health. Good mental health is highly desirable for those who are at risk due to early emotional trauma such as adoption. Whilst this statement applies to adoptees, good mental health is also desirable for those who face challenges as adoptive parents. Clinicians have found that many people cite spirituality and religion as sources of strength and coping, naming them ‘as the most important aspect of their lives, central to their meaning and identity.’⁵²⁹ Enabling children to explore aspects of their spirituality is a means for keeping them healthy. It can facilitate healing of their emotional and psychological wounds. ‘To overlook or ignore [aspects of spirituality] is to miss an important aspect of human motivation that influences personality, development, relationships, and mental health.’⁵³⁰

The next section looks at how a spirituality can be nurtured, developing the answer to two therapists’ rhetorical question: ‘Is it possible to develop and promote spirituality through distinctly earthly, even seemingly artificial, means? We believe that the answer is yes, provided that the interventions that follow are offered respectfully, sensitively, and lovingly.’⁵³¹

5.3.2 How an Adopted Child’s Spirituality Can Be Nurtured

Children operate within two social worlds: the world of the community (school, church, street, hospital, shops, friends) and the world of the home (parent, sibling). As indicated in **section 5.1.2**, the wider environment of school and health matters has embraced children’s spirituality much more evidently than the home. Parents bridge the gap between the two worlds. They can either build confidence in relating to both situations or

⁵²⁶ Clarke, op. cit.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ronald Goldman, *Religious Thinking From Childhood to Adolescence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 209; Carolina E. Yahne, William R. Miller, ‘Evoking Hope’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 227.

⁵²⁹ Miller (ed.), op. cit., xviii.

⁵³⁰ William R. Miller, ‘Diversity Training in Spiritual and Religious Issues’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 261.

⁵³¹ John E. Martin, Jennifer Booth, ‘Behavioural Approaches to Enhance Spirituality’ in Miller (ed.), op. cit., 162.

they can expect children to enter a completely different world when they come home, such as when a family preserves distinct cultural, linguistic and religious practices within the home. Margaret Crompton argues that the better environment within which to nurture the spirituality of a child is the home.⁵³²

John Bradford identifies five areas through which spirituality can be developed: love, security (peace), experiences (play or inner reflection), affirmation (confidence) and participation (relatedness).⁵³³ Bradford argues that for a child to have ‘a full quality of life, spirituality in all its aspects must be nurtured and affirmed.’⁵³⁴ If adopted children have been able to develop confidence with their parents, if they feel secure and loved at home, they will more readily participate in nurturing experiences at school and in wider society.

Storytelling is a universal human activity that is found in every culture and can embody truths, entertain, offer warnings, facilitate dreaming and be inspiring.⁵³⁵ Stories can be used to tell specific religious stories or spiritual themes. They can also serve to help children by giving them a language, a vehicle, for telling their own stories. Karen Marie Yust claims that people with a faith tradition are inherently equipped to work with stories with their children:

When we offer children stories as a means of linking the seemingly abstract language of beliefs and values to the immediate experiences of their daily lives, we are providing space for compassion to develop and flourish... The languages and practices of faith traditions can provide children with an interpretive basis for sustainable and intentional identity as a compassionate person.⁵³⁶

The very act of sitting down together to spend time reading or creating a story can be a mutually beneficial experience. It is a chance for the child to teach the parent as much as for the parent to reach out to the child.⁵³⁷ For an adopted child the birth story, the ‘life story book’, the pictorial and descriptive collection of information detailing life before adoption, is an obvious story to tell. This story is told in the words of the adoptive parent, carefully nuanced for age and maturity. The power of this story in building relationships, while creating a positive regard for early life experiences, is key to self-acceptance for many adopted children.

Whereas storytelling builds relationships between parents and children and potentially self-understanding within the child themselves, another aspect of spirituality that needs to be nurtured is the sense of place within the community. Practical spirituality fosters

⁵³² Crompton (1998), op. cit., 57.

⁵³³ Bradford, op. cit., 3-4.

⁵³⁴ Bradford, op. cit., 72.

⁵³⁵ May et al, op. cit., 174.

⁵³⁶ Yust, op. cit., 67; thoughts echoed in Crompton (1998), op. cit., 227.

⁵³⁷ Crompton (1998), op. cit., 227; May et al, op. cit., 189.

friendships, resilience, endeavours and reflections, growth and development (building self-esteem), and social responsibility as an extension of community awareness.⁵³⁸ Building friendships with other children is important, as is building personal responsibility for others, an activity that can be fostered by having pets within the home. In addition, another source of strength can be a good relationship with another adult, someone who is a family friend and who is not the parent. Tobin Hart has found that children who have grown up in very difficult, abusive, or neglectful situations ‘but who have thrived nonetheless – (is that) they have nearly always had a ‘leg-up’ person – a spiritual friend – someone who made a difference in their lives – who saw a spark in them, who noticed them, who offered a kind word or took genuine interest in their lives.’⁵³⁹ The communal nature of churches and children’s groups within churches, can be ideal for building networks of relationships. Key people in this context become Sunday School teachers or older church members who can take on the role of surrogate aunt, uncle or grandparent. Practical help for adoptive parents, such as babysitting, can produce lasting mentors for children. People who have privileged access into adoptive homes, can become those who pray with great insight, offering tangible spiritual support.

External aspects of spirituality include experiencing silence, sacred spaces, places of natural wonder and encouraging a fascination with mystery. This is about exploring the wonder of creation; a chance to ask some of life’s ‘ultimate questions’. Children can express a sense of awe and wonder when looking at the stars, standing in a cathedral, gazing at a view of countryside or indeed standing on a bridge in a city and imagining what is happening in all of the buildings and how they were made.⁵⁴⁰ It is encountered through wonder and imagination.⁵⁴¹

It is important that the ability to engage with a child’s spiritual nature should be a spontaneous and natural activity, not reserved for special occasions and experiences.⁵⁴² Children are natural philosophers.⁵⁴³ Any question or experience can be used to encourage an awareness of self, others, the world or with the transcendent. This is inevitably far easier with an outward, self-confident and articulate child than a withdrawn, reclusive individual. Questions arise in the life of all children, some of which have a potentially religious answer.

⁵³⁸ Bradford, *op. cit.*, 25-33.

⁵³⁹ Hart, *op. cit.*, 150.

⁵⁴⁰ Hay and Nye, *op. cit.*, 121.

⁵⁴¹ Brendan Hyde, ‘Children’s Spirituality and “The Good Shepherd Experience”’, *Religious Education* 99, no. 2 (2004), 137-150.

⁵⁴² Margaret Crompton, *Who am I? Promoting Children’s Spiritual Well-Being in Everyday Life* (Ilford: Barnardo’s, 2001), 53.

⁵⁴³ Hart, *op. cit.*, 91.

These questions may refer to death or to the meaning of life. As mentioned in the previous section, parents might need to have considered their own belief in life after death, in order that they may be more prepared to help a child understand. It is in this situation that faith provides a strong framework for both parents and children.

A prayer life builds many ways of being connected with other people and with God. Almost all people, regardless of faith, can relate to praying, ‘crying out’ during difficult or frightening experiences.⁵⁴⁴ Whilst prayer can be an outlet for deep emotions, it can also be a comfort as in the example of a grandparent writing a blessing that can be used as part of a bedtime ritual. Nourishing spirituality can enable imaginative ideas to liberate a child from any pre-determined social pressures.⁵⁴⁵ For an adopted child, someone who already has a sense of difference and non-conformity, this freedom can generate a confidence in themselves as a uniquely valued personality.

Finally, a child’s spirituality is best nurtured in an open environment. There is much more opportunity for children to control the direction of the game or the conversation at home, than at school where they traditionally react and respond to the lead taken by a teacher. How parents react to the direction taken by their children is an important part of developing spirituality. Several places of regular activity lend themselves to open conversations, without the intensity of planned, deliberate discussion about difficult subjects: driving along in the car; eating together; walking alone with a parent, all of which are places avoiding eye-contact.⁵⁴⁶

The argument that adoptive parents who have a faith offer something distinctive to an adoptive child, compared to parents with no faith, is at the heart of this research topic. The body of evidence that connects a healthy mental state with an understanding of spirituality is very strong. Spirituality is not something that can be nurtured apart from the rest of life; it is inherently part of growing up.⁵⁴⁷ A child’s personal spirituality needs to be nurtured; an adopted child’s spirituality more so. Adoptive parents who recognise their own spiritual natures have an advantage. The following section looks at how the Christian faith has motivated the adoption journey, from the beginning of the process, through to a belief that adopting a child was something that God was encouraging them to do.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁴⁵ Hay and Nye, *op. cit.*, 149.

⁵⁴⁶ May et al, *op. cit.*, 161-165.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 152.

5.3.3 The Journey Towards Adoption by Christian Parents

We extend hospitality to God's kingdom by inviting the stranger to share our story. Of course we know that the stranger also has a story to tell us. Through the stranger's reception of the story of Jesus (which may often take the form of rejection), we too learn more fully to hear the story of God.⁵⁴⁸

The majority of this chapter has been a discussion about how adopted children can experience healing and wholeness through engaging with their own spirituality and identity. Latterly, **section 5.3** has looked at the practical implications since aspects of spirituality can foster good mental health (**5.3.1**), something often lacking in adoptive situations. **Section 5.3.2** looked at how parents who were spiritually aware were better equipped to tackle this matter. This final sub-section looks exclusively at real adoptive parents with a Christian spirituality and how their faith influenced their engagement with adoption as an issue and with children who would ultimately be the beneficiaries of their love.

As discussed in **chapter 2**, the calling to welcome the stranger into the family is recognised by Christians. Some respond to this by including vulnerable children within their family. These families blend their own life stories with those of a child who needs a home. Other Christians are prevented from having children for a wide range of medical reasons and choose adoption as a way of completing their own sense of what their life journey entails. This is a natural and very human route into adoption. The survey with adoptive and foster parents (see **Appendix 2**) asked respondents about their parenting experience, before asking them why they decided to be assessed as adoptive or foster parents.

Table 5.1 shows the percentage of parents in each of several possible groups, reflecting different experiences of parenting and family life. The majority (41.4%) of respondents were adoptive parents only. Two respondents were included in the analysis for their views of the assessment process only, since, though approved for adoption, they had not yet been matched with a child or children. Of note is the percentage of families (more than 30%) who pursued adoption alongside their ability to have children naturally.

⁵⁴⁸ Hauerwas (1983), op. cit., 109.

	Frequency	Percent
Adoptive parent only	24	41.4
Adoptive and foster parent	5	8.6
Birth parent and foster parent	8	13.8
Birth parent and adoptive parent	11	19
Birth, foster and adoptive parent	7	12.1
Prospective adoptive parent	2	3.4
Step-parent and adoptive parent	1	1.7
Total	58	100

Table 5.2. Table of Mix of Parenting Experiences

The majority of adults who desire to have children are able to conceive relatively easily. Yet childlessness is still increasing partially due to changes in fertility intentions and also factors such as overestimates of fertility by women who delay decisions to begin a family. Statistics indicate that only about half of women over thirty years old conceived within six years if they had delayed their decision.⁵⁴⁹

The reasons why a decision was taken to be assessed for adoption or fostering are detailed in table 5.2. The qualitative responses were coded so that quantifiable results could be presented. This enabled both single-word answers and mixed responses to be included. A few parents knew the children before they were adopted or fostered. In one case, a couple adopted the husband's sister's two children since she was unable to care for them. Infertility is a strong factor in nearly 60% of cases, but often an awareness of need was also stated.

	Frequency	Percent
Infertility	20	34.5
Vocation	15	25.9
Infertility and awareness of children waiting	14	24.1
Knowing children prior to fostering/adoption	5	8.6
Unanswered	4	6.9
Total	58	100

Table 5.3. Factors Influencing a Decision to Foster or Adopt Children.

It was apparent that some parents had tried fertility treatments without success. In seven instances fertility treatments were a possibility but were rejected. The following comments cover a spectrum of responses concerning infertility and disappointment:

1. Fertility problems. 2. In the light of [this], adoption was our preferred choice. We did not feel, from the information we were given, that fertility treatment was likely to be successful for us. We also felt that by adopting we could provide a family for children

⁵⁴⁹ *Population Trends 117 – Autumn 2004* (London: HMSO, 2004) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/poptr0904.pdf> (accessed 4 June, 2007).

*who needed one, as well as completing our own family.*⁵⁵⁰

*Because we were diagnosed with ‘unexplained infertility’ and we did not want to pursue IVF and because we felt we had a lot to offer a family we went forward to adopt a family. We adopted for ‘adoption’s sake’ rather than to ‘replace’ the birth children we assumed we would not have.*⁵⁵¹

*After many years of fertility treatment resulting in various heartbreaks, the last being a full term still born daughter, we decided that enough was enough, and that we would try to adopt, something that we had previously thought about and thought we might do even if we had had our own children.*⁵⁵²

One older mother wrote the following, revealing both a sense of Christian vocation and aspects of the way adoption procedures have changed over time:

*My husband and I lived in Leicester and had been married for 10 years. The Doctor talked to us about adopting. We were both committed Christians and I especially wanted to do something with my life. We adopted our first son in 1950. Two years later we accepted our second boy; the same doctor found both boys for us. Our life became complete. These two boys have been the most important thing in our life. We accepted the boys as a ‘gift from God’, therefore they had to be given everything of the very best in life.*⁵⁵³

One adoptive parent who completed the survey had been adopted herself.

Specific aspects of vocation were strongly expressed, often separately from matters of fertility:

*We decided that we could offer ourselves as foster carers because we loved looking after our own children but didn’t want any more (we have four) of our own, but we felt we could help other children and we had room again as our eldest two had left home.*⁵⁵⁴

*We had reached the age when having more children of our own was not a possibility but we felt we still had love and a desire for a larger family.*⁵⁵⁵

*I felt that ‘we’ as a family had something to share; the emotional and practical timing was right. Ethos of ‘do what you can today’, ‘what goes round comes round.’*⁵⁵⁶

*We had one birth child and wanted a second child. Conception was harder second time around. During this waiting to conceive, I felt challenged by Christian notions of hospitality – making space for those not one’s kith and kin – adoption made sense in the light of this – even felt like a calling.*⁵⁵⁷

The recognition of being able to offer a home to differently able people was also cited, or to become parents to children who had been in institutionalised care:

*Heard that ... were recruiting for adult carers. Had done some voluntary work with an adult literacy group peopled entirely by people with some disability and thought it might work.*⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁰ Parent (12)

⁵⁵¹ Parent (24)

⁵⁵² Parent (31)

⁵⁵³ Parent (16)

⁵⁵⁴ Parent (20)

⁵⁵⁵ Parent (51)

⁵⁵⁶ Parent (40)

⁵⁵⁷ Parent (57)

⁵⁵⁸ Parent (8)

We had been social 'aunt and uncle' to a child in Stelling Hall NCH for 3 years first, when the opportunity arose to foster him we did. We began the initial contact because I was NCH secretary at church and enquired about schemes to help youngsters.⁵⁵⁹

When I was a student I worked in a residential nursery during vacations. From that experience, I developed a strong belief that children needed family not residential care. My parents became "Social Relatives" to one of the children – a role my husband & I shared after our marriage. This led us to become short-term foster parents and to adopting 2 of our foster children. The first had been placed as a long-term foster placement and the second was short term but available for adoption. Our family chose to apply.⁵⁶⁰

These experiences outline the different journeys towards adoption and illustrate the fact that many Christian parents simply seek to become families when they cannot conceive children naturally. A reluctance to use some infertility treatments may be directly connected to faith, though this thesis cannot provide evidence for this. There is a strong sense of children being a 'gift'. Importantly, the responses indicate that a sense of calling or vocation enabled these parents to pursue adoption as part of their faith journey. For these parents, they acknowledged that God had provided resources and motivation.

This is a distinctive route into adoption for a Christian parent. The starting point may be a very human desire to build a family but the resolve and stamina into the adoption process is seen as being enabled by God. Adults can find purpose and meaning in their future as it becomes bound up with the children God seeks to place with them.

5.4 Moving From Theory to Practice

Parents have to consider that their task is limited in the further sense that it cannot amount to more than offering their children opportunities. They cannot even make their child healthy in body and soul, let alone happy or successful, or one who seeks and bears and pleases God, i.e., a Christian.⁵⁶¹

In **chapter 1**, the questions were asked: does awareness of issues of spirituality provide a means of engagement between Christianity and secular contributions to adoption work? And, can Christian adoptive parents help or hinder? The introduction to this chapter stated that its purpose was to inform both the Christian community and adoption social workers about spirituality, its relevance to adoption matters and to offer a theological reflection about the identity of adopted children.

This chapter has focussed upon the adopted child. An adopted child has specific needs for healing and wholeness. One approach that can meet these needs in the child is for those who provide support, parents and external agencies, to be spiritually aware. A child

⁵⁵⁹ Parent (54)

⁵⁶⁰ Parent (45)

⁵⁶¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, op. cit., 284.

will be incomplete if a spiritual sense of who they are is inadequate. It is widely documented that a positive sense of spirituality facilitates good mental health and well-being. The vulnerable nature of adopted children makes these attributes even more desirable since they have a complex sense of identity.

A theology of adopted identity was developed. Adoptive identity is a subtle blend of deep psychological difficulty and the knowledge that all people, irrespective of the 'ease-of-fit' within society, are created and valued by God. An awareness of the reality of adoption, its implication for all involved, can facilitate a journey from a perception of being a victim in society to being a full participant within it.

Finally, the potential for a Christian parent to nurture spirituality within adoption was explained. Survey results were used to show that adopting children was often motivated by the desire to provide a loving home, as a response to a sense of calling from God. Spiritual matters impact 'on the way parents interact with their children.'⁵⁶²

It requires great skill to be clear and open with an adopted child when talking to them about their start in life. Good communication can promote a healthy sense of self and 'what makes them tick.'⁵⁶³ Professionals are available to help adoptive parents to accomplish the task. Parents with a predisposition to 'a reflective stance' can facilitate easy collaboration with therapists.⁵⁶⁴ An active faith gives both meaning and meaningful support to families. In one study, parents 'experience[d] less potentially negative effects of unexpected or exceedingly taxing events' due to the impact of their faith.⁵⁶⁵ In the closing section, Christian adoptive parents gave their own testimonies to this truth.

At the heart of this argument is the belief that nurturing the spirituality of a child is a benefit that is widely accepted in some caring professions. Social work is not one of these. This is not in the 'best interests' of the most needy children in society. Within a stable, self-giving family unit, there exists the potential for an adopted child to gain a unique self-identity. This may be especially true within families who have a known spirituality, such as Christianity. In the next chapter I shall argue that social workers sometimes have a restricted understanding of Christianity and how it is practiced. There is a risk that some children waiting for adoption may be denied parents by virtue of this misunderstanding.

⁵⁶² McEvoy, op. cit., 216-220.

⁵⁶³ Julia Feast and David Howe, 'Talking and Telling' in Anthony Douglas and Terry Philpot (eds.) *Adoption: Changing Families, Changing Times* (London: Routledge, 2003), 139.

⁵⁶⁴ Kim Golding, 'Helping Foster Carers, Helping Children, Using Attachment Theory to Guide Practice', *Adoption and Fostering* 27, no. 2 (2003), 64-73.

⁵⁶⁵ Linda L. Treloar, 'Disability, Spiritual Beliefs and the Church: The Experiences of Adults with Disabilities and Family Members,' in *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 40, no. 5 (2002), 594-603.

6 Adoptive Parents: Tensions and Tasks

The previous chapter concluded with some evidence to support the view that Christian adoptive parents could (a) nurture the spirituality of a child and (b) perceive a motivating, vocational element in their parenting. These were positive factors for the adopted child and the adoptive parents. The chapter also focussed upon how a healthy concept of identity enables an adoptive child to become a survivor rather than a victim, being supported within a wide community who all shared the desire to work in the best interests of the child. The community discussed was a Christian community.

This chapter moves the argument forward by looking more closely at the reality of parenting. It looks at the influence of the Christian faith upon a group of adoptive parents, by analysing original data from both adoptive parents and social workers about what Christian belief means to them. It argues that social workers do not always recognise the potential for Christian parents to be good at the parenting task because of some misconceptions about Christianity itself. This can create either a real or perceived tension between prospective Christian adopters and their assessors.

The research into the assessment of prospective Christian adopters is almost entirely original. There is very little literature available in this area. A keyword search in the magazine for adoption professionals, published by BAAF, covering issues dating back to 1999, yields results shown in table 6.1. This would seem to indicate that the knowledge-base about faith issues generally is not changing, when it is apparent to Christian people that their inclusion within society is changing. This thesis draws heavily upon the actual narratives of social workers and Christian adopters to make its arguments.

Keyword	No. of 'hits'
religion	3
Christianity	0
Islam	0
race	8
ethnicity	8
faith	2
spirituality	0
Jewish	1
Catholic	0

Table 6.1. Results of Keyword Search in *Adoption and Fostering Magazine* From 1999 to 2009.

In the introductory chapter, the questions to be addressed in this chapter were: How do social workers assess prospective Christian adoptive parents? How does the Christian faith make a difference? This chapter, therefore, informs both the adoption social worker

community and prospective parents about positive and negative perceptions coming from the Christian community. Given the desperate need for more adopters, this thesis endeavours to inform both parties, fostering more understanding and engagement so that ultimately more children can be adopted. In terms of a theology of engagement it enables Christian people to have a greater regard for the demands of assessment for adoption and wider society to build respect for the specific circumstances that enable Christian people to be effective adoptive parents.

An analysis of faith practice is an understandable and inherent part of the formal adoption assessment process. This chapter looks at the assessment process, paying particular attention to those parts that refer to faith and lifestyle choices. The social worker's report to the panel of people, who make the final judgement about approval for adoption, is a highly influential document. This places a great deal of potential and perceived power in the hands of the assessing social worker (6.1). In this chapter, Christian parents reflect on this experience, as do adoption social workers. Much of the critique about faith and religious activities depends upon familiarity with Christian practice, including a breadth of understanding about the spectrum of beliefs that constitute the faith that is Christianity. This is discussed in **section 6.2**. The chapter concludes by discussing real adoption stories as told by Christian parents, who reflect on how faith has influenced their practice as parents (6.3). However, the chapter starts by discussing the process that can ultimately lead to children finding a new family.

6.1 Assessing Christianity Within Adoption

By virtue of the distinctive narrative that forms their community, Christians are distinct from the world. They are required to be nothing less than a sanctified people of peace who can live the life of the forgiven. Their sanctification is not meant to sustain judgement that they are "better" than non-Christians, but rather that they are charged to be faithful to God's calling of them as foretaste of the kingdom. In this sense sanctification is a life of service and sacrifice that the world cannot account for in its own grounds.⁵⁶⁶

A Christian lifestyle can be misunderstood. When adults apply to become adopters they undergo a thorough assessment process. Faith is understandably part of the discussion; a discussion that is made more complex if the interpretation of words used and actions described are not based upon a common framework.

This section looks at the complex interaction between legislation, professionalism and personality within the adoption assessment process. Possible tension in the process is frequently compounded by the emotional desire for couples to succeed in becoming

⁵⁶⁶ Hauerwas (1983), 60.

adoptive parents. For some Christian people, becoming adopters may be a response to a sense of vocation as a parent; a response to God. It is also true that many Christians are naïve about the difficulties facing many adoptive parents.

Faith and religion are repeatedly mentioned in legislation pertaining to adoption. Religious considerations were included in the Adoption Act 1976 where it was specified that the wishes of a child's birth parents for the religious upbringing of their child must be considered by an adoption agency. It was also stated that adoption could not be refused 'simply because of difference in religious faith between applicants and birth mother.'⁵⁶⁷ These statements were echoed in the Children Act 1989. Religious matters are referenced in the National Adoption Standards. Prospective adopters are required 'to be recruited to ensure that children's needs can be met..., including: ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language.' The Standards state that prospective adopters should not be automatically excluded on the grounds of religion.⁵⁶⁸ Faith is taken seriously when considering the adoption of children.

6.1.1 The Assessment Process: Paperwork and Power

The assessment of prospective adopters by a social worker results in the completion of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F which is designed to provide 'a standard way of collecting, analysing and presenting information about prospective foster carers, adoptive parents and other carers.'⁵⁶⁹

BAAF's advice notes on adoption mentions religion on three occasions: twice with reference to the child's religious background and thirdly that 'prospective adopters do not have to follow any religion to be considered.'⁵⁷⁰ Form F asks for specific details about the faith of the applicant(s). The individual profile of each applicant asks for comments about the 'significance of culture/ethnicity, religion and language in upbringing' and the place of 'religious activities' in the applicant's 'support network.' Specific matching considerations include an assessment of the 'positive interest' of the applicant(s) in considering a 'child whose religion is different from the applicant(s).' A specific question is asked about this matter under the sub-heading 'difference': 'Would this family be able to parent a child whose culture, religion, ethnicity, "race" or language is different from their own?' A positive answer to this question would reveal the potential of the prospective adopter to consider possible

⁵⁶⁷ Smith et al, op. cit, 3.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 74-5.

⁵⁶⁹ British Association for Adoption and Fostering, *Form F1* (London: BAAF, 2002)

⁵⁷⁰ British Association for Adoption and Fostering, *Advice Notes: Adoption* (London: BAAF, 2004)

difficulties, cognitive, emotional or spiritual, that might occur as the child developed with them as parents.

In the analysis of a prospective adopter, the social worker has to form a judgement about the impact of a parent's faith upon a child. In Furman et al's survey, the majority (seventy-three per cent) of the 789 responding social workers were agreed that it was important to raise the matter of religion and spirituality, in matters of adoption and foster parenting.⁵⁷¹ This is a straight forward recognition of how any religious or spiritual practice can influence family life. The social worker will conduct several interviews. The overall nature of the discussion is highly intimate and personal. Details are required that cover most aspects of life: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The result will be a report that offers an assessment of both character and suitability. For example, experience in leading the youth group suggests a willingness to work with teenagers. The fact that it is observed that this is not the same as being parents of teenagers shows self-awareness, even vulnerability. In his essay on the ethics of character, Hauerwas observes that an understanding that character can grow and form in ways that give 'our lives moral orientation by directing us to certain kinds of activities.'⁵⁷² He continues to say that, 'on a theological level, the idea of character provides a way of explicating the normative nature of the Christian life.'⁵⁷³ Religious beliefs may shape 'character'. It is an appreciation of 'character' that is pertinent to an evaluation about suitability to be an adoptive parent: the ability to form, change and develop with the child and his or her needs.

The British Association of Social Work (BASW) code of ethics does not use words such as faith, religion or spirituality. The preferred language includes words like values, beliefs and customs. The word 'values' is difficult to define. In everyday language 'values' 'is often used to refer to one or all of religious, moral, political or ideological principles, beliefs or attitudes.'⁵⁷⁴ In social work it can be a broad term defining 'a set of fundamental moral/ethical principles to which social workers are/should be committed.'⁵⁷⁵ Inasmuch as 'values' include religious beliefs, faith is part of the ethical code. 'Belief' has been used in social work literature to include both religious beliefs and 'beliefs which might be regarded as delusions.'⁵⁷⁶ For Christian people, their understanding of 'values' would be wrapped up

⁵⁷¹ Furman et al, op. cit.

⁵⁷² Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.:University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 66.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 66-7.

⁵⁷⁴ Banks, op. cit., 6.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷⁶ Watson (ed.) op. cit., 3.

in how they live their life. Christian 'beliefs' would be found in scripture and present in the teaching of the Church. For each Christian prospective adopter, their values and beliefs are discerned by conversations about lifestyle, church attendance, social networks and so on. Such an examination is fair and appropriate; it goes some way towards determining 'character'. The future stability of a child is at stake, so informed and insightful judgements are called for.

Within the social work profession, however, David Hodge has found examples of discrimination against evangelical social workers. Funding for research in areas involving Christian expression or spirituality was refused even though such actions are at odds with the National Code of Ethics which stipulates that social workers 'should ... seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to...religion.'⁵⁷⁷ Employing a similar technique to that used in the opening words of this chapter, Hodge found that matters of sexuality and race were strongly represented in the accepted literature, whereas keyword searches for articles about 'evangelicals', 'conservative Protestants' had no matches, and even 'Christianity' had very few (three in ten years!) These findings suggest, maybe wrongly, that social workers are relying upon their own learning about certain Christian strands of thinking rather than using an informed, contemporary, general view gathered across their profession.

Government statistics show the latest situation concerning Christian activity in the United Kingdom. Christianity is the main religion in Great Britain yet the Christian population is declining, both as a percentage of the population, and in absolute numbers.⁵⁷⁸ According to the 2001 Census, Christians represented almost three quarters of the population (72%), with Muslims forming the second largest faith group. People with no religion formed the second largest group overall, comprising 15% of the population. Despite the numbers of people declaring that they were Christian, in 1999 almost half of all adults aged eighteen and over said that they never or practically never attended a religious service. 13% of women and 10% of men attended a religious service at least once a week.⁵⁷⁹ There is evidence to suggest that the social worker population may have even lower numbers of 'believers'.⁵⁸⁰

Furman et al carried out a survey in religion and spirituality in social work education

⁵⁷⁷ Hodge (2002), op. cit.

⁵⁷⁸ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954> (accessed 3 September, 2005).

⁵⁷⁹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D3722.xls> (accessed 3 September, 2005).

⁵⁸⁰ Bruce Stewart, 'Spirituality and Culture: Challenges for Competent Practice in Social Care' in Nash and Stewart (eds.), op. cit., 58; Hodge (2002), op. cit.

and practice. The questionnaire defined religion and spirituality: ‘*Religion* was defined as ‘an organised, structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality.’ *Spirituality* was defined as ‘the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relation with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality, however a person understands it.’⁵⁸¹ They found that 47% of the responding social workers thought that ‘integrating religion and spirituality in social work practice did not conflict with social work’s mission ($n = 369$).45% ($n = 358$) felt that such integration did not conflict with the BASW Code of Ethics.’⁵⁸² On the other hand, 11% of the respondents disapproved of religion and spirituality being integrated in the code, based on ethical concerns.⁵⁸³ Approval or strong approval was indicated by only 15%. These findings show that significant numbers of social workers find faith to be an ethical issue, a judgement call. In a climate where the media may seize upon errors with alacrity, this judgement has to be taken very seriously, especially where other socially sensitive subjects such as culture, gender, disability and sexual orientation, have also to be discussed.

Whilst there have not been many public debates about matching on the grounds of religion, there have been several about matching on the grounds of race. The typical ethical issue is whether it is in the best interests of the black child to be adopted by white parents, if no ethnic match can be made or whether the issue of colour matching is critical to the success of the placement. A survey of student social workers found that the ethnic background of students was a powerful predictor of views concerning the placement of, say, black children with black parents. The greatest disagreements in the survey concerned the capacities of white families to meet the identity and cultural needs of black children. The dominant view was that one needed to experience racism oneself in order to help a child cope.⁵⁸⁴ Extending the logic of this finding, it would be possible to assume that the religious experience of social workers would be a predictor of attitudes towards religious people. Christian people may approach an adoption agency with a general awareness about some matching criteria or views about their personal suitability as prospective parents. They may also come with some pre-conceived ideas about attitudes towards them as religious people. They perceive that social workers wield great power.

BAAF acknowledge this openly, saying that ‘the relationship between agency worker

⁵⁸¹ Furman et al, op. cit.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Derek Kirton, ‘Perspectives on ‘Race’ and Adoption: The Views of Student Social Workers’, *British Journal of Social Work* 29 (1999), 779-796.

and applicants, however amiable and constructive, is one characterised by power.⁵⁸⁵ The desire for any applicant to adopt a child and the critical nature of the assessment process, promotes a wish to ‘jump through any hoop’, always answer correctly and profess to potential parenting abilities that natural parents find alarming. Power issues are reinforced when the aspect of discussion is one that particularly distinguishes an applicant: ‘religion, culture, class, language, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status.’⁵⁸⁶ Such is the complex nature of some cases that an additional social work professional attached to the court (*guardian ad litem*) is required to balance the rights of one party over another.⁵⁸⁷ All this is done in ‘the best interests of the child.’

It would be rare to find prospective adopters who doubted their own ability to become good parents. The professional skill of the social worker is to assess these applicants and make a recommendation about approval, or otherwise, to an adoption panel. This section has argued that an assessing social worker has a powerful role in interpreting the character of would-be adopters and the role of faith in the lives of applicants. For a social worker to draw realistic conclusions, informed, professional detachment is vital yet the support and guidance of codes of ethics and journals is notably deficient in the specific area of Christianity. Whilst Christian people need to be much more aware of the *raison d’être* of the assessment process, to reduce their own misconceptions, so too a more thorough engagement by social workers in understanding Christian spirituality would better equip them for this highly demanding task.

6.1.2 Assessing Christianity

*The self-giving of Christ to the Christian and the Christian to Christ is the goal of vocation, the true being of the Christian.*⁵⁸⁸

Barth assesses that being a Christian is simply about being true to Christ. In its expression, however, Christianity is diverse (see **section 6.2**). Pursuing the idea that social workers are perceived to wield power, this section argues that the religious experience of the social worker has relevance in assessing Christian adopters. It examines the views of those assessing and then the post-approval reflections of those who were assessed as adoptive parents, to discern if the process can be improved upon. In this way, the section tests the perception of tension between Christian spirituality and social work.

In the survey conducted by Furman et al, 56% of respondents identified themselves

⁵⁸⁵ BAAF (1998), op. cit., 2.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Neil Leighton, ‘Personal and Professional Values – Marriage or Divorce’, in Watson op. cit., 64-5.

⁵⁸⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 3.2, op. cit., 594.

as Christian, though it should be accepted that those responding to the survey may represent people with strong interests in religion and spirituality. In the survey conducted with adoption social workers for this thesis, two-thirds said they were practicing Christians. The adoption social worker survey (see Appendix 3) asked: ‘What aspects of faith and spirituality have been covered in the training you have received as a social worker?’ The replies were coded and quantified and table 6.2 shows the resultant analysis. Over half of the respondents stated that they had received no specific training in this field. Other comments mentioned training in respect for individuals and for all faiths, without discrimination. A number of people stated that they had training in understanding cultural needs when matching children with prospective adopters.

		Frequency	Percent
	No training in faith or spirituality	17	50.0
	Belief systems generally	4	11.8
	Respect of others / non-discrimination	4	11.8
	A little training in faiths and spirituality	1	2.9
	Cultural matching needs	6	17.6
	Anti-discriminatory practices	1	2.9
	Total	33	97.1
Missing		1	2.9
Total		34	100.0

Table 6.2. Details of Training Received by Social Workers in Aspects of Faith and Spirituality

The following three comments allude to the range of training possibilities:

Very little. Some information about the needs of black children when matching. The main impression given was that ethnic origin/colour/culture is taken more seriously in matching than religion/faith or spirituality. With regard to the assessment of prospective adopters, faith and spirituality are covered, briefly, in the report. Faith seems to be seen largely as a lifestyle issue (i.e. about attending church, mosque etc.)⁵⁸⁹

I have done anti-discriminatory practice training but not as this applies to adoption. I have done a course on Sikhism in my own time – in fact I seem to know more about other religious denominations than the various denominations of Christianity.⁵⁹⁰

Social work training offered little but specific adoption training has a strong emphasis on identity and this is a major consideration for matching. Faith and spirituality has normally been taught in terms of other faiths with knowledge of Christianity seen as a ‘given.’⁵⁹¹

The first quote augments the finding cited in the opening words of this chapter that more attention is paid to race issues than faith or spirituality. The latter two quotes indicate

⁵⁸⁹ Social Worker (14)

⁵⁹⁰ Social Worker (22)

⁵⁹¹ Social Worker (31)

that whereas non-Christian faiths may receive attention in training institutions, knowledge of the Christian faith may be assumed. It was noted in 6.1.1 that the majority of people in this country declare themselves to be ‘Christian’ without any Christian practice, so an assumed knowledge is widespread.

Aside from neglecting to train social workers in Christianity, and assuming they have some cultural insight into this faith, Graham Bowpitt argues that evangelical Christianity has had a particularly bad press. He finds that evangelical Christianity has been neglected both in acknowledging its historical input to social work and also in its present day potential to have a valid role.⁵⁹² In particular, Bowpitt finds that ‘Christian voluntary organisations have been obliged to subscribe to secular standards of professionalism in order to sustain credibility in the field of welfare.’⁵⁹³ This suggests that this strand of Christianity may be misunderstood if it is seen to have a bearing upon either the conducting of the assessment process or the responses to it.

The survey explored the validity of assertions such as these by asking about how social workers regarded expressions of faith. From a Christian perspective the results were encouraging. Table 6.3 shows that more responding social workers regarded faith as a positive factor than a negative one. The modal choice was that faith was neither a positive or a negative factor in the assessment process.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very positive	4	11.8
	Fairly positive	9	26.5
	Neither positive nor negative	16	47.1
	Fairly negative	5	14.7
	Total	34	100.0

Table 6.3. Ranking of Expressions of Faith as a Factor in Assessing Prospective Adoptive Parents

An open question was asked about which aspects of faith caused most concern to adoption workers. Figure 6.1 is a bar chart of responses that result from coding and quantifying the qualitative responses. ‘Inflexibility’ or ‘rigidity’ was the reason cited most frequently. ‘Intolerance of other faiths’ was a secondary factor that ties in with the idea of ‘inflexibility’. There were additional concerns about only presenting the child with one worldview, one faith position. There was also concern for the way in which a child would be nurtured, especially if the behaviour was believed to be contrary to widely accepted

⁵⁹² Bowpitt, op. cit.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

standards in society. Would the parents use an inappropriate means for disciplining the child?

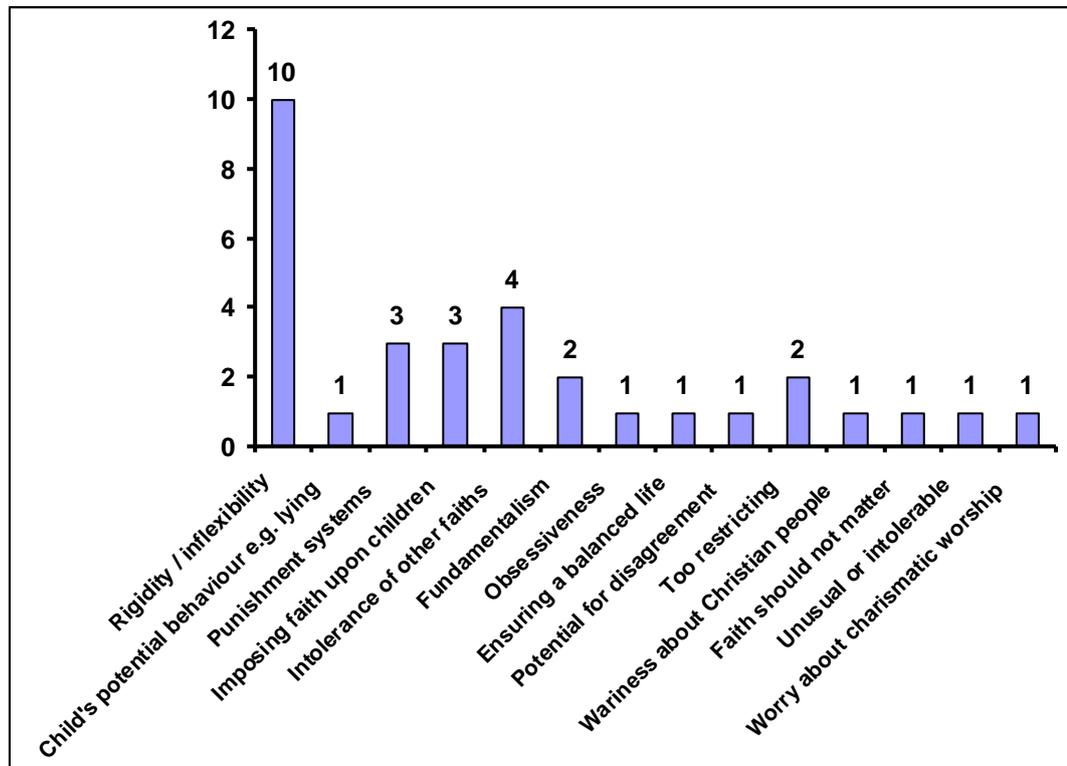


Figure 6.1. Bar Chart of Aspects of Faith Causing Social Workers Concern in the Assessment Process

The following quotes about aspects of faith that could cause concern, come from the written survey:

Rigidity / fundamentalism / (any religion) inflexibility / inability to accept other's differing views.⁵⁹⁴

This would be the same if we were considering Christian or Muslim prospective adopters: rigidity, exclusiveness, isolation; attitudes to physical punishment of children, based, as they perceive on Biblical teaching. Many of our children have already experienced physical violence so hitting is not appropriate and is harmful; punitive attitudes to children's first family lifestyle.⁵⁹⁵

Non-mainstream churches with extreme belief systems; rigidity with regard to children's behaviour and acceptance/rejection of spirituality as young adults; rigid insistence on children attending church.⁵⁹⁶

These types of responses were augmented by comments from several semi-structured telephone interviews. It emerged that there is a particular association with evangelicalism and a strong sense of parental discipline.

There were Christians who answered that in all honesty they could not promise never to smack a child, they were told of the implications of this answer and they withdrew from

⁵⁹⁴ Social Worker (1)

⁵⁹⁵ Social Worker (7)

⁵⁹⁶ Social Worker (18)

*the assessment process before they went to panel.*⁵⁹⁷

*In an initial assessment of evangelical Christians if they have a strong sense of discipline and the potential for smacking, then they are bottom of the list. They are not given a chance to explain about discipline and different approaches ('moderation') and social workers work with the stereotype. Some social workers are openly anti-Christian and do not have 'detached thinking' but they have the power and scope to abuse their influence and make critical judgements. I agree that some Christian voices have to be questioned carefully, for example, Seventh Day Adventists, but some evangelicals can be very sensitive. Overall there is a strong negative view about Christianity.*⁵⁹⁸

*Some Christians do support an inappropriate system of discipline. It's an American view. I've come across situation where a "Peter Paddle" philosophy is used to smack a child but hands should be for loving... All people are worth working with, even the rigid and fundamental ones, but some attitudes have to be challenged.*⁵⁹⁹

Alongside these views, there were more moderate and positive views of faith concerns:

*[I would be concerned...] (i) When their support system is limited only to other members of that faith group. (ii) When their motivation boils down to 'do-gooding' in the selfish sense. (iii) If it consumed a lot of their time and energy to the expense of a child placed. (iv) If it were to be coupled with a sense of naivety about the world.*⁶⁰⁰

*In a faith community, one of the big positives is the support of the wider community but one of the things that many people miss is the fact that the majority of Christian people think and act out their faith in daily living and how this is done is regarded suspiciously by those who have no Christian faith. On the whole I think there are no barriers to Christians applying to adopt because we need to look at the whole picture when making any assessment. If you have problems with one social worker then you can change worker, especially in a small agency.*⁶⁰¹

*I have experience of a couple of Christian prospective adopters, where the father was a pastor of a non-conformist sect, untrained but accredited and acknowledged as the church leader. We perceived very strong and strict mores, especially with respect to discipline and their idea of the Biblical principle of smacking. We knew that smacking a physically abused child within the new family would have a huge impact. The assessment of this couple was protracted, with their knowledge and participation, teasing out the issues. They were encouraged 'to see that smacking was something that they could let go of.' They changed their views, were approved and have a successful placement – we recognised their potential from the beginning and worked with the one issue that needed attention.*⁶⁰²

The latter quote is a rare example of how education in adoption issues and strong Christian views can be harmonised. For people who have been raised in a home where moderate smacking existed, the intolerance and inappropriateness of this form of discipline for many, if not all, children freed for adoption, is about education and awareness. This story came from a social worker working for an agency with a Christian background. The

⁵⁹⁷ Social Worker: Telephone interview (1)

⁵⁹⁸ Social Worker: Telephone interview (2)

⁵⁹⁹ Social Worker: Telephone interview (6)

⁶⁰⁰ Social Worker (31)

⁶⁰¹ Social Worker: Telephone interview (4)

⁶⁰² Social Worker: Telephone interview (4)

appreciation of sufficient ‘character’ in the prospective adopters, coupled with the willingness of the social worker to offer education and counselling, produced a positive result.

The question was asked about how much an awareness of the benefits of nurturing spirituality within a child was discussed by assessing social workers. A range of answers emerged:

One thing is that birth parents have to be asked about their feelings about the upbringing of their child so they have freedom to say ‘C of E, or baptised or whatever.’ Mostly very few have thought about the child’s spiritual needs, so it is only if the professionals raise the issue that they may think about it...⁶⁰³

Spirituality is very important and it is a good factor in nurturing a child. I worked with a couple of vegans who had a strong sense of personal identity, a distinct world view, they were very anti-God and yet in writing the report I hesitated to use the word spiritual because of its potential to be misunderstood yet I found these people to have a definite spirituality in my own thinking. I chose instead to use words like ‘depth’, ‘awareness’ and ‘reflective thinking.’ We need to see that nurturing troubled children can operate on a different level. Religion is a big word and it’s becoming more unpopular...⁶⁰⁴

We start with the needs of the child. If we need to match the religious preferences of birthparents then that needs to be done at all costs but if there are no religious preferences than all approved couples and adults can be considered as potential parents. In NCH we have a routine question about nurturing a child’s spirituality. We would ask people who do not express any faith: ‘How do you feel about encouraging a child who wants to go to Sunday School?’ The conversation about openness to a child’s spirituality would develop from there...⁶⁰⁵

In these cases the social worker demonstrates a broad awareness of spirituality issues within the assessment process and was proactive in making the assessment. Social workers are attuned to subtlety and the need to set aside prejudice yet the behaviour and ‘talk’ of some prospective adopters may be a source of confusion. Some professionals may be wary either through experience or because their understanding of the supportive aspects of faith is inadequate:

I am working with some Christian evangelicals now; I talk their language and I understand it. I’ve talked to them at length about jargon and behaviour. They have a set of beliefs that are highly objectionable to worldly people yet they have a good grasp of the issues. They say, ‘you don’t give up when the going gets tough’, they lean on their faith. For these people, even with our panel, the biggest issue is their Christianity. With other faiths we can be more creative and more open.⁶⁰⁶

I’ve handled a lot of Form F’s over the years and met many different people some of whom have been put off by church, or their faith has lapsed or they have been abused by churches. Social workers handling Form F’s learn from this experience. Adopters are desperate to be approved. If they detect that their faith is perceived negatively then they

⁶⁰³ Social Worker: Telephone interview (2)

⁶⁰⁴ Social Worker: Telephone interview (7)

⁶⁰⁵ Social Worker: Telephone interview (8)

⁶⁰⁶ Social Worker: Telephone interview (3)

downplay their activity. I assessed a Christian couple for a step-parent adoption but later he turned violent and I know they kept their faith throughout. The issue is that Christians have definite ideas and are less willing to change them and they make semi-doctrinal statements.⁶⁰⁷

The survey of adoption social workers asked whether concerns about a strong faith might lead to decisions to turn down or not approve prospective adoptive parents and if the social worker would regard this as discrimination. Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the answers to these questions.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes - a possible non-approval matter	10	29.4
No - not a possible non-approval matter	13	38.2
Unanswered	11	32.4
Total	34	100

Table 6.4. Responses to a Question: Can the Articulation of a Strong Faith Lead to Decisions Against the Approval of Prospective Adopters?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes - this is discriminatory	8	23.5
No- this is not discriminatory	16	47.1
Unanswered	10	29.4
Total	34	100

Table 6.5. Responses to a Question: Is it a Discrimination to Not Approve Prospective Adopters who Articulate a Strong Faith?

Table 6.4 shows that responding social workers are evenly divided in their assessment as to whether a strong articulation of faith leads to non-approval of prospective adopters. Table 6.5 indicates that, on balance, most social workers would not consider such a decision to be discriminatory. The quotes below illustrate the complexity of the line of thinking that would lead up to a non-approval decision:

Our main focus is the needs of the children we place. We look at applicants in the round. We are interested in whether they understand adoption issues and whether they can promote the child's needs throughout childhood and deal with issues that are life-long. For some people faith and the support of a religious community is a great plus, for others religious faith leads to difficulties accepting children's diverse backgrounds and birth parents criminal behaviours and lifestyles. It is a great positive factor if people can nurture spirituality in its broadest sense in a child.⁶⁰⁸

I suspect that this sometimes happens. I have never been party to such a decision and I have found that panel tries hard to be non-discriminatory. I think that discrimination tends to be less overt, more about assumptions on the part of assessing social workers. Having said this I don't believe that all Christians would make good adoptive parents.

⁶⁰⁷ Social Worker: Telephone interview (5)

⁶⁰⁸ Social Worker (7)

Some are too rigid and inflexible...⁶⁰⁹

I don't believe strong faith in itself would lead to prospective adopters not being approved, but I could imagine that faith can influence the attitude to parenting in a way which might lead to non-approval. I would not consider this discrimination. Faith is also a matching concern and will influence which children might be placed with a certain family.⁶¹⁰

This last quote very clearly distinguishes between 'faith' and 'attitude to parenting', making a helpful distinction. This is about assessing strength of 'character' as it applies to parenting. It is appropriate that this is a dominant aspect of the assessment process. In one of the telephone interviews, the following comments were made:

Sometimes Christians do get turned away as adopters and it's very sad, especially when you know it may be the end of the road for their hopes to have a family. I've had one couple who said that 'It was God's will we should be approved.' Another couple said 'We have been given a vision that we shall have two girls under two' and in today's world that's near impossible. They held out for six months and have now moved on in their thinking – it's very difficult. One Christian couple went to independent review of the non-approval decision... This type of situation is always difficult and I work closely with colleagues and stay open-minded and take advice and receive proper supervision...⁶¹¹

This section has shown that Christian people can behave in ways that lead to understandable non-approval decisions. Christian people can act in ways that do not always work in the best interests of the child. Christians should accept that this decision is not based upon discriminatory judgements. On the other hand, some social workers have strong associations between some actions and some Christian people; there is an apparent connection between evangelical Christians and the issue of smacking.

The next section looks at faith assessment issues from the perspective of the would-be adopter.

6.1.3 The Experience of Being Assessed as a Christian Adopter

This section looks at the narratives of Christian people who have adopted children. They were asked to reflect on the assessment process and comment particularly about how social workers discussed their Christian faith. The data argues that these approved parents were relatively happy with the way their active faith was understood. In researching this thesis, I heard anecdotal stories about suspicion and negativity of the Christian faith by social workers. It is not possible to determine whether this is a defensive reaction to non-approval or if there are true grounds for concern from the Christian community. Critically, there are no objective data about Christian applicants who were not approved.

⁶⁰⁹ Social Worker (14)

⁶¹⁰ Social Worker (23)

⁶¹¹ Social Worker: Telephone interview (7)

The fifty-eight people who responded to the survey represented encounters with thirty-five separate assessing adoption agencies or local authorities, including three overseas assessing bodies. Ten agencies had a Christian background, e.g. Barnardo's, or were specifically Christian, e.g. Catholic Caring Services.

Parents were asked if social workers had discussed matters of faith during the assessment process. Table 6.6 shows that 74% of parents recalled discussing faith with their social workers.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	43	74.1
No	14	24.1
Unanswered	1	1.7
Total	58	100

Table 6.6. Respondents Indications Concerning Whether Faith Was Discussed During The Assessment Process

There was a strong correlation between those who recognised the strong influence their faith had upon their parenting and the memory of a discussion about faith-related issues with a social worker. Sometimes these discussions were of an obvious and practical nature, for example, if the prospective parents were in a family including a minister who would need to think about people coming to the house, moving to new parts of the country etc. Where this was a part of the conversation, this was given a specific category in Figure 6.2, which details all the responses given.

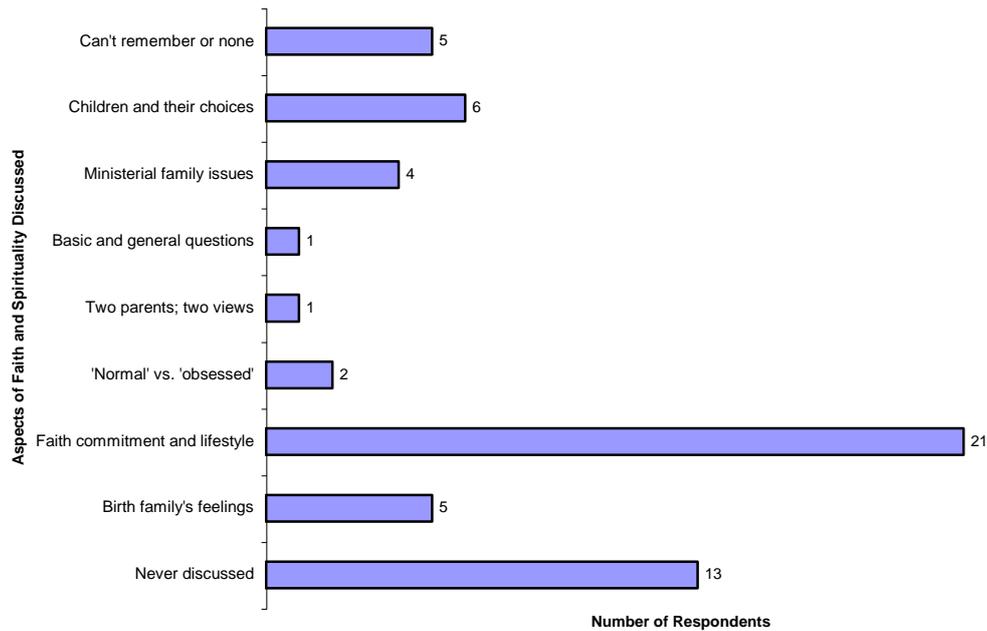


Figure 6.2. Bar Chart of Aspects of Faith and Spirituality Discussed With Social Workers

Twenty-one out of fifty-eight parents, recalled a conversation about lifestyle and Christian commitment. These had both positive and negative connotations:

*Our attendance; what it meant to us; would we expect children to go. And how would we feel if parents were against church.*⁶¹²

*Practical concerns about child's behaviour in church; that we would let them choose own faith when it was 'age appropriate.'*⁶¹³

*The main concern was that as we were obviously practicing evangelical Christians, that we would not indoctrinate our children. We responded that we would teach them and leave them to decide individually for themselves. There was also some concern over the issue of smacking.*⁶¹⁴

*The social worker concerned exhibited a belief that having a faith was important without expressing a clear preference for any particular faith. Discussions therefore centred upon coping with real life difficulties perceived as likely to be encountered and how a faith might assist in dealing with those situations, for example death in the family; imposition of discipline; coping with unwelcome developments in child-rearing and expectations of the child (and ourselves).*⁶¹⁵

One Christian couple had particular concerns during their assessment process, arising from several social workers demonstrating an ignorance of matters about faiths in general and a confusion because the husband was Asian British:

I have had various conversations with Local Authority Social Workers along the lines of 'No I won't be practicing Sikh festivals at home' and 'I don't think that Punjabi is actually a religion' and 'How can someone be a quarter Muslim?' It is amazing to me

⁶¹² Parent (26)

⁶¹³ Parent (27)

⁶¹⁴ Parent (32)

⁶¹⁵ Parent (35)

in this “PC” world that professionals can get away with using Asian and Muslim as interchangeable terms. We were also once asked if we would support a child with a Muslim background by taking them to the Temple! We were never sure if that was a trick question.⁶¹⁶

The subject of discipline and smacking was mentioned by two parents, augmenting data previously presented. Other subjects discussed included the legal requirement to honour the views of the birth family with respect to religious education, the importance of allowing the child to make up their own mind about commitment and ensuring that the views expressed were ‘normal’ and not ‘extremist’ or ‘obsessive.’

Two additional questions were asked about faith and assessment. Firstly, respondents were asked to decide if expressions of faith had been positive or negative factors in their assessment and then secondly, if social workers had expressed any specific concerns about aspects of their faith.

Table 6.7 shows the ranking of how faith factored within assessment discussions.

	Frequency	Percent
Very positive	11	19
Fairly positive	17	29.3
Neither positive nor negative	16	27.6
Fairly negative	3	5.2
Very negative	1	1.7
Not discussed i.e. unanswered	10	17.2
Total	58	100

Table 6.7. Table Ranking Respondents Perception of Faith as a Negative or Positive Factor in the Assessment Process

Just under 50% of parents said that their faith had been a positive factor in their discussions with social workers and the majority of the rest were not convinced that it was a negative factor. Table 6.8 shows that even those whose feelings about the way faith influenced their behaviour were very strong, were also those who felt that discussions about faith were positive in their assessment as prospective parents. There is no evidence to indicate that a strong faith will result in a predetermined reaction by social workers, from those who are approved. Data linking those who are not approved with strong faith convictions, is an area for future research.

⁶¹⁶ Parent (27)

		Faith expressions						Total
		Very positive	Fairly positive	Neither positive nor negative	Fairly negative	Very negative	Not discussed i.e. unanswered	
Faith influence	Very strong influence	7	10	10	2	0	4	33
	Fairly strong influence	4	5	5	1	1	5	21
	Neither strong nor weak influence	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
	Fairly weak influence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Very weak influence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Unanswered	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	11	17	16	3	1	10	58

Table 6.8. Cross-tabulation of Faith Influence on Parenting Behaviour With Perception of Faith as a Negative or Positive factor in the Assessment Process
(Chi-square tests at 0.966 level indicating no statistical significance.)

When asked what concerns social workers did express, the great majority (74.1%) had never discussed the matter or answered that there were none. Figure 6.3 indicates the other responses.

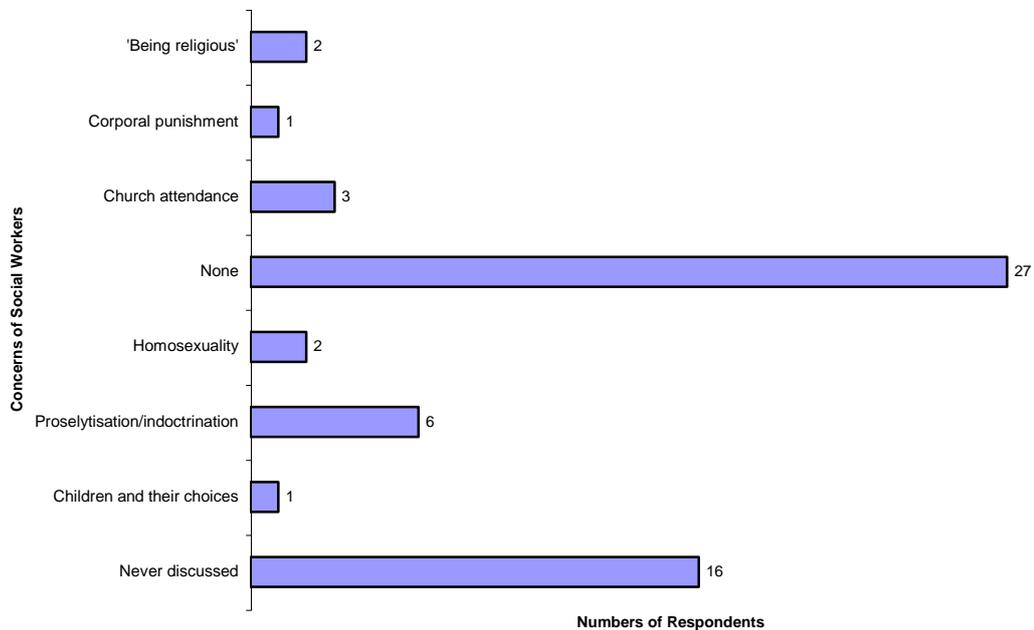


Figure 6.3. Bar Chart of Concerns Expressed by Social Workers Concerning Faith of Prospective Adoptive Parents or Foster Carers

The following are a selection of quotes covering several of the concerns indicated above:

There were questions about what would happen if, when reaching teenage years, the

*children did not want to attend church! We pointed out that this would be absolutely normal!*⁶¹⁷

*Our expectations of a child in our care i.e. would we make them go to church with us. In fact, I can say all enjoyed going (enjoying the attention) and used not going or objecting to going as a way of protesting when there had been some sort of trouble.*⁶¹⁸

*There seemed to be a real concern about us 'being religious' and how this would relate to our attitude as parents. My experience was that this was a personal prejudice of the social worker.*⁶¹⁹

*I think we spent an unnecessary amount of time discussing homosexuality. I'm sure it's not a twenty minute topic in antenatal classes.*⁶²⁰

On balance, experiences support a view that social workers were even-handed and non-discriminatory in the minds of those who were approved. It is impossible to say how many Christians have been non-approved due to reasons of faith and how many of these would have been approved by other agencies offering different levels of support and guidance. Nonetheless the findings are encouraging for those convinced that Christian parents would be discriminated against on the grounds of faith. A couple of comments leave room for qualifying this:

*I felt they weren't sure how to approach someone who took the Christian faith seriously. Had to explain that Methodism was a Christian denomination, not a different religion to, say, Church of England. I felt there was little understanding of, say, issues of baptism and personal faith. I felt at times, being a Christian was harder than, say, being Muslim.*⁶²¹

*Concern that we would impose our faith on our children and wouldn't accept them if they turned out to have different views/sexual orientations. As an adoption panel member I have seen cases coming through panel where people have waited years to be matched. When I really pushed for a reason it was admitted (but not minuted) that a lot of social workers wouldn't consider them as they were active Christians.*⁶²²

This section has reviewed how Christian adoptive parents retrospectively reflect on their assessment process, with a focus on aspects of faith. The surveys and conversations have indicated a sense of fairness, with occasional comments or questions that raise doubts. These do not concern the ability of a social worker to be fair but rather about understanding some aspects of faith, practice and perspective. Three areas that illustrate this lack of understanding are: different religious practices; Christian parents and discipline; and, Christians and sexuality. Whereas social workers could be criticised for being ill-educated about Hinduism, Sikhism or other minority faiths, the Christian Church is widely known to have strong views about home life and attitudes towards same-sex relationships. These are

⁶¹⁷ Parent (1)

⁶¹⁸ Parent (5)

⁶¹⁹ Parent (30)

⁶²⁰ Parent (4)

⁶²¹ Parent (14)

⁶²² Parent (43)

areas for greater engagement between the Church and adoption social work. The following section offers two contributions to furthering engagement by firstly looking at Christian language, connecting it to religious practice and spirituality, and secondly by looking specifically at parental discipline within Christian homes. The third area of concern to social workers, attitudes to same-sex relationships and adoption, forms part of the next chapter.

6.2 Christian Understanding: Practice and Discipline

*The Christian who is called by God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, exists in apparently endless multiplicity of different forms in his specific freedom, orientation and determination.*⁶²³

Barth speaks as a theologian and not as a social scientist when he makes this comment about the ‘multiplicity of different forms’ of being a Christian. The quote, however, acts as an observation of how God creates unique, faithful people, who are differently gifted and active within society. Not all Christians will be ‘gifted’ parents, capable of meeting the demands of being a family with mixed emotional needs. Yet the high regard of the Christian faith for family life, can also make Christians very aware of how much they can offer in both domestic and church contexts. Social workers come to the assessment task with the needs of the child uppermost in their minds. I contend that the more aware they are of Christian language and religious practice the easier it is for social workers to make insightful judgements that affect the approval decision.

6.2.1 What’s in a Word...?

In common with many belief systems, Christianity exists as a spectrum of views and lifestyles; Christianity is not monolithic. Some Christians would view the Bible as God’s spoken word, inerrant and infallible; other Christians would see the human influence of the writers within the scriptures. Some Christians would regard the family as sacrosanct and marriage as indissoluble; others recognise the existence of divorce throughout time, including Biblical time, and that families can remain true to God in different forms. The subtleties and nuances of the variations are mostly understood by those within the faith and placed along a range of accepted possibilities. Those who have no Christian faith can misunderstand the wide diversity of manifestations of Christianity. In an increasingly secular environment, it is much more likely that knowledge about Christianity will be gleaned through popular stereotypes and media coverage of specific activities, than through direct

⁶²³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 3.2, op. cit., 554.

involvement with a church community. It can be argued that it is almost impossible to deduce specific Christian practice from a description that someone is a Christian.

It is important for terms to be used correctly and especially important if these words are part of the basis for forming a judgement about someone's lifestyle. Some of these words are: conservative, evangelical, liberal, fundamentalist, and so on. Christian people can have a view that falls somewhere on a continuum of opinion and may move along this continuum during their faith journey. Within Christianity, the spectrum of views has one extreme described by the word 'fundamentalist' and the other by the word 'liberal.'

The word 'conservative', as applied to a Christian person, can be used synonymously with words such as traditional, orthodox, fundamentalist or evangelical. These Christian people seek to preserve traditional values and creeds. Conservative Christians believe in the Trinity; in Jesus as God's own son; in Judgement Day and original sin. Salvation is granted through God's grace and it is important to share this belief with others. The Bible is regarded as the primary source of teaching about faith and attitude, to which 'conservative Catholics' would add the teaching of the Church. Faith is built through responding to the preached word of God. Conservative Christians are typically against abortion and many, though not all, are strongly opposed to divorce.⁶²⁴ They have a traditional view of the shape of a family, namely that children should be raised within marriage. It is likely, therefore, that these Christian people would be reluctant to condone adoption by same-sex couples or co-habiting heterosexual couples. It is a stereotype, however, to extend this line of thinking to an inability to be uncaring about the wider needs of society: conservative Christians make extensive contributions to charitable and welfare projects. In many instances, fundamentalism has come to be thought of as synonymous with conservative evangelicalism, though it is a distinct and extreme form.

At the other end of the continuum, 'liberal' Christians regard 'many traditional beliefs as dispensable, invalidated by modern thought, or liable to change.'⁶²⁵ There are strong philosophical and humanist elements within liberal Christian thinking. For them, the Bible is symbolic and not literal; it was written by human authors in a set historical and cultural context. Through narrative the Bible conveys the essence and significance of Christian life. Life on earth will be judged by God who is able to see good works and self-less conduct. Abortion may be morally wrong but it can also be regarded as a woman's right to choose. Choice is a part of deciding about divorce and a homosexual lifestyle. Being a

⁶²⁴ A popular view of conservative Christianity can be found on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Christianity (accessed 24 April, 2008).

⁶²⁵ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th ed. 2007), 1590.

liberal Christian does not incline someone towards a critical evaluation of societal trends.

Evangelical Christians are typified by an emphasis on evangelism, a ‘stress on salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ’⁶²⁶ and a Biblically oriented faith. Evangelicalism has its roots as a response to Enlightenment thinking, including a call for strong personal piety, publicly and privately. In the nineteenth century, evangelicals were to be found among Methodists, Quakers, Congregationalists and Anglicans and they were in the forefront of several significant acts of social reform including the abolition of slavery, prison reform and establishing orphanages. In the twenty-first century evangelicals can be found in all of the mainstream denominations and also in less formal, independent churches. Since fewer Christians are members of these independent churches, knowledge of their community and worship life is inevitably less widespread.

Setting aside recent political movements, it is not difficult to see that right-wing politics has often coincided with conservative, evangelical Christian thinking and this receives widespread publicity and attention in America, especially during Presidential election years. Such attention is part of popular knowledge and it influences many people with no direct understanding of the Christian faith in the United Kingdom. Social workers and their activities are stereotypically to the left of centre politically. This divergence adds further layers of complexity when attempts are made to make dispassionate evaluations. To illustrate how specific terms can be confusing, it is worth noting that it is possible to be theologically conservative and politically liberal. Where Christians and others involved in adoption work engage politically, is in the area of compassion and interdependence, both working to counter the negative power of individualistic thinking yet only one group modelling their attitude upon the teaching of Jesus.⁶²⁷

The survey of Adoptive and Foster Parents (see **Appendix 2**) and a survey of Adoption Social Workers (see **Appendix 3**) confirmed the picture of a wide variety of Christian commitments. They both included the following question: ‘define your spirituality using any of these words or additional words of your own choosing: *open, progressive, orthodox, catholic, liberal, traditional, evangelical, conservative,...*’ All the parents who responded to the survey were practicing Christians and two-thirds of social workers responded similarly in their survey. The words offered were not defined and were left open to the respondent’s interpretation.

Figure 6.4 is a pie chart totalling the number of times specific words were used to

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 876.

⁶²⁷ Brian Howe, ‘Politics and Faith: Living in Truth’, in Sullivan and Leppert (eds.), op. cit., 42.

describe personal spirituality as analysed from the parent’s survey.

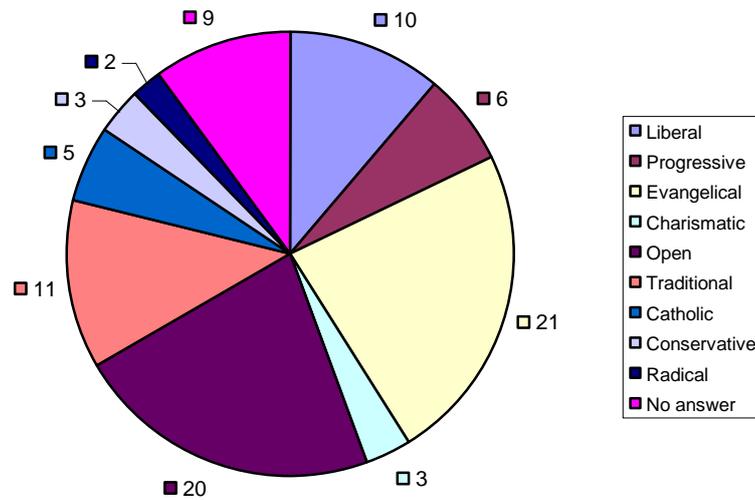


Figure 6.4. Pie Chart of Instances of Words Used in Defining Personal Spirituality

Parents used single words on eighteen occasions, the most frequent use being ‘evangelical’ which was used six times. The word ‘open’ was used singly four times and the word ‘traditional’ was used three times. In all other cases, words were combined portraying a complex and subtle mixture of faith expressions:

*Evangelical, progressive.*⁶²⁸

*Open, evangelical, slightly traditional, fairly liberal.*⁶²⁹

*My spirituality is my own – of my own making, based on a very special relationship with God – special.*⁶³⁰

*Open and liberal but on occasion traditional too; certainly not orthodox nor, we hope, dogmatic, but veering towards evangelical in an undemonstrative way.*⁶³¹

*Open, Christ-centred, influenced by evangelical, charismatic, catholic, Iona, Taijze... but also doubting*⁶³²

This analysis indicates that Christian spirituality is eclectic and individual. Given the way some words were defined above, it is of interest to note that two quotes have the words ‘liberal’ and ‘evangelical’ in the same sentence. It is not possible to understand what being a Christian means, in one simple statement. Someone assessing a spirituality with this variety, who came to the situation with no first hand exposure to the Christian faith, would need to

⁶²⁸ Parent (5)

⁶²⁹ Parent (13)

⁶³⁰ Parent (24)

⁶³¹ Parent (35)

⁶³² Parent (57)

be educated about the way these words were understood by the Christian community.

For the social workers, the words used most often were ‘open’ and ‘liberal’. Five respondents used them together. The full spread of responses is shown in Figure 6.5. The quotes following give an indication of the types of responses received:

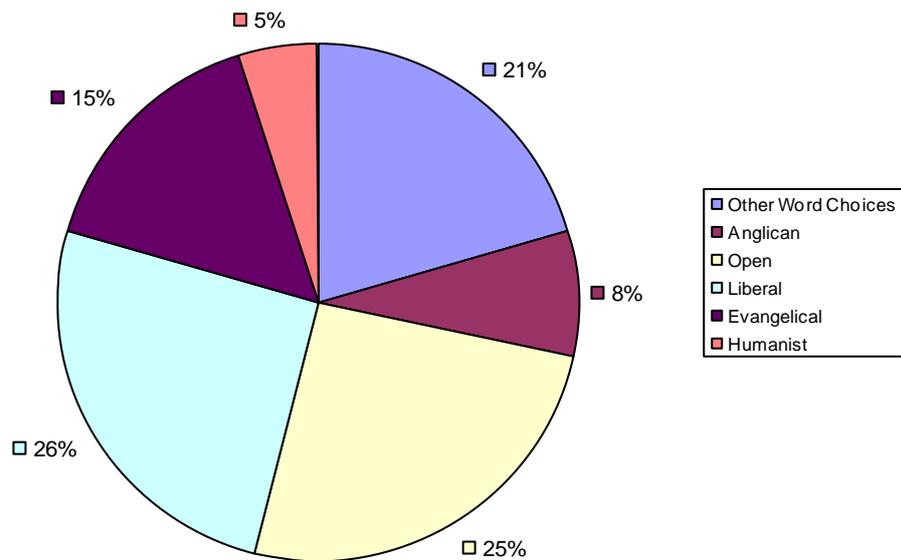


Figure 6.5. Pie Chart of Words Selected Singly, or in Combination, to Define Spirituality

*Open to appreciation of other people’s faith and belief systems. I attend other churches, mosques, temples etc with friends. However, I am a committed Christian with a strong relationship with God. I am not religious.*⁶³³

*Agnostic/atheist but with a personal moral code which is influenced by Christianity.*⁶³⁴

*Global; multi-cultural; organic; individual; open; idiosyncratic.*⁶³⁵

*Evangelical, charismatic, bible-based, community focussed.*⁶³⁶

These quotes illustrate both the complexity and lack of orthodoxy, of the spirituality of social workers. The first quotation comes from someone defining themselves (in the survey) as ‘Practising Christian’, the second person defined themselves ‘Anglican’ and the third person defined themselves ‘Humanist and nature worshipper.’

It is evident from the data that there is a very wide range of Christian spiritualities and interpretation of the word Christian. The fact that the social worker survey favoured the words ‘liberal’ and ‘open’ to define personal spirituality supports a widely held stereotype about social workers’ attitudes; they contrast with the ‘evangelical’ and ‘open’ words used by

⁶³³ Social worker (8)

⁶³⁴ Social worker (24)

⁶³⁵ Social worker (27)

⁶³⁶ Social worker (32)

parents. Words cannot be, and are not, the exclusive means for assessing an adult's ability to become a good adoptive parent. What is more important is lifestyle and faith practice; a valid interpretation of what Christian 'determination' means in day-to-day life. If someone attends Sunday worship once a week and a midweek Bible study group and describes themselves as 'evangelical', does this create a favourable impression of strong family values and self-giving, or is it perceived as narrow and rigid from the outset? Are evangelicals associated with strong parental discipline?

6.2.2 The Discipline Debate

Christian parenthood includes the full range of illumination, joy and pain available to any parent. Christians will draw upon the teachings of the Church, scripture and the experience of other Christians to help them formulate a personal response to the demands they face. The emphasis placed upon family life within the specific community of believers within which they worship will have an understandable impact. Where Biblical principles are upheld as being foundational and applicable to all aspects of contemporary living, then an encounter with some texts will produce distinct attitudes. This applies to forms of discipline and chastisement.⁶³⁷ For example: 'Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish the child with the rod, the child will not die. Punish the child with the rod and save the child's soul from death' (Proverbs 23.13-4). Other texts include Proverbs 10.13, 13.24, 22.15, 29.15 and Hebrews 12.5-11.

The use of such scriptures dates back to practices found in the early church. It also draws upon sources such as the Didascalia and writings of John Chrysostom 'that parents are responsible for their children's eternal destiny, and that they will be called to account by God if their failure to exercise discipline leads their children to sin.'⁶³⁸ Within the past fifty years James Dobson has been particularly influential with his book *Dare to Discipline* that has had widespread appeal within one strand of Christianity and generated a tolerance of some corporal punishment.⁶³⁹ Protestant, conservative Christian parents value 'child obedience and approve of corporal punishment more than do other parents.'⁶⁴⁰ To many outside of this 'religious subculture' this has been exaggerated and misunderstood. Sadly, the attitudes of one group of Christian people have been extended to embrace all those who profess to

⁶³⁷ Jaco Hamman, 'The Rod of Discipline: Masochism, Sadism, and the Judeo-Christian Religion', *Journal of Religion and Health* 39, no. 4 (2000), 319-327.

⁶³⁸ Odd Magne Bakke, 'Upbringing of Children in the Early Church: The Responsibility of Parents, Goal and Methods', *Studia Theologica* 60 (2006), 145-163.

⁶³⁹ James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1977)

⁶⁴⁰ W. Bradford Wilcox, 'Conservative Protestant Childrearing: Authoritarian or Authoritative?' *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998), 796-809.

be Christians. In particular, confusion exists between authoritative and authoritarian attitudes.

Authoritative parenting offers ‘consistent and firm discipline and high levels of warmth and parental responsiveness, [and] has been linked to positive outcomes among children and adolescents.’⁶⁴¹ Research indicates that the ‘disciplinary style of conservative Protestant parents is not as authoritarian as has often been charged.’⁶⁴²

The reason for this reassessment of the stereotype is based upon research that shows that Protestant family advice manuals blend together conservative Protestant theology and modern psychology.⁶⁴³ Conservative Protestants ‘have positive childrearing beliefs and norms: (1) the belief that children are created in the image of God; (2) the belief that psychological well-being of children depends on positive parent-child interaction; and consequently, (3) the norm that children must be treated with love and dignity.’⁶⁴⁴

Additionally, ‘for both theological and psychological reasons – the same conservative Protestant parenting specialists who enthusiastically endorse the corporal punishment of youngsters actually oppose the use of yelling as a means of disciplining children.’⁶⁴⁵ Shouting, ‘yelling’, at children is considered to be intimidation that can lead towards forms of physical child abuse and a loss of parental self-control.

What fails to be mentioned within the prevailing stereotype of these Christian parents is that the Protestant conservative subculture is characterized by both strict discipline *and* an unusually warm and expressive style of parent-child interaction.⁶⁴⁶ The parenting style ‘may be viewed as innovative in that it harnesses theological and psychological values to framing rules that dictate a warm, expressive style of parenting for most parent-child interaction.’⁶⁴⁷ Whereas liberal parental beliefs lend themselves to permissive parenting styles, authoritarian child-rearing attitudes, such as those practiced by more conservative Christians, offer strict discipline within a loving home.⁶⁴⁸

Summarising, the reality of Christian parenting is that it has been linked with corporal punishment, especially in some historical groups and in scripture. The contemporary reality, however, confirms that Christian parents seek guidance from both

⁶⁴¹ Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴² John P. Bartkowski and W. Bradford Wilcox, ‘Conservative Protestant Child Discipline: The case of Parental Yelling’, *Social Forces* 79, no. 1 (2000), 265-290.

⁶⁴³ Bartkowski and Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴⁴ Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴⁵ Bartkowski and Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴⁶ Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴⁷ Wilcox, op. cit.

⁶⁴⁸ de Roos et al (2004), op. cit.

scripture *and* modern psychology in order to be a good parent. If parents who feel instinctively tied to one form of parenting were made more aware of effective alternatives then different disciplinary choices may be selected.⁶⁴⁹ This thesis includes one story about how re-education of the prospective adopters had very positive results for the new adoptive parents (see **section 6.1.2**). Christian parents who can describe their own faith as ‘open’ can also be open to wise counselling about parenting.

So far this chapter has discussed the power of the relationship of the social worker to prospective adopters, in influencing the report that precedes approval. I then examined two possible areas of tension that could be encountered in the approval process. The next section moves on to look at the views of existing Christian adoptive parents, analysing the role their faith has played in reality.

6.3 Christian Adoptive Parenting in Practice

Should we not ask whether a man and his wife, and even those who are single, are any less called to be elders, to fatherliness and motherliness, because they are not parents in the physical sense – elders who in regard to all young people have the same task as physical parents have towards their offspring? May there not be young persons in their locality whose physical parents may be dead, or for some reason do not fulfil their duty, so that they can help both them (and themselves) if they are willing directly or indirectly to fill the gap?⁶⁵⁰

Once approved Christian, adoptive parents face challenges in family life both privately and publicly when attending worship. As indicated in **section 5.2**, the adoptive family can face specific difficulties, over and above the normal frustrations of family life. That which seemed desirable can prove to be fraught, exhausting emotionally and spiritually. Barth’s quotation suggests that a Christian community can provide an extended family that supports those who need extra help.

This section examines the reality of the experience both in the home and at church. It moves beyond the ‘potential’ to be an effective adoptive parent (see **section 5.3**), as assessed by social workers, to the practical day-to-day reliance on faith. It is argued that faith is an immense support for the parent. The Church can provide additional meaningful support.

6.3.1 Christianity in the Adoptive Home

The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses who

⁶⁴⁹ Andrew Grogan-Kaylor and Melanie D. Otis, ‘The Predictors of Parental Use of Corporal Punishment’, *Family Relations* 56 (2007), 80-91.

⁶⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, op. cit., 267-8.

*still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others.*⁶⁵¹

The survey of adoptive and foster parents asked for an assessment to be made about the rewards and demands of the parenting responsibility. Respondents were drawing upon a wide range of experiences when answering these questions, some with experience of birth children in addition to fostered and adopted children. Figure 6.6 shows the data about rewards in parenting as a bar chart.

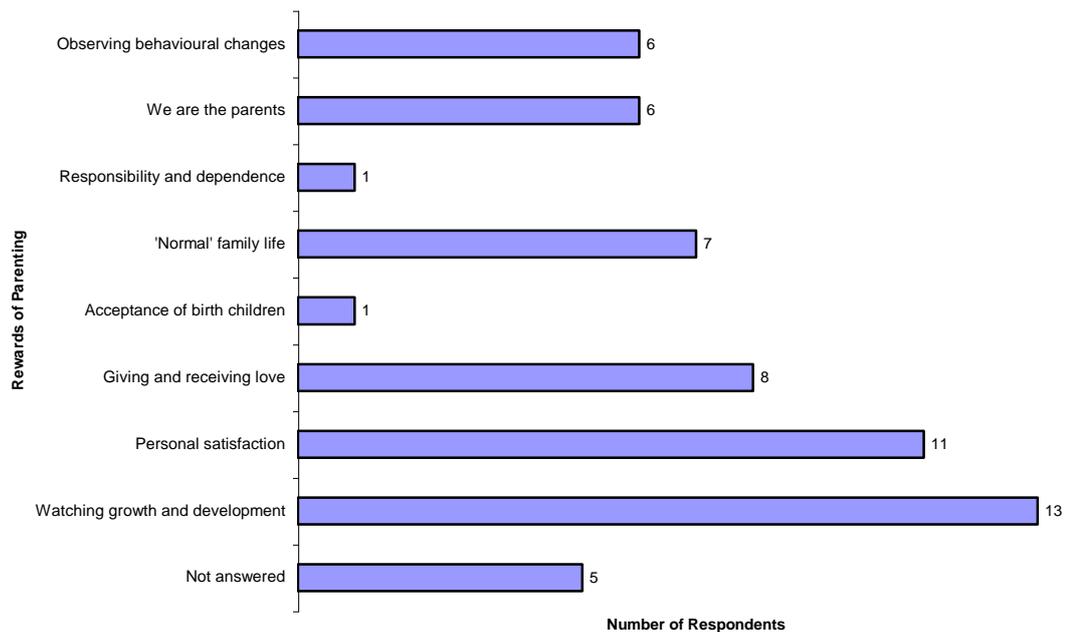


Figure 6.6. Bar Chart of identified Rewards in Parenting

The top five bars in this figure are comments pertaining to fostering and adoption specifically. The phrase 'We are the parents' means that respondents felt committed to their adoptive children as if they had conceived them naturally. Other categories: 'giving and receiving love', 'personal satisfaction' and 'watching growth and development', may be generic rewards of parenting. Working with damaged children, noticing behavioural changes or knowing that the relationship with the child is earned rather than biological, are rewards for foster and adoptive parents specifically. These quotes illustrate this point:

Seeing our children grow and develop despite their background. Watching them become

⁶⁵¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 6, SubSection 3, Heading 3, Paragraph 2379, <http://www.kofc.org/publications/cis/catechism/getsection.cfm?partnum=3&SecNum=2&ChapNum=2&articlenum=6&ParSecNum=0&subSecNum=3&headernum=3&ParNum=2379&ParType=a> (accessed 14 September, 2006).

*more settled and make lasting friendships.*⁶⁵²

*To see that after quite a few ups and downs we have three adults who know that they are loved – and they love us. They are making their way in life and appear to be happy and settled.*⁶⁵³

*That our two sons have grown into sensible men. They have not ‘grumbled’ because they were not our birth children. We have been their parents and as far as I know do regard us as their parents.*⁶⁵⁴

*To see a damaged child (had been to three other foster families apart from the birth home) grow up into a caring and loving adult, who now has become an excellent parent and wife herself.*⁶⁵⁵

*Seeing the boys develop and hit some physical and emotional milestones; being able to provide simple, material needs; being called ‘Mummy’!*⁶⁵⁶

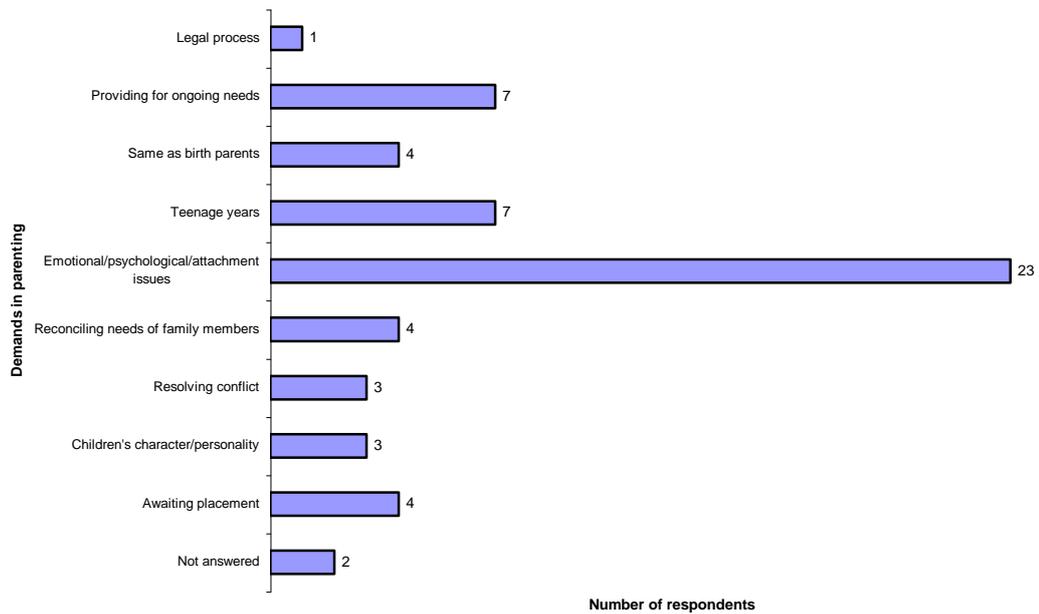


Figure 6.7. Bar Chart of Identified Demands in Parenting

Figure 6.7 shows a bar chart illustrating respondents' views about the demands of parenting responsibility and it clearly indicates that nearly 40% of parents had coped with emotional, psychological or attachment issues. One foster carer openly acknowledged the strain upon her family, which ultimately led to the relationship breaking down:

*Inability to reconcile the different needs of different members of the family i.e. seeing the cost to our birth children and ourselves in trying to accommodate a child with very challenging behaviour.*⁶⁵⁷

For others, who have been able to cope with these demands, the journey goes on:

⁶⁵² Parent (13)

⁶⁵³ Parent (39)

⁶⁵⁴ Parent (21)

⁶⁵⁵ Parent (47)

⁶⁵⁶ Parent (48)

⁶⁵⁷ Parent (3)

To know how to deal with challenging behaviour which you know is a result of trauma and loss in early life – sudden changes of mood/anger at being adopted/deserted, physical and verbal abuse (professional help is needed). To know that you cannot accept this behaviour but to also understand why it is there. To get a balance.⁶⁵⁸

Fostering a toddler who experienced adoption breakdown was very challenging. His behaviour was out of control with lots of attachment problems. He is now our adoptive son and it has been a long difficult journey – but he’s great. Fostering three sisters with special needs has been mega-demanding!⁶⁵⁹

It is very demanding and difficult and, in a sense, ultimately impossible to put right the loss which an adopted child has suffered. We can only do what we perceive to be our best – just because it is dark is no reason not to turn on the light!⁶⁶⁰

When parents were asked how their faith influenced their parenting, no respondents indicated ‘weak’ levels of influence. They were also very aware of the importance of nurturing a child’s spirituality. A cross-tabulation of these two factors (see Table 6.9) indicates, with demonstrable statistical significance, that those who felt that faith exerted a strong influence on their behaviour were also convinced of the merits of nurturing a child’s spirituality. This would be an instinctive conclusion and is supported by the evidence.

		Faith influence				Total
		Very strong influence	Fairly strong influence	Neither strong nor weak influence	No response	
Child's spirituality	Very important	31	14	0	1	46
	Fairly important	2	6	3	0	11
	Neither important nor unimportant	0	1	0	0	1
	Fairly unimportant	0	0	0	0	0
	Very unimportant	0	0	0	0	0
Total		33	21	3	1	58

Table 6.9. Cross-tabulation of Importance of Child’s Spirituality with Influence of Faith on Parental Behaviour (Chi-square tests at 0.003 level indicating statistical significance.)

Subsequent semi-structured telephone interviews explored the issue about what adoptive parents did practically to demonstrate that faith was important to them. Praying alone, something known to the children, and praying together as a family was important, though the latter may exist only in the form of ‘saying grace’ before a meal, rather than in anything more formally devotional.

Praying is very important! I am worried for them and it’s good to know that God is involved and loves me and loves the children and knows about their history and their behaviour. I do my best.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁸ Parent (24)

⁶⁵⁹ Parent (26)

⁶⁶⁰ Parent (35)

⁶⁶¹ Parent: Telephone interview (3)

We say grace at meal times. We have a 'quiet time' at breakfast. We have used a couple of books: "Day-by-day for Young Children" by Paternoster and it's had 8-9 years of use. There is always an opportunity to ask questions – belief is relevant to everyday life and we discuss the situation if we're unhappy at school or someone's poorly or if we feel happy about creation or something.⁶⁶²

There was also a strong desire to assert that these children were individuals who had their own freedom, dignity and rights. This can offer some reassurance to social workers who may feel that Christians may only desire a child who will go on to accept the Christian faith themselves.

They have choices too and they are individuals who can decide right from wrong...⁶⁶³

[We demonstrate faith is important to us] by Christian upbringing and encouraging them in their faith. We want to show them what we believe and what we would like them to think but also say, your view is your own...⁶⁶⁴

It's about moral standards – everything we do with the children. Neither our birth child nor our adopted child are now interested in church. When our older [birth] child stopped going to church this had an influence on the younger one. It didn't stop us relating day-to-day life with our Christian faith and it didn't stop us giving our point of view. It's about integrity: putting people first, a Christian ethos and setting an example...⁶⁶⁵

Parents were relaxed about their parenting and their faith as a blend of daily, relevant experience:

Mostly, you live your life and set your example at home: this is lived-out reality and the values that you show and teach reflect your faith.⁶⁶⁶

I've been a Christian for fifty years and it's integral to who I am. My Christian belief centres on and looks for hope – I do get down and distressed – so I place my hope in positive, concrete, practical things and try to prepare the children for their adult lives. For example, they all help with cleaning and I set the standard. All children are very self-focussed but in this family of five (three adopted children) we share what we have as a community and we co-operate together.⁶⁶⁷

In some ways I am no different to anyone who tries to be a good parent. We teach about forgiveness, anti-racism, not ganging up on others, loving people, not being negative in our attitudes. We try to apply Biblical principles. We don't bear grudges and hit out at people. We go to church regularly and the children join in youth church activities but there is a balance and this is not forced. We mix with other Christian families on our holidays too. We pray at bedtimes and encourage them to say their own prayers too.⁶⁶⁸

The experiences described above were responses by parents to issues about faith. More subtly a subsidiary question asked about specific acts of nurturing a Christian spirituality with the children. These responses illustrate an empathy with a broad range of

⁶⁶² Parent: Telephone interview (3)

⁶⁶³ Parent: Telephone interview (3)

⁶⁶⁴ Parent: Telephone interview (4)

⁶⁶⁵ Parent: Telephone interview (6)

⁶⁶⁶ Parent: Telephone interview (2)

⁶⁶⁷ Parent: Telephone interview (8)

⁶⁶⁸ Parent: Telephone interview (9)

spiritual stimuli and go beyond a rigorous Biblical approach or other stereotype.

We listened to a lot of different types of music: hymns, Taizé, relaxing music or choruses and I now see my son doing this with his own children... having music in the background. We encouraged both church going and active questioning about faith and church matters. He's a Baptist minister now whereas I'm a Methodist minister!⁶⁶⁹

We had conversation about what our faith meant and about our values. I remember Sunday lunchtime discussions especially. Our son is not a Christian but he thinks through things very carefully and I still hope he will be challenged and will respond. He still demonstrates admirable qualities.⁶⁷⁰

As Christians we believe in forgiveness. We are realistic about the children's early life experiences and also we know we must forgive and build understanding. God's plan for these children was that they should be 'rescued' into this family but that does not mean we do not think about and pray for the birth parents.⁶⁷¹

We have three teenagers with raging hormones! We chose this town and this place because of its community life and the whole environment for nurturing the children. The children absorb so much information. The girls are both in a church choir and pick up on faith through the music and its content. There is also space to challenge and ask questions. They are surrounded by people who pray even if they can't be bothered. I do very little direct (even none) teaching about faith. The environment is the most important thing.⁶⁷²

All parenting experiences will have common elements, whether the children are biologically related to the parents or adopted or fostered. Children who become part of new families have widely recognised emotional problems. Only some children have the inner resources to assess these and assimilate them in a constructive and life-building way. Some children 'act out' as a form of wrestling with the inner complexity of their life experience, in a desperate attempt to make sense of who they are. Adoptive and foster parents were asked about their experience of these issues and if faith had provided them with any help.

Our faith has been tested but it has also helped and we know there is support 'out there.' We adopted our son at age 8 five years ago. He has been through therapy and the first year was terrible and we had to learn to cope as a parent. We had unreal, rosy ideals and then these were brutally adjusted by the demands he placed upon us. I was mostly angry and praying was impossible... We survived knowing that other people were there for you and were loving and supporting you.⁶⁷³

Our son bonded with men so attachment was an issue; there was mutual difficulty for him and for me as his adoptive mother. God intended that we should be together, so I knew to give it time and my love for him grew. I realised this in my reactions to a situation at a birthday party he went to, after we'd had him for six months, and he was being bullied. Bonding was a gradual process. My faith taught me that there was a purpose in everything and I just gave it time.⁶⁷⁴

Two out of three of our children have attachment disorders to some extent. My faith has been really challenged by them mostly because no one said to us you will not be

⁶⁶⁹ Parent: Telephone interview (1)

⁶⁷⁰ Parent: Telephone interview (2)

⁶⁷¹ Parent: Telephone interview (3)

⁶⁷² Parent: Telephone interview (8)

⁶⁷³ Parent: Telephone interview (4)

⁶⁷⁴ Parent: Telephone interview (5)

doing parenting “normally.” Most of my friends are Christian and our church community don’t judge us. As a group they uphold me and care for me when I cannot pray myself and this has helped me enormously. I’ve been struggling a lot recently and now that my energy levels are returning so my spiritual life is returning too.⁶⁷⁵

I think you feel more guilty when you feel you don’t reach your own or God’s standards. An adopted child is more challenging if you haven’t handled things properly. I have one birth child and one adopted and sometimes I feel that the blood tie counts for more and I put up with more. It takes longer to build a strong loving bond with an adopted child. There always seems to be behaviour where you are asking yourself is that because he is adopted? Is that because he’s a boy? Is that because...? My son can be a bit “poor me-ish.”⁶⁷⁶

This section has given testimony to the way that faith works as narrated by those who are adoptive parents. Reflecting upon practical and spiritual experiences, through the telling of the story, is one way in which relationships develop meaning. John Paul Lederach expresses it thus:

‘social meaning, identity, and story are linked through narrative, which connects the remote past of *who* we are with the remote future of *how* we will survive in the context of an expansive present *where* we share space and relationship. The space of narrative, the act linking the past with the future to create meaning in the present, is a continuous process of restoring.’⁶⁷⁷

The journey of these parents has not always been simple but it has frequently been motivated, stimulated and sustained by their Christian faith. Within his ‘Doctrine of Creation’ Karl Barth examines how God features in the relationship between parents and children. His views align with the experiences described in these stories. Barth says, ‘Broadly speaking, the main essential in the parent-child relationship is that parents are summoned to regard their children from the angle of the divine will, and to deal with them, to live for them and with them, accordingly.’⁶⁷⁸ There is evidence of substantial pragmatism in the attitudes of the adopters. Adopted children will never be ‘chips off the old block’ and can be freer spirits as a result, whilst parents can be liberated by the lack of expectation placed on their children. They nurture them as the people God wants them to be. Parents are fallible and flawed children of God themselves, but in becoming adoptive parents, as Christian people, they rely on God to help them. As Barth says:

While themselves doing everything which they can and must do within the compass of their responsibility, they can only commit him to the hand of God from whom they have received him, to the Holy Spirit of God who alone is able to make their weak testimony efficacious to him and ward off the influence of evil spirits, some of which may be parental in origin.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ Parent: Telephone interview (8)

⁶⁷⁶ Parent: Telephone interview (9)

⁶⁷⁷ Lederach, op. cit., 146.

⁶⁷⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, op. cit., 277.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 284.

6.3.2 Adoptive Children in the Christian Community

In the case of the Church, the character is that of a community or communities; the circumstance anything and everything that life has to offer. The Church does not escape the circumstantial, for it is first and foremost groups of people struggling with the contingencies and vicissitudes of earthly existence, in all its messiness.⁶⁸⁰

The church is crucial for sustaining claims of the narratability of the world. Our experience, of the world as well as of ourselves, is open to narrative construal, but experience in and of itself does not entail the form of narrative and/or the kind of story Christians learn to tell about the world and our place in it. The church is, therefore, an ontological necessity if we are to know rightly that our world is capable of narrative construal.⁶⁸¹

These two quotes illustrate the belief of Christian theologians that the Church exists in the routine mess of life. The Church is shaped by the experience of those within it, who contribute to the faithful witness that is made by the Church. The Church can be regarded as the enduring presence of God enacted in and through society, and whose presence is revealed through the stories of those through whom Christ works. This section explores how this is a reality or otherwise for Christian adoptive parents.

Positively, adoptive parents found that knowing a caring, praying community surrounded them, substantially bolstered their confidence and strength for the adoptive task. In the survey several parents recognised the benefits of being within a loving and giving community:

Christian values offer guidance to parents. The Christian parent has a unique support system i.e. fellow believers, prayer-support, as well as the inner strength one's faith brings.⁶⁸²

A family built on Christian values can offer stability, love, support, discipline etc. in which a child is more likely to thrive. With a culture of self-sacrifice they are more likely to persevere when the going gets tough. If they are part of a local church they are able to offer inclusion in a community that could be very beneficial.⁶⁸³

When asked specifically about the nature of 'support', such as that alluded to in the two quotes above, a wide variety of responses resulted. Whilst the majority of these were favourable, it is clear that the Church could do much more to uphold the worth of adoption and fostering. It could provide clear evidence of the support systems and understanding needed to care for parents undertaking what has been shown to be a sometimes-difficult task. Figure 6.8 shows the results in a bar chart.

⁶⁸⁰ Loughlin, op. cit., 85.

⁶⁸¹ Hauerwas (2001), op. cit., 61.

⁶⁸² Parent (7)

⁶⁸³ Parent (3)

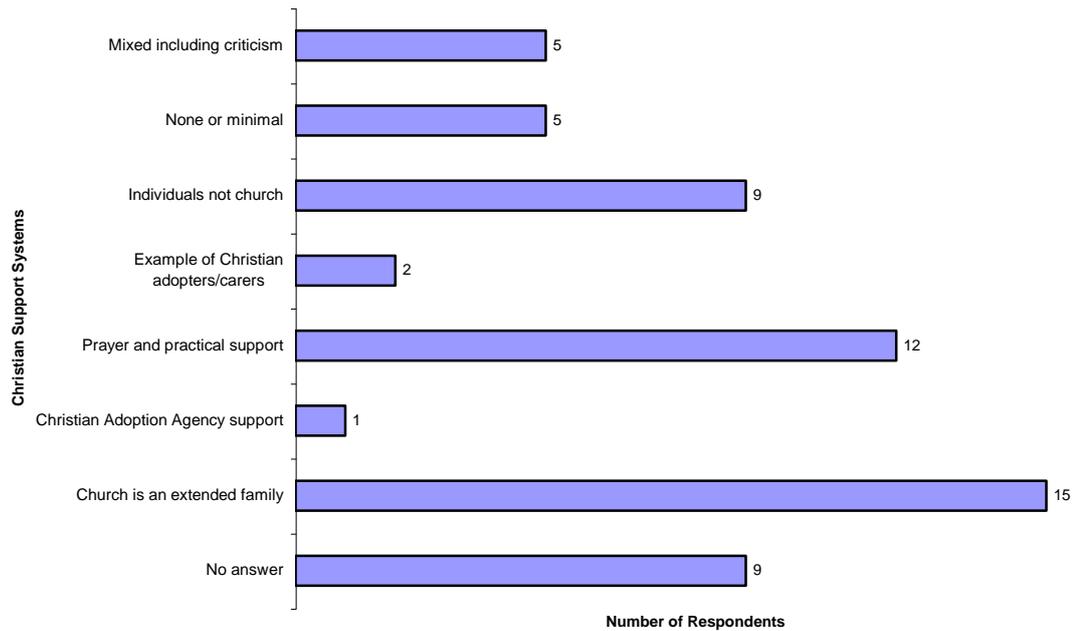


Figure 6.8. Bar Chart of Christian Support Systems Experienced By Adoptive and Foster Parents

The two main ways that parents recognised that other Christians supported them were through the attentiveness of the wider church community and again through prayer. Some of the ways this was articulated were:

We had massive support from Church people. Church friends are Godparents to our girls. Older members became surrogate grandmothers.⁶⁸⁴

I've been lucky: my church family have known my foster children as long as I have. I get regular praise from others about how much the children have settled and become part of our family (church). And know that when the going has got tough, there are people at church who will support and help me through whatever troubles I'm facing.⁶⁸⁵

LOTS! Lots of prayer through the whole process, from start to finish. Lots of encouragement. Our minister at the time of our home study was a reference for us so was very involved in the whole process. Since the child has been with us we still receive a lot of spiritual support and fellowship.⁶⁸⁶

A listening ear, at times; lots of prayer.⁶⁸⁷

The top three measures shown in Figure 6.8 include some positive and some rueful reflections:

Personal encouragement; extended family (as I live away from my own); nothing formal and no teaching in this area, despite obvious parallels with adoption as children of God.⁶⁸⁸

Very good support – we have three families in our church who have adopted. However, we still have experienced the anger of some who believe that adopted children are no

⁶⁸⁴ Parent (1)

⁶⁸⁵ Parent (20)

⁶⁸⁶ Parent (11)

⁶⁸⁷ Parent (38)

⁶⁸⁸ Parent (14)

*different from birth children and therefore no special parenting techniques are needed.*⁶⁸⁹

*Christian friends, particularly within the ethnic community from which our adopted children originate, have been enormously helpful, supportive and influential. Other Christian friends and churches have been helpful too but (without any sense of being critical) from a different perspective and without a clear understanding of the issues, and even, on occasions, a fear of them.*⁶⁹⁰

*Very little. The church has seemed disinterested.*⁶⁹¹

Despite adoption being pioneered by Christian people, the real heart for the work today resides with Christian individuals within churches, rather than with the Church. Given some of the emotional demands upon parents who perceive a real call to undertake the task, there is a lack of understanding that feels far from supportive, within the comments above. Telephone interviews expanded on these matters and indicated that there were two main issues: lack of education and awareness about adoption issues, and conservative attitudes towards children's behaviour in church.

*We try to meet the specific needs of our children and we have been open with them and others about their adoption 'as fact.' My husband has been rebuked about 'going on' about 'adoption as different.' He was told 'move on – they've been with you for "x" years now.' But other people should learn that their [the children's] whole life is affected by adoption, so we won't ignore it.*⁶⁹²

*We were very fortunate and supported by our church and a group of foster and adoptive parents who all go to our church. These people have created an awareness of the issues and we have received positive comments about how the children are changing and developing.*⁶⁹³

*We haven't had critical comment from church and we have had foster children as well as our two [birth child and adopted]. They have all been OK about going to church and not too resistant; they have sort of known about the rules of behaving... Our church family have been very, very supportive. There seem to have been a lot of young families all going through 'it' together. Help was also offered practically, like when we were fostering baby twins and had our own and there was a lady who simply came and took one of them to sit with her and helped us out. People know about our situation and one Local Preacher made reference to adopted children being included in the church family, just like God includes us all as adopted children, in the sermon!*⁶⁹⁴

One adoptive parent commented that the son of her adult, adoptive son had mild autism and that his behaviour was 'difficult' for that church. Others noticed that some children were treated differently:

*Our son has been so good. But another family in church had a [biological] child who was very rowdy and restless as a young teenager. He had ADHD and there were unpleasant conversations with his parents.*⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁸⁹ Parent (32)

⁶⁹⁰ Parent (35)

⁶⁹¹ Parent (42)

⁶⁹² Parent: Telephone interview (3)

⁶⁹³ Parent: Telephone interview (4)

⁶⁹⁴ Parent: Telephone interview (6)

⁶⁹⁵ Parent: Telephone interview (5)

When I was an active minister I did detect some disapproval of the children from the congregation but once we moved and I am part of a congregation then I am open about the situation and it's easier because I have educated them and made them more aware of what is going on in the lives of these children. My age, confidence and experience helps and I'm educating people about attachment and adoption things.⁶⁹⁶

Being adopted is a different and sometimes difficult experience of life. Nurturing children, encouraging them to be fully self-aware and integrated them into a new environment can take many years. Many bigger churches have a particular demographic profile that doesn't always accommodate behavioural differences:

Our church is a very family friendly church and has several youngish families. Everyone is very tolerant of all the children's behaviour. Some people have passed on encouragement when they have seen improvement and a positive change in the behaviour of our boys.⁶⁹⁷

I have had no criticism from my church and people have been very supportive and tolerant. My son lacks the ability to concentrate for long and they have often given him all the attention that he craves for and been very generous. The system our church has of older members of the youth group mentoring younger ones is really helpful and builds lasting friendships. Would say it all depends on the church's attitude towards children generally. My adopted child is so very different from my birth child in playing, emotionally, academically... Actually there is a bit of intellectual snobbery about his intelligence and his difference to the other young people...⁶⁹⁸

Just as individual parents are fallible, occasionally impressive in their ability to cope with challenges and occasionally woefully inadequate, so too the Church can respond to needs in genuinely helpful ways or else be critical and avoid the issues. These stories give support to the view that the Church has the potential to be an invaluable support system. It could be this in every case if it had more awareness of adoption issues.

6.3.3 Parenting as a Vocation

Christian families will be able to show greater readiness to adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them. Rediscovering the warmth of affection of a family, these children will be able to experience God's loving and provident fatherhood witnessed to by Christian parents, and they will thus be able to grow up with serenity and confidence in life.⁶⁹⁹

The Roman Catholic Church has recognised the contribution to a child's future that can be made by being raised within a loving and stable family. Within a strong tradition of family, it acknowledges that parenting can be a vocation for both the childless and those who already have children. This section is an analysis of views about Christian distinctiveness in adoptive parenting.

⁶⁹⁶ Parent: Telephone interview (8)

⁶⁹⁷ Parent: Telephone interview (7)

⁶⁹⁸ Parent: Telephone interview (9)

⁶⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio - Apostolic Exhortation to the 'Catholic Church on the Role of the Christian family in the Modern World'* (Rome: 1981)

Table 6.10 shows that nearly 85% of parents who responded to the survey felt that being a Christian offered something distinctive to adoption and fostering work.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	49	84.5
No	9	15.5
Total	58	100

Table 6.10. Answers to Question If Being a Christian Offered Something Distinctive to Adoption or Fostering Work

Figure 6.9 charts replies to the question: ‘how can a Christian parent be distinctive?’

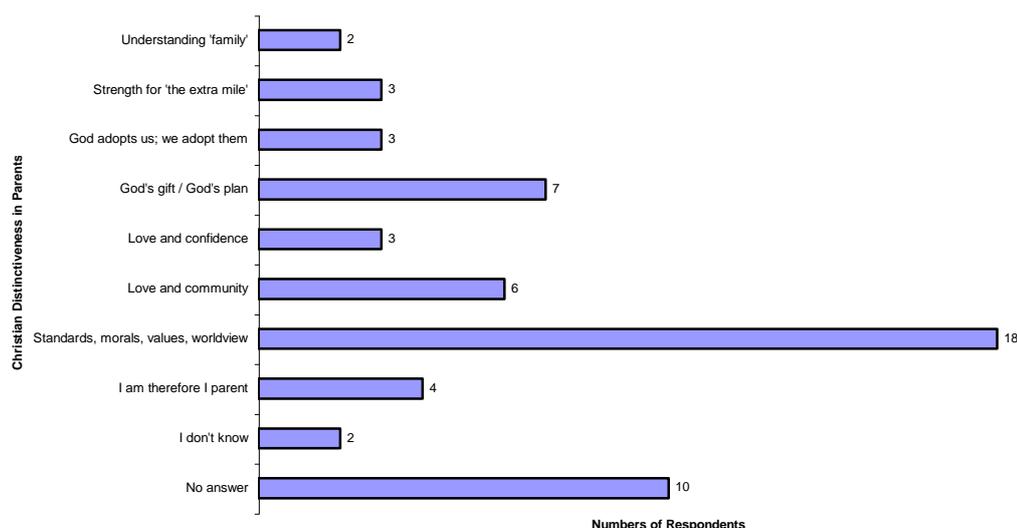


Figure 6.9. Bar Chart of Ways in Which Christians Are Distinctive Parents

The leading response concerned a lifestyle reflected in actions and attitudes:

Offering a spiritual perspective and a moral code rooted in an external source.⁷⁰⁰

A distinctive set of moral and family values; a self-sacrificial model of love; a tradition of discipline and order.⁷⁰¹

1. A definite set of morals, attitudes but tempered with an accepting love. 2. Love of the development of the spiritual within the child.⁷⁰²

Seven respondents recognised that their life was distinctive since it had God's hand upon it:

We told the children that God had chosen them for us; they knew this from being tiny. Also when things got difficult I knew that God was in charge and in control.⁷⁰³

By knowing that I fulfil God's desire that "orphans" are cared for. By knowing, I have God's strength and not my own for a really demanding task. By knowing the power of prayer for the child and myself. By developing and teaching, the fruits of the spirit. By sharing Jesus' love with children who may have never known a father's, or a

⁷⁰⁰ Parent (14)

⁷⁰¹ Parent (23)

⁷⁰² Parent (42)

⁷⁰³ Parent (52)

*mother's love.*⁷⁰⁴

Some of the identified qualities, regarded as 'distinctive' by the respondents, are potentially recognisable by adoptive parents in other faith traditions. They are not qualities that are unique to Christian people. Since they are articulated, shared and owned by Christian adoptive parents, however, the answers given have relevance in indicating to social workers how Christian people would feel as they approached parenthood. Given no other literature in this area, this should be useful data. Some of the telephone interviews gave a positive and different testimony: one concerning a memory of how the relationship developed in an unsolicited way and another of how faith sustained the relationship:

Our son was in care first and the relationships with his foster carers broke down and he went into a children's home. He had a rough time and felt very rejected. We were going into the children's home on Thursday evening's and he attached himself to my wife and developed a relationship with her. Eventually we fostered him from the age of eight onwards but we had to wait for five years before we could adopt him because he wasn't officially released for adoption until then. Now he will not use words like 'adopted' or 'fostered'; he sees himself as our son and will only describe himself as 'our son.'⁷⁰⁵

Our daughter came to us aged 4½ and she had emotional baggage from her previous experiences of being in a family. We were both prepared and unprepared for her. When we disagreed, she was 'in our face' and wouldn't give up but would follow us around and continue the argument – it was very wearing. I remember in the early days at bedtime with her, thinking and praying what to do and what to say, and saying to her 'we will not reject you; we will stick by you whatever you do...' We coped better because we are Christians.⁷⁰⁶

The final story indicates how Christian parents can be naturally reflective thinkers, looking into personal experience and thinking about life and difference:

I have three grown up children from my first family and two adopted children in my second. I doubt there are any two children the same! The problems we have now are more to do with things that came from the children's early life experiences. For example, empathy... how do you teach it? I had to work on how to have empathy. A lot of things I see in our older boy that aren't there and you would have expected it by now, especially socially. Faith has been a support to us – huge! We have such unbelievable pray-ers in the people who are our children's Godparents. Prayer support really works!⁷⁰⁷

In conclusion, irrespective of whether parents became adoptive parents through childlessness, through a desire to help family-less children or through some deeper sense of calling, being an effective parent for children with special needs involves tasks and levels of self-giving which are possible through an existing or emerging sense of vocation. This connection with God's greater purpose makes Christian parents narrate their understanding

⁷⁰⁴ Parent (45)

⁷⁰⁵ Parent: Telephone interview (1)

⁷⁰⁶ Parent: Telephone interview (6)

⁷⁰⁷ Parent: Telephone interview (7)

in a distinctive way with recognisable attributes.

6.4 Christian Suspicion and Success

*The task 'consists in the fact that with their whole being, action, inaction and conduct, and then by word and speech, they have to make a definite declaration to other men. The essence of their vocation is that God makes them his witnesses.'*⁷⁰⁸

This chapter began with the approach of social workers towards assessing Christian parents for adoption, then engaged two aspects needing clarification for the benefit of Christians and social workers. Finally, I looked at how Christian people engage with adoption; what positive contributions they bring.

The chapter has argued that assessing Christians as prospective adopters may be made easier if the language used conveys a common understanding. Christianity covers a broad range of lifestyles and spiritualities, some of which are exaggerated by popular stereotypes. Training would reduce misperceptions for both social workers and prospective Christian adopters. The place of judgement would be characterised by a more widely acknowledged understanding of social workers seeking adopters. This may be particularly helpful in working through issues of parental discipline in a Christian context. In terms of a theology of engagement, Christian people would wish to say: 'you shall know them by their fruit...' (Matthew 7.16), whereas social workers would need to be reassured that the fruitful outcome would be a security and stability that nurtured the best interests of the child *before* the child even came home.

For those approved as adopters, this chapter argues that the Christian faith has had a positive impact on the parenting challenge that they have faced. The Church has shown itself capable of support at a practical and spiritual level, but also ignorant of some of the wider challenges facing adoptive parents and adopted children. The Church can do more to teach about adoption as a spiritual and practical reality. The Church could engage more by welcoming training from adoption agencies about the work they do with vulnerable children. Since the Christian community has some respect for welfare and charity work in wider society, inspiring large numbers of volunteers, so it is a community that should welcome more information about the needs of children awaiting adoption.

The Church can also fulfil a responsibility to support all social workers when society requires them to make judgements about whether or not adults should become adoptive parents. This support should extend to Christian and secular adoption agencies. The support

⁷⁰⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 3.2, op. cit., 575.

should obviously include Christians within its own community. One social worker, employed by a Christian adoption agency, and with twenty-four years of social work experience, said this:

I have done some research about matching parents with children and the results of that matching process. The results found that there was a group of adopters I called 'stretched adopters' people who had been matched according to their profile and then found themselves challenged as parents. I asked the question: was that 'stretch' a success? Sometimes you can work with a couple and you just know that they have the potential and the ability to cope and to stretch and to find the inner resources...⁷⁰⁹

'Inner resources' are not only emotional or physical but, as has been seen, also spiritual. These come from an individual being in relationship to God and also from that family being part of the Church. The families who have shared their stories in this chapter consist of married, divorced, single, foster carers and adoptive parents. Some have birth children as well as foster or adoptive children. Their families have unusual shapes. This is nothing unusual in today's society. The law, however, defines the shape of adoptive families. It has been open to considerable criticism from the Christian community for the way in which it is doing this. The next chapter explores whether or not this is a positive situation.

⁷⁰⁹ Social Worker: Telephone interview (7)

7 Adoptive Families: Traditional or Radical Creations?

*Bless this couple in the gift and care of children,
That their home may be a place of love,
security, and truth,
And their children grow up
to know and love you in your Son
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*⁷¹⁰

*'we thank and praise you for bringing N and N to this
day...
May they nurture their family with devotion,
see their children grow in body, mind and spirit...'*⁷¹¹

In his *Theology of Engagement* Ian Markham asserts that 'If Christians really are committed to the "tradition" then that commitment will involve a recognition that it is a dynamic entity that learnt from non-Christian sources and contemporary culture to modify the Christian understanding of the truth of God's relations with the world.'⁷¹² In other words Christian people have a theology that responds to real experience. In agreeing with this, I would contend that engaging with contemporary culture may be done in a way that does not diminish thinking that is responsive to a traditional perspective. The two prayers above illustrate this. They come from Church of England marriage services, written twenty years apart at the end of the twentieth century. The liturgies have moved from a separate prayer for children, perceived as an inherent part of married life, to a prayer as part of the general intercessions, so worded that it makes provision for children to pre-exist the marriage. There is a subtle de-emphasis in the place of children and a careful re-phrasing that can accommodate a new family structure.

Changing patterns within society, including the lessening financial dependence of wives on husbands and increasing cultural individualism, have produced a new climate for families. Writing in the US, one commentator reflects that 'recent family decline is unlike historical family change. It is something unique, and much more serious.'⁷¹³ The specific family form in decline is the traditional nuclear family. There has also been a decline in the number of children in the family that has 'significant ramifications for the priority our society gives to children, and for the cultural attitudes we hold concerning the importance of

⁷¹⁰ *The Alternative Service Book* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 296.

⁷¹¹ *Common Worship* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000-2006), <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/marriage/marriage.html> (accessed 30 November, 2007).

⁷¹² Markham, op. cit., 21.

⁷¹³ David Popenoe, 'American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review and Appraisal', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* Vol. 55, no. 3 (1993), 527-542.

children in the overall scheme of life.⁷¹⁴ The numbers of children awaiting adoption in the United Kingdom, about four thousand, testify to this reality.⁷¹⁵

This is the fourth chapter that looks at the possible areas of tension between Christian and non-Christian people in adoption work. Earlier chapters have looked at how Christian adoption agencies can offer experience, professionalism and work with 'hard to place' children (**chapter 4**); how children have a greater likelihood of well-being if their spirituality is nurtured (**chapter 5**); and, how Christian adoptive parents are spiritually and practically motivated in their parenting, in ways that need understanding by assessing social workers (**chapter 6**). This chapter concentrates upon the area that gets most media coverage: the perceived conflict between the Church's veneration of the traditional family, married couple and children, and society's support for diverse family shapes that may not include married people. Since adoption creates a new family, how should the Church respond to challenges to the traditional concept of 'family' brought in by recent adoption legislation?

In Great Britain in 2006, the average number of dependent children in a family was 1.8, compared with 2.0 in 1971.⁷¹⁶ The proportion of children living in lone-parent families more than tripled between 1972 and spring 2006 to 24%.⁷¹⁷ In 2005, 24% of non-married people aged under sixty years were cohabiting, around twice the proportion recorded in 1987.⁷¹⁸ Cohabiting is the fastest growing family type. Between 1976 and 2006, the proportion of cohabiting couple families increased to 14% from 9%.⁷¹⁹

With the changes in family life and the ways in which children are conceived, come an increase in the numbers of children available for adoption and, in parallel, a decrease in the numbers of children being placed for adoption.⁷²⁰ In England and Wales, of the children who were placed for adoption in 2006, more than 78% were born outside of marriage.⁷²¹

Don Browning summarises the situation when he writes:

Changes mean that there are more broken families with children to adopt, more older childless couples who have waited too long and have missed the parental fulfilment of having children of their own, and more unmarried singles who

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Adoption Register for England and Wales, <http://www.adoptionregister.org.uk/adoreg/default.asp?psg=2> (accessed 30 November, 2007).

⁷¹⁶ Social Trends 37: *Households and Families* (London: HMSO, 2007), <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1748&Pos=2&ColRank=1&Rank=176> (accessed 16 November, 2007).

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1865&Pos=4&ColRank=1&Rank=176> (accessed 16 November, 2007).

⁷²⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ci/nugget.asp?id=592> (accessed 30 November, 2007).

⁷²¹ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/adoptions_2006.xls (accessed 30 November, 2007).

think about adoption as a way to fulfil their parental inclinations.⁷²²

It is not the purpose of this chapter to resolve questions about whether the traditional family form is best; this chapter focuses its arguments upon adoption. It can, however, be argued that the traditionally normative form of family structure, where children in the home are biologically related to their parents, has not served all children well. Too few married adopters apply to increase their family size through adoption, else the numbers of children waiting would be fewer. In support of the children who wait for permanent homes, this chapter specifically addresses the cases of the expanded range of adults who can offer themselves as prospective adopters. It uses Biblical principles of hospitality, love for one's neighbour and care for the vulnerable, alongside sociological evidence, to argue that some adults should be considered as possible parents even when the new family will have a non-traditional shape. This is not so much an argument against the traditional family but rather an argument for the child that needs a family. It takes seriously Christ's words, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me' (Mk. 9.37) and argues that meeting the needs of children is paramount in adoption related matters.

The starting point for the discussion is about how the different denominations have developed different approaches to supporting families and children. This differs from the denominational comparisons made in **chapter 4** that compared approaches to social responsibility; this chapter focuses upon the family. **Section 7.1** shows that each church has taken a different path over the years, responding to societal changes and reflecting on their theological traditions to accommodate the emerging tensions. **Section 7.2** moves on to address those who apply to adopt who stand outside of providing a normative family form. It examines the theological and sociological arguments for accepting their applications as prospective parents. In **section 7.3** comparisons are made between the views of some Christian groups, adoption workers and actual adoptive parents in an attempt to discern an acceptable way forward in all creative work with families.

7.1 Denominational Perspectives on Christian Families

The word 'family' is used of a wide range of groupings of people, living in very different relationships and bound together in various ways. In our own society it is most often used of a couple and their children, if any – the so-called 'nuclear family'. These children may be theirs by birth, adoption, fostering or some other relationship of caring. They may also include the children of one partner by a previous marriage or partnership. A single parent with one or more children

⁷²² Don S. Browning, 'Adoption and the Moral Significance of Kin Altruism', in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 63.

*similarly constitutes a family.*⁷²³

This highly pragmatic and open definition of what constitutes ‘a family’ represents one denomination’s twentieth century attempt at moving the understanding of the contemporary family away from the stereotype of ‘husband, wife and two children’. Denominational understanding of the make-up of a family has been debated since the Reformation and the resultant doctrines and guidelines provide fundamental constraints to the work of adoption agencies funded by distinct Christian denominations.

7.1.1 Roman Catholicism and Families

*Christian families, recognizing with faith all human beings as children of the same heavenly Father, will respond generously to the children of other families, giving them support and love not as outsiders but as members of the one family of God's children.*⁷²⁴

This quotation from *Familiaris Consortio* shows that creating and extending families is part of the mission of Roman Catholicism within family life. Contemporary Catholic families work with this and preceding Papal Encyclicals to discern how best to live and love.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed many medieval canon laws: polygamy was forbidden, clerical celibacy was mandatory, celibacy and virginity was a superior state to marriage, divorce meant permanent separation with no prospect of remarriage.⁷²⁵ The Catholic tradition supported marriage as companionship, an antidote to sins of lust and for procreation.⁷²⁶ Marriage was sacramental and lifelong. The practice of annulment, even after several years of marriage and offspring, was a declaration that the original vows had been made in error, or improperly, at the inception of the marriage. Annulment did not dissolve the bond and was never designed to deal with marital breakdown.⁷²⁷

Papal encyclicals in 1880 (*Arcanum Divinae* – Leo XIII) and 1930 (*Casti Connubii* – Pius XI) dealt with divorce and the meaning of Christian marriage, the latter moving on to issues of abortion and birth control. Pius XI wrote that the primary cause and reason for matrimony was about ‘mutual interior formation’ that sought a daily increase in the practice of virtue and growth in the love of God: ‘marriage is considered not in its stricter sense, as the institution destined for procreation... but in the wider sense as a complete and intimate

⁷²³ Methodist Church, ‘*A Christian Understanding of Family Life, The Single Person and Marriage*’ (Methodist Conference, 1992)

⁷²⁴ *Familiaris Consortio*, op. cit., section 41.

⁷²⁵ Witte, op. cit., 38.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷²⁷ Ozment, op. cit., 80.

life-partnership and association.⁷²⁸ In saying this, the Roman Catholic Church began a slow move away from its traditional stance of upholding marriage solely for the production of children and found merit in marriage for its own sake.

The emancipation of women after World War I, solicited a ‘careful and guarded’ response from the Catholic Church who held with the traditional view. There was ‘dignity and status’ for women in the home; the role of mother and wife was a vocation.⁷²⁹ In its fullest sense, women’s emancipation produced a ‘total perversion of family life’ according to Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*.⁷³⁰

In the late twentieth century, the tradition maintained its ‘natural family planning’ form of contraception, leading to Jack Dominican observing that ‘a large family is not infrequently the diagnostic sign of a practising Roman Catholic household.’⁷³¹ For the Catholic couple, ‘each new life should be conceived only at a time when it is wanted and when the parents reach the prudent conclusion that they can adequately care for and love it.’⁷³²

The Church found the birth control movement to be intrinsically immoral and a denial of woman’s position and role.⁷³³ The present reality is that the majority of Catholic couples use artificial contraception. Commenting on data prior to 1967, Dominican says that the widespread use of contraception was in line with its general use across society.⁷³⁴ There is a substantial tension between the family and the Church in this matter. Cardinal Basil Hume spoke at the World Synod of Bishops in 1980 and said that ‘many ‘good, conscientious and faithful’ Roman Catholics could no longer accept the stance of the Church against birth control.’⁷³⁵

In its encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), written to the ‘Catholic Church on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World’, the Church unequivocally placed marriage at the centre of its understanding of what ‘family’ means. Families are ‘the foundation of society’ with every member having equal dignity. Family life that ignored marriage is a ‘corruption’ conceived ‘as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one’s own selfish well-being.’ Despite this, some Catholic couples live together before marriage and, not infrequently, may have children before their wedding

⁷²⁸ Jack Dominican, *Christian Marriage: The Challenge of Change* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967), 37.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷³⁵ Cited in Ronald Fletcher, *The Shaking of the Foundations: Family and Society* (London: Routledge, 1988), 247.

day.⁷³⁶

As a Catholic theologian, Lisa Sowle Cahill has written extensively about the challenges and opportunities for Catholic families. This includes the mission of the family extolled by *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasised as it is by the Catholic Church's Catechism. The latter document states that "The "supreme gift of marriage" is a human person."⁷³⁷ Whilst stating a preference against fertility treatments, though not condemning them, it specifically mentions adoption:

The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding service for others.⁷³⁸

Cahill finds that the stance taken by the Church on adoption is 'inadequate' since it should be better regarded than 'an alternative reproductive "choice" for infertile couples.'⁷³⁹ She recognises the opportunity that traditional Catholic teaching offers to the world of adoption, since it can provide both a source of children and an adoptive home:

Catholic social teaching provides a framework for appreciating the moral importance and interdependence of adoptive families, birth families, and the social conditions that create both a demand for adoption and a source of adoptable children.⁷⁴⁰

In summary, the Roman Catholic family consists of a married couple with children, who may or may not be adopted. Since non-marital unions cannot be considered as families, so cohabiting couples or same-sex couples ought not to be considered as prospective parents of adopted children. Marriage 'should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated.'⁷⁴¹ This excludes same-sex couples from being approved for adoption by Roman Catholic agencies, though, as will be indicated later, there has been a quiet move towards approving some cohabiting heterosexual couples.

The issue of same-sex couple approval for adoption became especially contentious in the run up to the passing of the Equality Act 2007, prior to which Roman Catholic adoption agencies operated freely within its doctrinal position under the provisions of adoption legislation. The matter received widespread coverage in the media and was

⁷³⁶ Anecdotal evidence from Roman Catholic seminarians at Ushaw College, Durham, attending the Marriage and Family Life Course (Autumn 2003 – Summer 2005).

⁷³⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, Section 2, op. cit.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Adoption: A Roman Catholic Perspective' in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 149.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Paragraph 2202, <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/2202.htm> (accessed 24 September, 2007).

formally addressed in a letter from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor to the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet. He said:

We believe it would be unreasonable, unnecessary and unjust discrimination against Catholics for the Government to insist that if they wish to continue to work with local authorities, Catholic adoption agencies must act against the teaching of the Church and their own consciences by being obliged in law to provide such a service.

Giving protection to the rights of Catholic adoption agencies to act with integrity will preserve an excellent and highly valued adoption service, representing 32% of the Voluntary Adoption Sector, with an outstanding record of finding stable and loving homes for some of the most disadvantaged children in society – including children who have been abused, physically, sexually and emotionally; children with disability and limited life expectancy; and large sibling groups who need a family where they can grow up together. Catholic adoption agencies continue to excel in their commitment and acknowledged success in securing and sustaining adoptive families for such children whilst maintaining the lowest rates of adoption disruption in the UK.⁷⁴²

Unsurprisingly, the national press were opposed to making the Catholic agencies an exception:

if you look at the make-up of Catholic adoption agencies, which accounted for 4 per cent of the 2,900 UK adoptions last year, you'll often find a significant proportion of staff who are not Catholic, perhaps not even religious. Many choose to work in these agencies because of their long and successful history with some of the hardest-to-place children. Where would such an exemption leave these staff and their consciences?⁷⁴³

An electronic petition was organised and received by the Prime Minister on 12 April, 2007. It stated:

We, the undersigned, petition the Prime Minister to allow adoption agencies the freedom to work according to the dictates of their conscience when finding adoptive parents for children. Also respect that the preference that children be given a home with a mother and father is not anti-homosexual discrimination.⁷⁴⁴

In his response, Tony Blair said:

The Government's approach will ensure that nobody will be required to act in a way that contravenes their core religious beliefs. Where religious organisations enter into an agreement to provide services to the wider community, on behalf of and under contract to a public authority, lesbian, gay and bisexual people should have equal access to those services.⁷⁴⁵

This statement encapsulates the tension that Christian agencies feel when working within an area legislated for by a secular society. When an official body is in receipt of public money for providing a public service, they, 'step out of the realm of religion and into a

⁷⁴² Letter from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor to the Prime Minister and Members of the Cabinet, 22 January, 2007, http://www.rcdow.org.uk/includes/dow_content_print.asp?content_ref=1179 (accessed 27 January, 2007).

⁷⁴³ Kate Hilpern, 'Gay Adoption: True Stories', in *The Independent* (25 January, 2007), http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this_britain/article2184265.ece (accessed 25 January, 2007).

⁷⁴⁴ <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page11466.asp> (accessed 14 April, 2007).

⁷⁴⁵ <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page11465.asp> (accessed 14 April, 2007).

shared space where one set of rules must apply to all.⁷⁴⁶ The state is entitled to insist that the activity is in accordance with the laws of the land.

Whilst the debate continues, the facility to persist with distinct, doctrinally driven approval criteria was denied the Church. There are interim measures to sustain the existing work until the end of 2008 and agencies are declaring ‘work as normal’. For example, one Nottingham-based agency makes the following statement on its website:

Families Are Best works with married couples and single people. However, we will provide initial advice and guidance, usually over the telephone, to anyone with in an interest in adoption. The law now enables unmarried couples in an enduring relationship to adopt and we will assist any unmarried couples, or couples in a Civil Partnership, who approach Families are Best to be linked with an adoption agency who will welcome their enquiry.⁷⁴⁷

7.1.2 Anglicanism and Families

*From a Christian perspective children are a gift and a blessing from God. But in our increasingly individualist and materialistic society, a number of factors and forces have led to the idea that children are a ‘problem’.*⁷⁴⁸

Between the wars, the Anglican Church wrestled with its own understanding of marriage and procreation. The Lambeth Conference of 1920 had underlined that one of the primary purposes of marriage was the gift of children.⁷⁴⁹ At the Lambeth Conference of 1930, the Bishops openly discussed contraception. It debated the moral obligation to limit family size, agreed that where there were sound reasons for avoiding abstinence, methods of contraception could be used but strongly condemned their use ‘from motives of selfishness, luxury or mere convenience.’⁷⁵⁰

The Conference of 1958 moved to a position of leaving the decision about contraception to the conscience of parents and their ‘choice before God.’ ‘Christians need always to remember that sexual love is not an end in itself nor a means to self-gratification, and that self-discipline and restraint are essential conditions of the freedom of marriage and family planning.’⁷⁵¹ It also attempted to define ‘the marks of a Christian family’ giving seven guidelines that included Sunday worship in church; ‘common prayer and Bible reading, and grace at meals’; forgiving one another, sharing jobs and recreation; and that a family acts as

⁷⁴⁶ Leader, ‘Principle Under Pressure’, in *The Guardian* (25 January, 2007), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/isfree/story/0,1997918,00.html> (accessed 24 November, 2007).

⁷⁴⁷ <http://www.ccsnotts.co.uk/adoptionyourquestions.html#about1> (accessed 30 November, 2007).

⁷⁴⁸ Church of England Board of Social Responsibility, *Something to Celebrate: Valuing Families in Church and Society* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), 86.

⁷⁴⁹ Dominian, op. cit., 90.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁵¹ 1958 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, Resolution 113 ‘The Family in Contemporary Society – Marriage’, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/archive/1958/in1958.htm> (accessed 30 October, 2004).

‘a good neighbour, hospitable to friend and stranger.’⁷⁵²

The Church of England studied the family again in 1974 in their report ‘Marriage and the Family in Britain Today.’ By 1992, ‘recognising that the world of the 1990s is significantly different’ it set up a working party that led to the publication of *Something to Celebrate* in 1995.⁷⁵³ The report was widely, often unfavourably, covered in the press, even before it was debated at General Synod. Such was the strong polarisation of views that it generated, an attempt was made to prevent the report ever being debated.⁷⁵⁴

The report gave extensive coverage to what was happening to families, reviewing the full sociological and statistical evidence to illustrate the impossibility of defining ‘family’ in simple terms.⁷⁵⁵ The report also looked at historical and theological aspects of family life as well as governmental policy and the place of families within the Church.

In answer to the question, ‘What are families?’ the report said:

Marriage is one key to what families are about – a source of grace channelled through human love – and a context for intimacy. Children are another key, one of the ways in which God blesses the love relationship of a man and a woman, and an expression of hope in God for the future.⁷⁵⁶

It continued to speak about the way that hospitality is one trademark of Christian families for other people, it is ‘a protest against the selfishness, individualism and sentimentalism of much of contemporary family life... In this context, the exploration of new forms of household living will be important.’⁷⁵⁷

In its recommendations to the Church, the report asked that ‘local churches be ordered in ways which help everyone feel welcomed, whatever their family circumstances,’ further recommending that its liturgy and worship ‘reflect both diversity and continuity in family life.’⁷⁵⁸

The evangelical wing of the Church of England made strong protests against the report arguing that it was theologically weak and sought to normalise family types that do not conform to a traditional, Christian model.⁷⁵⁹ Quite independently of General Synod, *The Christian Institute*, an Anglican evangelical organisation ran an aggressive and well-funded campaign for the traditional family and against condoning alternatives (see **section 7.3.1**).

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ *Something to Celebrate*, op. cit., 2.

⁷⁵⁴ Francis Bridger, *Celebrating the Family: A Critique of the BSR Report ‘Something to Celebrate’*, (Cambridge: Grove Books Ethics Series Number 99a, 1995), 3.

⁷⁵⁵ *Something to Celebrate*, op. cit., 65.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁵⁹ Professor Norman Dennis, ‘Family Disintegration and the Retreat From Common Sense’ (Christian Institute, 1995), <http://www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/family.htm> (accessed 28 October, 2004); Bridger, op. cit.

The fact that General Synod did not adopt the 1995 report, underlines the way in which day-to-day family life and Anglican Church policy can collide.

Ironically, in the same decade, Anglican adoption agencies in England and Wales aligned themselves with mainstream Protestant agencies such as NCH and Barnardo's and accepted applications from non-married and same-sex couples. This stance was achieved without the glare of publicity or criticism from the evangelical wing of the church, criticism that was emphatic in its opposition to adoption placements with same-sex couples during the bill stage of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

As far as same-sex relationships are concerned and the broader debate about homosexuality, it is a well-documented and publicised fact that the Anglican Church is divided on the subject. The lack of a single unified front on what family life truly represents to the Church, and the issue of sexuality, sets this denomination apart from the Roman Catholic Church's stance and it is also distinct from the other mainstream Protestant work in adoption.

7.1.3 Methodism and Families

By the content and style of its worship, preaching, teaching and prayer the Church must encourage the realisation that no family is perfect, but that with God's help difficulties can become creative as they are worked through and learned from. Indeed, to share the burdens as well as the joys of family is one of the privileges of Christian marriage.⁷⁶⁰

This statement is an encouragement to Methodist churches to accept lack of 'perfection' within the family. Churches should support families whose behaviour and lifestyle may be at odds with traditional values, whilst still upholding the merits of Christian marriage.

Methodism was born at the beginning of the nineteenth century after the work of John Wesley during the evangelical revival of the previous century. It developed into a highly pragmatic form of Protestantism, holding in tension scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Methodism has frequently responded to the realities of marriage and family life earlier than Protestant or Catholic partners. For example, Methodist ministers have been able to re-marry divorcees in church since 1946, rather than in the early twenty-first century for Anglican colleagues.

At its conference in 1992, the British Methodist Connexion accepted the report 'A Christian Understanding of Family Life, The Single Person and Marriage.' Such an

⁷⁶⁰ Methodist Church, 'A Christian Understanding of Family Life', op. cit.

acceptance came at the end of several years of discussion throughout the church. Once the report was accepted, rather like *Familiaris Consortio* was to Roman Catholics, these statements became the official views of the people called Methodists.

The report was able to come to an understanding about ‘family’ and included non-biologically related children within the definition, whether they were adopted, fostered or step-children. The presence of children defined a family; single parents with children were recognised as a type of family. In this way, the report recognised the reality of families in society and, uniquely amongst the denominations, it did not focus upon the relationship of parents to define a family.

Although marriage is not a sacrament within its tradition, the report acknowledged that it is ‘intended to be a permanent relationship’ and ‘a social institution.’ For Christian people it is a covenantal relationship ‘reflected in the way the couple share emotional needs and strengths, financial and other resources, - including their working together on the task of making a marriage and a home, in the strength of a life of prayer, bible-reading and worship together.’ Thus, like *Familiaris Consortio*, spiritual nurture within the Christian family was highlighted.

The report considered parenting to be ‘an exacting task.’ It said:

The intense feelings generated in family life are not all positive and can include anger amounting to hate and the desire to split apart. Family life calls for time, energy and emotional and spiritual resourcefulness – all aspects of what the Christian tradition means by love.⁷⁶¹

The Church also had a role in supporting and nurturing family life. It is a major obligation of the church to offer caring, compassion, help and understanding to families experiencing distress or difficulty.’

The Methodist Church’s attitude towards people of a homosexual orientation was defined in 1993, many years prior to the Equality Act.⁷⁶² The response from the Church concerning equality issues paves the way towards full acceptance of same-sex couples:

We... welcome the Government’s commitment to promoting equality and recognise that lesbians, gay men and people who are bisexual have not been treated as they should have been. The Conference resolution is clear that the Methodist Church will not operate discrimination in this area and we are content that there should be no exemption for religious organisations in respect of services provided to the public.⁷⁶³

This attitude was fully consistent with NCH’s stance as the adoption agency with historical connections to Methodism, who have had an open policy for adoption applications from single, married or cohabiting couples and same-sex couples since the

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Human Sexuality, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1547> (accessed 30 November, 2007).

⁷⁶³ Methodist Church Response to Government Consultation Document “Getting Equal”, July 2006, http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi_gettingequal_0706.doc (accessed 30 November, 2007).

1990s. Summarising it is apparent that the Methodist Church has a theologically liberal view of the family that embraces diverse forms of a couple or a single person with children, that distinguishes it from the conservative position of the Roman Catholic Church and the vagueness of the Church of England.

7.2 Contemporary Adopters: Single, Cohabiting and Gay

*But children of adulterers will not come to maturity, and the offspring of an unlawful union will perish. Even if they live long they will be held of no account, and finally their old age will be without honour...For children born of unlawful unions are witnesses of evil against their parents when God examines them.*⁷⁶⁴

This quotation from the Apocrypha emphasises the importance of marriage as the only place for procreation and indicates the tragic outcome for children born outside of marriage, whose worth is seen as negligible from conception onwards. Whilst the passage falls outside the accepted canon of scripture, it nonetheless indicates that some of God's people have ostracised those in unmarried relationships. **Chapter 2** discussed how the early Christian Church, came to the rescue of children who were conceived through these relationships. In acting as it did, the Church demonstrated its desire to assist vulnerable children, providing diverse forms of corporate care. The Church's prevailing attachment to married couples, however, as the primary place of belonging for children, has generated problems for some children without families as society has sought to return them to a family context. I will argue that the Church's priority must be to act in favour of adoption for these children, rather than speaking against prospective adopters.

This section focuses on issues of single parenting, co-habitation and homosexuality from the perspective of adoption alone, using sociological and theological reasoning. It is argued that adoptive single parenthood is viable within a framework of external support. Churches give mixed messages about unmarried couples, welcoming them and frowning upon them simultaneously. This is especially true for same-sex couples. Data about the stability of couples in unmarried relationships is analysed. Issues about how children are nurtured within these homes are also discussed. A review of the literature shows that issues of permanency and stability are critical. The assessment of the potential for adults to offer permanency and stability to children is fundamental to their best prospects in a new adoptive family.

⁷⁶⁴ Wisdom of Solomon 3.16-17, 4.6

7.2.1 Singleness and Adoption

Timothy Jackson is observing a familiar pattern when he says that the potential for ‘good single parenting is implicitly recognised by the state when it does not automatically remove even minor children from the home of a widow or widower.’⁷⁶⁵ This is an echo of the position that the Church would uphold, especially if single parenthood followed bereavement and the surviving parent takes on full, sole responsibility for children. Single parenting is, however, not ideal and demands considerable resources from the adult who has such a singular responsibility for their child’s every need.

Without adoption, single parents have children because of the death of a spouse, the end of a cohabiting relationship, through divorce, or maybe unplanned pregnancy. In many cases, the term ‘one-parent family’ or ‘lone parent’ may be more appropriate because more parents are single through divorce than bereavement. Children affected often have contact with both parents though they are primarily cared for by one.⁷⁶⁶ Sociological research shows that parental well-being is directly related to children’s well-being and that this is less certain for single parents.⁷⁶⁷ Single parents have significant financial and emotional dilemmas when juggling work and home life; income needs and parenting responsibilities. The multiple roles within single parenting can generate stress and this may lead to inconsistent and ineffective parenting.⁷⁶⁸ Research papers use negative comparisons between cohabiting parents caring for children and the outlook for children within a single-parent household.⁷⁶⁹

That lone parents have always been known to be vulnerable is illustrated by the Mosaic law embedding care for fatherless and orphaned children within the tribal structure. Use of the resources of the clan to assist in the responsibility of caring for children who were without one or both parents is found in scripture (Deut. 10.17-19). As a single person, Jesus drew upon the support of a group of women and men who assisted his work and thus modelled a way in which extended families and networks of friends can provide space and opportunity for a single person to offer their best. Biblical theology supports sharing the

⁷⁶⁵ Timothy P. Jackson, ‘Suffering the Suffering Children: Christianity and the Rights and Wrongs of Adoption’ in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., 202-3.

⁷⁶⁶ John Drane and Olive M. Fleming Drane, *Family Fortunes: Faith-full Caring for Today’s Families* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 27-8.

⁷⁶⁷ Maureen Perry-Jenkins and Sally Gillman, ‘Parental Job Experiences and Children’s Well-Being: The Case of Two-Parent and Single-Mother Working-Class Families’, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (2000), 123-147.

⁷⁶⁸ Susan L. Brown, ‘Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66 (2004), 351-367.

⁷⁶⁹ John Haskey, ‘Cohabitation in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future Trends – And Attitudes’, in *Population Trends 103* (London: Office for National Statistics, Spring 2001); <http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/marriedornot/Factsheet1.htm> (accessed 25 October, 2004); Judith A. Seltzer, ‘Families Formed Outside of Marriage’, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62, no. 4 (2000), 1247-1268.

care of vulnerable people within a stronger community of two or more people.

It has been possible for single people to adopt children from the earliest adoption legislation. Prior to the 2002 Act, this facility was the only means by which adopted children could enter the homes of cohabiting heterosexual or homosexual couples. The co-resident member of the household, amongst others, could provide evidence of a support system for the single adopter. The co-resident was effectively a co-parent. The flaw in the legislation was that the adoptive parent, the 'single' parent, could deny contact with the estranged partner if the relationship broke down, making this unlike a divorce situation when both parents had legitimate access to the children. This would not be in the best interests of the child if a relationship had been developing for several years. The new Act corrected this position by making it possible for unmarried couples to adopt jointly and have enduring and shared responsibility to care for children.

Within the Christian community, the potential for one adult to offer a home to a child exists. For the Christian person, the Church could provide the necessary support system. Not unreasonably, a church community would want to know why such a task was being undertaken in a non-traditional, non-couple circumstance. Those single people who have a love for children and a heart for justice, yet who may not be likely or able to have a committed relationship with another adult may seek fulfilment in becoming prospective adoptive parents. This circumstance is theologically and sociologically supportable.

7.2.2 Cohabiting, Heterosexual Couples and Adoption

*Why aren't a co-habiting couple compelled to "tidy up" their relationship by marrying, especially since their status as adopters would then be as a couple rather than as two individuals with joint custody?*⁷⁷⁰

This statement was made about heterosexual couples and succinctly delivers a valid point: if a couple are not prepared to be legally bound to each other, why should they be legally bound to a child?

From the 1970s onwards, increasing personal freedoms for men and women, their sex life and career choices, alongside the increasing secularisation of society, led to increasing numbers of 'partnerships'. Cohabitation came to be a recognised lifestyle that might or might not precede marriage. Irrespective of the 'rightness' of these relationships, children are a factor within these families. There has been a sustained and significant growth in the number of cohabiting couple families with dependent children.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁷⁰ Anonymous Christian adoption social worker.

⁷⁷¹ Haskey, op. cit.

The weakness of the sociological research about cohabiting parents and children is that it relates to biological offspring: two-parent or stepparent. The research is not a reflection of the different relationship that could exist between a couple seeking to adopt children jointly. As a relationship, however, and unlike marriage that has a greater chance of permanence and stability, the evidence about the likelihood for ‘union breakdown’ is considerable.

Not only do cohabiting couples have fewer children than married couples, but there is an increased risk of relationship breakdown amongst cohabiting couples compared with married couples.⁷⁷² This risk is assessed as being as much as five times more common when couples are cohabiting or ‘closely involved’.⁷⁷³ Not only is cohabitation a ‘less stable’ union, it follows that there are higher risks for children to experience parental separation.⁷⁷⁴ Some researchers have found evidence that cohabitees have ‘less of a sense of commitment than those who marry directly.’⁷⁷⁵

Some couples cohabit prior to marriage and having children; others have children within the cohabiting relationship. Multiple research papers indicate that society should attend to the impact upon children that some cohabiting relationships can create. There is evidence that marriages after cohabitation are less likely to survive⁷⁷⁶ and that increased acceptance of cohabitation by society, ‘contributes to a decline in cohabiting partners’ expectations about whether marriage is the “next step” in their own relationship.’⁷⁷⁷ Children ‘born to cohabiting parents and to mothers not in a partnership when they have their baby, have less advantaged lives than their contemporaries who are born to married parents.’⁷⁷⁸ Though the presence of children reduces the chance that a couple will break up, yet ‘because cohabiting unions are usually short-term relationships, taking cohabitation into account increases the number of family disruptions children experience.’⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷² Haskey, op. cit.; Seltzer, op. cit.

⁷⁷³ Harry Benson, ‘The Conflation of Marriage and Cohabitation in Government Statistics – A Denial of Difference Rendered Untenable by an Analysis of Outcomes’, Bristol Community Family Trust (September 2006), <http://www.bcft.co.uk/Family%20breakdown%20in%20the%20UK.pdf> (accessed 4 November, 2006).

⁷⁷⁴ Patrick Heuveline and Jeffrey M. Timberlake, ‘The Role of Cohabitation in Family Formation: The United States in Comparative Perspective’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66 (2004), 1214-1230.

⁷⁷⁵ Jenny Reynolds and Penny Mansfield, ‘Executive Summary’, *The Effect of Changing Attitudes to Marriage on its Stability* (London: Lord Chancellor’s Office - Volume 1 (Papers 1-3) - Research Series No. 2/99), <http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/Publications/ReviewPapers/Paper%203%20-%20summary.pdf> (accessed 23 November, 2007).

⁷⁷⁶ Elizabeth Thomson and Ugo Colella, ‘Cohabitation and Marital Stability: Quality or Commitment?’ *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54 (1992), 259-267.

⁷⁷⁷ Seltzer, op. cit.

⁷⁷⁸ Kathleen Kiernan and Kate Smith, ‘Unmarried Parenthood: New Insights From the Millennium Cohort Study’, *Population Trends* 114 (London: Office for National Statistics, Winter 2003)

⁷⁷⁹ Seltzer, op. cit.

The Christian community upholds marriage as the preferred relationship within which to nurture children. There are no examples, stories or metaphors within the Bible that can be used to support heterosexual cohabitation without marriage. There is no Biblical theology of cohabitation. The permanency of the union between one man and one woman is underlined within scripture (Gen. 2.24). Adrian Thatcher claims that the Christian faith, however, can offer support for unions that illustrate ‘marital values’, the substance of those qualities vowed in a marriage service, even when these are not backed up by a marriage certificate.⁷⁸⁰ This position is a liberal view and would not find support from the evangelical or Roman Catholic traditions of the Church. What is clear to Thatcher, however, is that:

... the evidence regarding the impact of family breakdown on children cannot remain a morally neutral matter for theology... Since many cohabiting couples may be largely unaware of the public information about what is likely to happen to people like them, there is a simple fact-imparting job to do.⁷⁸¹

Christian adoption agencies have a responsibility to communicate these facts without condemnation or judgement of the relationship, just as any secular agency would wish to explore issues of permanency within the cohabiting relationship of prospective adopters.

For cohabiting couples, if descriptions such as ‘low commitment’ and ‘high autonomy’ are merited then an exacting assessment should be made by a social worker if they are seeking to jointly adopt a child. This said, denying cohabiting couples, in stable, permanent relationships, the chance to adopt children may be an action that works against the best interests of some children in an environment where too few married or single adults are applying to adopt. This statement is made against the thrust of the sociological evidence about cohabiting couples and there is no theological support for it, apart from the overriding argument that permanent, covenantal adult-child relationships provide the desired stability for any child who needs a family. Two parents are better than one, though the next section raises doubts that apply to some prospective adopters.

7.2.3 Same-Sex Couples and Adoption

*Same sex parents who adopt children aren't in danger of significantly dwindling the stock of abandoned, destitute, or orphaned children. The supply well outpaces demand. No married heterosexual couple that wants to adopt will go home empty-handed because we have adopted.*⁷⁸²

Gregory Maguire and his partner have three adopted children and are bringing them up in the Roman Catholic faith. Speaking about his partner Andy, Maguire says ‘We are capable adults in need of loving children in a world where children are in need of capable

⁷⁸⁰ Thatcher, op. cit., 135.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 130-1.

⁷⁸² Daria Donnelly, ‘A Gay Parent Looks at his Church: An Interview with Novelist Gregory Maguire’ in *Commonweal* 130, no. 18 (2003), 20-22.

loving adults.⁷⁸³ This viewpoint encapsulates the issues and does so from the perspective of children. Christian voices have strongly resisted the prospect of children being raised by gay couples, arguing that the union is both unbiblical and that children are more vulnerable in these families (see **section 7.3.1**).

Gay and lesbian couples challenge the traditional ideology of the family as a married heterosexual couple. Parents whose homosexuality was not acknowledged in a previous heterosexual relationship can raise their children. There are children in homes with a natural mother and her girlfriend; children (rather fewer) in homes with a natural father and his boyfriend; and, children who are adopted by a same-sex couple with no biological connection to the children. Not all lesbian and gay couples want children as a component of their life, though the possibility is greater for lesbians through self-insemination by donor. For the majority, however, fostering and adoption is the obvious choice and is not connected with infertility or the impossibility of a biological child.⁷⁸⁴

The sociological research concerns children within gay families who typically have a biological connection to one parent rather than being adopted. There are five main areas of concern: sexual abuse of children, social development of children, gender role development of children, parenting capacity of homosexual parents and the chance of becoming a homosexual person.⁷⁸⁵ The research available has been criticised for small sample sizes, methodological flaws and for biased studies arising from the sexuality of the researcher.⁷⁸⁶ This said several studies go to great lengths to prove objectivity.

Research conducted in 1984 and widely regarded as responsible for perpetuating the myth that homosexual men were more likely to be child abusers has been discredited, and it is now recognised that there is no statistical or psychological connection between the two.⁷⁸⁷

Several studies have examined social development and found no evidence of more teasing or bullying and more difficulties in their relationships with their peers.⁷⁸⁸ A paper summarising twenty-three research papers on the subject of homosexual versus heterosexual

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermott (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption – Extraordinary Yet Ordinary* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999), 151.

⁷⁸⁵ Norman Andersson, Christine Amlie and Erling Andre Ytteroy, 'Outcomes For Children With Lesbian or Gay Parents. A Review of Studies From 1978 to 2000', *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 43 (2002), 335-351.

⁷⁸⁶ For example: Joy Holloway, 'Homosexual Parenting: Does it Make a Difference? A Re-evaluation of the Research With Adoption and Fostering in Mind' 16 February 2002, <http://www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/homosexualparenting.htm> (accessed 15 September, 2005).

⁷⁸⁷ BAAF – Practice Note 44, *Assessing Lesbian and Gay Foster Carers and Adopters* (London: BAAF, 2003), 5-6; Hicks and McDermott, op. cit., 151.

⁷⁸⁸ Fiona MacCallum and Susan Golombok, 'Children Raised in Fatherless Families From Infancy: A Follow-up of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers at Early Adolescence', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45, no. 8 (2004), 1407-1419.

parenting found that ‘the studies reported few or no incidents of serious teasing, harassment, and bullying due to having a lesbian mother or gay father’, though the children were concerned about the chance of being stigmatised.⁷⁸⁹

Research about gender role development showed that ‘children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers did not systematically differ from other children.’⁷⁹⁰ As far as parenting capacity is concerned, one study compared lesbian and heterosexual mothers and found no evidence that lesbian couples should not be allowed to adopt.⁷⁹¹

The final area of concern was a suspicion that being brought up by a homosexual person would increase the likelihood that the child would be homosexual. One study found that ninety per cent of the sons of gay fathers were heterosexual.⁷⁹² This agrees with the analysis of the twenty-three separate studies that also explored this area and found that there were no significant differences between children raised in a same-sex parent household and a heterosexual household.⁷⁹³

Much of this sociological evidence works to exonerate homosexual people, upholding their capability as loving parents. An additional criticism of same-sex adoption, however, is the stability of the relationships. Homosexual people do not dispute the fact that homosexual couples are statistically less stable.⁷⁹⁴ One study compared the stability of relationships between couples of different sexual orientation and found that ‘the relationships of gay partners and the relationships of lesbian partners work in much the same way that the relationships of heterosexual parents do.’⁷⁹⁵ Both types of relationships can experience breakdown. Rather than the stability of the couple, it was support from the wider group of family members that was likely to be weaker for homosexual couples.⁷⁹⁶

Amongst the homosexual population, studies of these types are conducted to bolster the provision within legislation for raising children by adoption. They reject the criticisms of heterosexual people by stating that:

... the field suffers less from the overt ideological convictions of scholars than from the unfortunate intellectual consequences that follow from the implicit hetero-normative presumption governing the terms of the discourse – that

⁷⁸⁹ Andersson et al, op. cit.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ David K. Flaks, Ilda Ficher, Frank Masterpasqua and Gregory Joseph, ‘Lesbians Choosing Motherhood: A Comparative Study of Lesbian and Heterosexual Parents and Their Children’, *Developmental Psychology* 31, no. 1 (1995), 105-114.

⁷⁹² J. Michael Bailey, David Bobrow, Marilyn Wolfe and Sarah Mikach, ‘Sexual Orientation of Adult Sons of Gay Fathers’, *Developmental Psychology* 31, no. 1 (1995), 124-129.

⁷⁹³ Andersson et al, op. cit.

⁷⁹⁴ Lawrence A. Kurdek, ‘Are Gay and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples Really Different From Heterosexual Married Couples?’ *Journal of Marriage and Family* no. 66 (2004), 880-900.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

healthy child development depends upon parenting by a married heterosexual couple.⁷⁹⁷

It is argued that under conditions of full equality and respect for sexual diversity these presumptions would not exist.

As with any application to adopt, social workers conduct the assessment and make a recommendation to the adoption panel. Prevailing areas of concern will be permanence of relationship, suitability, and the ability to offer stability and security to the child. Research conducted by Stephen Hicks in the mid-1990s showed that social workers were not always convinced about the merits of gay relationships and they did not always avoid discrimination. He claims that:

Applicants felt that the assessing social workers knew very little about lesbian or gay lives or, in some cases, avoided discussion of their sexuality altogether. Social workers were concerned about the gender role models that lesbians or gay men would provide and, in some cases, there was a suspicion that gay men, in particular, might sexually abuse children.⁷⁹⁸

Stephen Hicks has been a highly influential voice for gay adoption in England and Wales. He founded the Positive Parenting Group in Manchester, for the City Council, and their literature on fostering and adoption contains the following statement:

Remember that you are free to apply to any local authority or voluntary agency, not just your nearest one. Find out what an agency's policy is on gay and lesbian applicants. Ask other lesbians and gay men if they know of good agencies. If an agency is negative about lesbian or gay applicants, then it is probably best to avoid them. If they are positive, but tell you that you would be their first ever gay or lesbian applicants, then think hard about whether you should pursue this as it can be very hard to be pioneers. Think about the point at which you are going to come out as lesbian or gay to the agency and be positive about what you have to offer.⁷⁹⁹

This is intriguing, not least because it acknowledges that some agencies hold distinct views about accepting gay couples and it suggests avoiding them. This contrasts with the tone of statements from Roman Catholic agencies who offer assistance to same-sex couples and onward referral (see **section 7.1.1**).

Amongst the strongest voices against permitting the adoption of children by homosexual people is the Christian Institute. The Institute was set up in 1990 by a group of Christian people connected to Jesmond Parish Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. They were concerned about the 'lack of a Christian voice to respond to major ethical debates.' Today, the Institute exists for 'the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom' and seeks 'to help Christians answer the challenges of living in an increasingly

⁷⁹⁷ Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz, '(How)Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?' *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 66, no. 2 (2001), 159-183; Stephen Hicks, 'Lesbian and Gay Foster Care and Adoption: A Brief UK History', *Adoption and Fostering* 29, no.3 (2005), 42-56.

⁷⁹⁸ Hicks (2005), op. cit.

⁷⁹⁹ 'Are You Lesbian or Gay? Thinking About Fostering or Adopting a Child?' http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/positive_parenting.pdf (accessed 16 November, 2007).

secular society... and respond to the major moral and ethical issues.⁸⁰⁰ They hold to the ‘inerrancy’ of scripture as the primary authority for their views and would point to the Biblical texts that refer directly to same-sex sexual acts and emphasise that they are irrefutably negative (Lev. 18.22, 20.13).

The Bible does provide a reference point for this subject. 1 Corinthians 7.9 and 1 Timothy 1.10 includes people whose sexual activity is unacceptable to God. Romans 1.18-22 is the only place in scripture referring to lesbian sexual relations. Richard Hays points towards the activities mentioned as ‘manifestations’ of the wrath of God; it is ‘the flouting of sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God’s creative design.’⁸⁰¹ Whilst these acts are a rejection of God’s design there is nowhere in scripture a clear rule against homosexual practices, excepting that if in Acts 15.28-9 the prohibition of *porneia* includes homosexual acts, ‘that would be the one instance of a direct rule dealing with the issue....this reading of the passage is probable but not certain.’⁸⁰²

For Hays attempting to make a moral and ethical interpretation of scripture, the reading of Romans 1 is central and not to be read without including Romans 2.1: ‘Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.’ He finds that homosexual acts are not ‘specially reprehensible sins’⁸⁰³ and that ‘passages such as Romans 1 might serve to moderate tradition’s harsh judgement of homosexuals as specifically despicable sinners.’⁸⁰⁴

Whilst there is a strong Christian argument against placing children into a family with a same-sex couple, no environment, homosexual or heterosexual is sin-free. Sociologically, research does not find qualitative evidence that the parenting ability of same-sex people is poor or worse than other parenting forms. Thus, analysts gathering data to present to politicians and decision makers find that, ‘because no significant differences have been found between heterosexual- and homosexual-parent families, there appears to be no empirical support for dissimilar treatment of these families under the law.’⁸⁰⁵

Since the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, same-sex couples have been permitted to jointly adopt children. The most recent statistics indicate that small

⁸⁰⁰ <http://www.christian.org.uk/whoweare/index.htm> (accessed 1 December, 2007).

⁸⁰¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 386.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 394.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁸⁰⁵ David K. Flaks, ‘Research Issues’, in *Issues in Gay and Lesbian Adoption: Proceedings of the Fourth Peirce-Warwick Adoption Symposium* (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 1995), 33-4.

numbers of same-sex couples are adopting: 3% of adopters were unmarried couples (same sex) or in a civil partnership, compared to 84% being married adopters and 5% being unmarried couples (different gender). The remaining adoptions were by single adopters, of whom 99% were female.⁸⁰⁶ Despite the new law, the Christian community remains unsettled about unorthodox forms of family. The next section moves on to reflect on whether Christian adoption agencies should be taking a specific stance in answering the question ‘who should adopt?’

7.3 Who Should Adopt?

The answer to this question varies and is predominantly determined by two factors: the view of marriage and the proximity to adoption matters. Upholding marriage as the only relationship within which to nurture children effectively leaves more children in need of being ‘looked after’ by the state. On the other hand, upholding adoption needs above the institution of marriage creates new forms of family with which the traditions of the churches are uncomfortable. Where Christian couples have adopted, their views are more favourable towards ‘the best interests of the child’ and here, in the lived experience of adoption, social workers and adoptive parents move towards common ground.

7.3.1 Views of Christian Organisations

In debates preceding the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the director of the Catholic Children's Society (Westminster) said: ‘The key thing about adoption is the total commitment required of the couple to the child. One of the best ways of judging whether a couple can do this is if they have made such a commitment to each other.’⁸⁰⁷ The Roman Catholic catechism teaches that a child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged ‘right to a child’ would lead.⁸⁰⁸

These views are echoed by the evangelical wing of the Protestant churches, who find that ‘the best environment for raising children is marriage because the spouses have committed themselves to each other, and thus their children, for life. No other kind of relationship provides this environment of stability and permanence for children.’⁸⁰⁹ These

⁸⁰⁶ Statistics from: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/SFR23-2008Textv1oct.pdf> (accessed 2 January, 2009).

⁸⁰⁷ Letter to *The Guardian*, J M Richards, Director, The Catholic Children’s Society (Westminster), (29 October, 2001), <http://www.cathchild.org.uk/gu291001.html> (accessed 20 December, 2002).

⁸⁰⁸ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Paragraph 2378, op. cit.

⁸⁰⁹ Colin Hart, Simon Calvert, Humphrey Dobson and Rachel Woodward, *Counterfeit Marriage: How ‘civil partnerships’ devalue the currency of marriage*, <http://www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/counterfeitmarriage.doc> (accessed 28 October, 2004).

voices funded the publication of the most widely publicised critical review opposing adoption by single parents, cohabiting, heterosexual couples and same-sex couples authored by Patricia Morgan.⁸¹⁰

The same theological tradition also offers more compassionate opinions. Elaine Storkey says we should ‘resist the church’s tendency to idolise marriage. Marriage is ‘for better, for worse’, not for worship.’⁸¹¹ Recent research with some independent evangelical churches in the United Kingdom, has shown that ‘though these evangelicals claim to shape their marriages according to Biblical patterns, they in fact reflect the partnership practices of their less religious peers.’⁸¹² As with the Roman Catholic Church, there is an emerging gap between the strong opinions of the church leaders and the reality of the relationships of members of the congregations. Authority and submission is preached but the reality is partnership and mutuality. The ability to accommodate greater equality and vulnerability within marriage, however, does not deny that it remains the most enduring form of relationship. When social workers seek to find environments within which permanency and security exist then being married is testimony to a mutual commitment.⁸¹³

The evidence to support marriage as a strong relationship potentially able to provide the best for children finds support from Christian Churches and governmental sources alike. A Government consultation document published in 1998 recognises that this is a majority view when it said:

This government believes that marriage provides a strong foundation for stable relationships. This does not mean trying to make people marry, or criticising or penalising people who choose not to. We do not believe that Government should interfere in people’s lives in that way. But we do share the belief of the majority of people that marriage provides the most reliable framework for raising children.⁸¹⁴

From a theological standpoint, Timothy Jackson notes that ‘stable marriage is the ideal setting for raising children... not simply because two parents can be more efficient than one but also because two can more fully model, in their interpersonal relations, the give and take of love.’⁸¹⁵ This might form the basis for an accommodation for *any* couple to be able to adopt, if, for example, stability is encountered within a cohabiting, heterosexual or

⁸¹⁰ Patricia Morgan, *Children as Trophies? Examining the Evidence on Same-sex Parenting* (Newcastle upon Tyne: The Christian Institute, 2002).

⁸¹¹ Elaine Storkey, ‘Retrossexual?’ *Third Way* 25 no. 2 (2002), 18-21.

⁸¹² Kristin Aune, ‘Marriage in a British Evangelical Congregation: Practising Postfeminist Partnership?’ *The Sociological Review* Vol. 54, no. 4 (2006), 638-657.

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ *Supporting Families: A Consultation Document* (London: Home Office, 1998), Chapter 4, Strengthening Marriage, para. 4.3, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ERO/records/ho415/1/acu/sfpages.pdf> (accessed 14 October, 2006).

⁸¹⁵ Timothy P. Jackson, ‘Suffering the Suffering Children: Christianity and the Rights and Wrongs of Adoption’ in Jackson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 206.

homosexual relationship. Pragmatically, Adrian Thatcher has observed that aspects of the marriage vows, qualities he calls 'marital values', are found in some non-marriages and are lacking in some marriages.⁸¹⁶

One of the stronger reasons against non-married couples adopting is the research evidence that finds that non-marital relationships are dissolved more frequently.⁸¹⁷ The arrival of the Civil Partnership Act 2005, enables a same-sex couple to share a life closer in kind to a married relationship, than that of a heterosexual cohabiting couple. Evidence of such mutual commitment may strengthen the couple's case in their application to be considered as prospective parents. Homosexual campaigning groups such as Stonewall, argue that objections to equal parenting rights for gay people is discriminatory: 'At a time when three million children in this country are growing up in single-parent households, it seems odd there should be this obsession with a few hundred who have an opportunity to have a second loving parent.'⁸¹⁸ From a theological standpoint, Brent Waters says there should be no objection to same-sex couples adopting provided that the motivation for adopting is charitable i.e. it represents parentage to a child in need.⁸¹⁹

When consideration is paid to parenting, rather than marriage, there is no strong evidence that suggests that gays and lesbians should be excluded from consideration for adoption by virtue of their sexuality.⁸²⁰ Journalists joined in with the campaigners and found cases that illustrated some positive examples of same-sex parenting:

One little girl, in particular, springs to mind who had been severely sexually abused. It was agreed by all the professionals involved that she would benefit from a two-parent family, but it was also felt that she would gain from slow, cautious reintroduction to men in her life. A lesbian couple rose to the challenge and the result was the emergence of a child with hope for the future, against all odds.⁸²¹

Given successes of this type, it is questionable why gay and lesbian foster carers should continue to be regarded as 'second-class carers for second-class kids.'⁸²² Cohabiting couples are equally situated yet have the benefit of more conformity with traditional family patterns. One adoption agency director complained of the frequent assumption made about the strengths of heterosexual marriage and the ability for good parenting to exist within it.

⁸¹⁶ Thatcher, *op. cit.*, 135.

⁸¹⁷ See Section 7.2.2 and Kurdek, *op. cit.*

⁸¹⁸ Bill Summerskill, Chief Executive of Stonewall, responding to Iain Duncan Smith MP, <http://news.aol.co.uk/lesbian-equal-parent-plans-rapped/article/20071117212909990005> (accessed 18 November, 2007).

⁸¹⁹ Brent Waters, 'Adoption, Parentage and Procreative Stewardship' in Jackson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 44-5.

⁸²⁰ Peter Selman and Kathy Mason, *Report to Adoption Law Review Group of Scottish Executive* (June 2004) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2005/06/27140607/07123> (accessed 25 January, 2007).

⁸²¹ Hilpern, *op. cit.*

⁸²² Hicks (2005), *op. cit.*

Determination of the suitability of any prospective adoptive parent or couple, the specific answer to the question ‘should *this* person or *these* people adopt?’ is the responsibility of social workers and adoption professionals. These views are now examined more closely.

7.3.2 Views of Social Work Professionals

The views of social work professionals about the expansion of the range of adults able to apply to adopt, were gathered in two of the surveys (see **Appendix 1 and 3**). In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with a selection of directors and social workers.

A question to Christian adoption agencies asked them to recall their responses to consultation documents preceding the Adoption and Children Act 2002. One Roman Catholic agency respondent observed that:

The legislation hasn't expanded the range, just made it possible for two unmarried people (heterosexual or same-sex) to apply jointly to adopt a child. We supported including unmarried heterosexual couples, but largely remained silent on the issue of same-sex couples: we would not accept an application from the latter but would provide them with information about agencies who would accept their application.⁸²³

Whereas ‘silence’ about joint adoption by homosexual people was one response, other agencies noted that their inability to approve homosexual couples was ‘limiting.’ Others were very positive about the potential to approve any couple. Out of twenty-three responses, eight comments mentioned homosexual people and four mentioned unmarried couples as their area of ‘greatest challenge’. One comment, also from a Roman Catholic agency, was:

We are not concerned about the issue of unmarried heterosexual couples but we have asked that there be an opt-out clause for faith-based agencies regarding same-sex applications. We feel that this is an untested, un-researched area and that vulnerable children should not be used as ‘social guinea pigs.’⁸²⁴

This statement is true with respect to research about same-sex adoptive parents but untrue with respect to same-sex parenting.

The above quotes suggest that a movement away from traditional positions has been tolerated for some time. A further anecdotal comment augments this point:

I heard of a case where a Roman Catholic Bishop agreed to baptise the baby adopted by a gay couple and there was a furor, but as he explained the baby had very severe developmental difficulties and how many heterosexual couples were applying and wanting to adopt this child! Another case I heard of was where the gay couple were so exceptional in what they could offer any child, that agencies were positively fighting over them! A Roman Catholic colleague also told me that they had approved five unmarried heterosexual couples for adoption, within one group of prospective parents, and they had

⁸²³ Agency (9)

⁸²⁴ Agency (14)

*all gone on to get married before their children were placed with them!*⁸²⁵

Confirming the potential for homosexual people to act as good adoptive parents, one senior manager said:

*The caring professions include a number of gay people who make excellent adopters and their assessment as suitable adopters is highly individual. Relatively few gay people consider they want to raise children!*⁸²⁶

Figure 7.1 shows a bar chart of the responses given by agency directors and senior managers when asked about the ‘greatest challenge’ covered by the Adoption and Children Act. Adoption by same-sex couples was the greatest challenge. Table 7.2 correlates denominational background with these challenges.

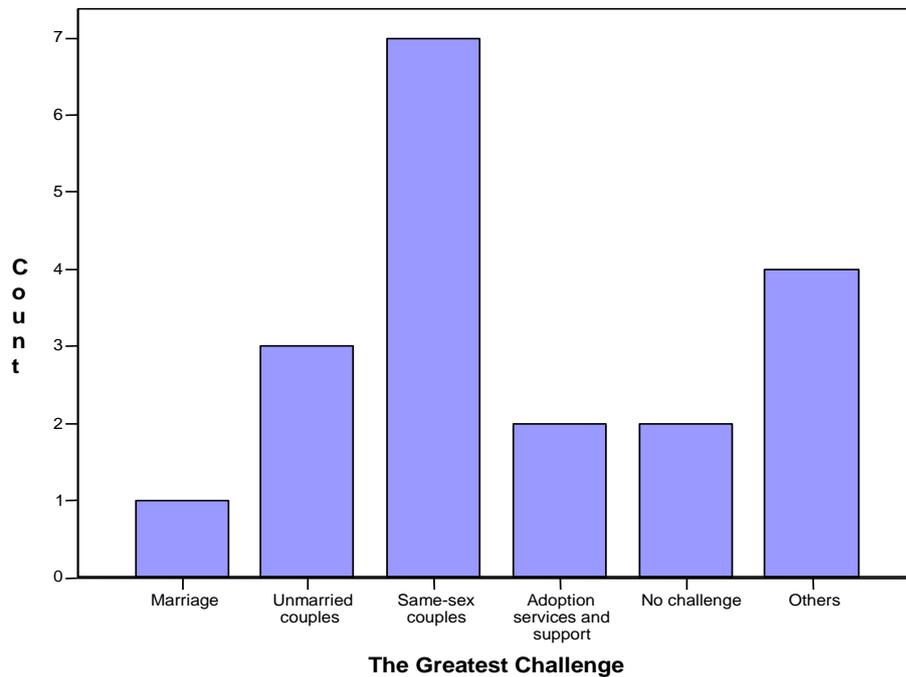


Figure 7.1. Bar Chart of Numbers of Respondents and Legal Challenges

⁸²⁵ Caroline Davis

⁸²⁶ Ruth duBois

	The Greatest Challenge						Total
	Marriage	Unmarried couples	Same-sex couples	Adoption services and support	No challenge	Others	
Roman Catholic	1	2	4	2	0	0	9
Anglican	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
Methodist	0	0	2	0	0	1	3
Non-conformist	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Non-denominational	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	1	3	7	2	2	4	19

Table 7.2. Cross-tabulation of Denominational Background and Issues of Great Challenge

The table shows that being married remains a critical issue for Roman Catholic agencies. Protestant agencies accept applications from all adults irrespective of marital status or sexuality but the table shows that same-sex adoption is still regarded as a challenge to some of these agencies. One Anglican respondent phrased the situation in this way:

*When considering approval of applicants the agency must take the 'best interests of a child' into account. Therefore the best first choice of placement for most children will be with 2 parents (mother and father). In this case very few other types of adopters may be chosen. A difficult message but adoption is a service for children not adults. However, we value the gifts and talents of many of the individual adults who present themselves to become approved adopters – but not all will be taken up, unless they offer something very special.*⁸²⁷

According to an American survey of adoption agencies, an open approach to adoption by same-sex couples is lacking in birth parents. Since contact with birth parents is an increasingly important aspect of adoption in the United Kingdom, this is a pertinent finding. The American survey found that about twenty-five per cent of respondents said prospective birth parents objected to placing their child with gay or lesbian couples, compared to nearly fifteen per cent of agencies who said that birth parents had requested or chosen lesbian or gay prospective adoptive parents for their child.⁸²⁸

The question about the challenge posed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 was also asked to social workers. Out of the thirty-four respondents, fourteen mentioned the issue of approving homosexual couples. Table 7.3 shows that there is an even split between those who mentioned this issue and who worked for a Christian Voluntary Agency and those who cited something else as the 'greatest challenge'. Local Authority social workers may well have been unaware of the fact that all Protestant adoption agencies and some Roman Catholic adoption agencies were approving these couples for adoption before the

⁸²⁷ Agency (8)

⁸²⁸ Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *Adoption by Lesbians and Gays: A National Survey of Adoption Agency Policies, Practices and Attitudes*, (29 October, 2003), <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/> (accessed 23 November, 2007).

implementation of the Act.

	Homosexuality issue		Total
	Other	Concerns about gay adopters	
Voluntary Agency	12	8	20
Local Authority	8	6	14
Total	20	14	34

Table 7.3. Cross-tabulation of Employing Agency with Statement About Challenge of Approving Homosexual Couples for Adoption

The area of ‘assumptions’ was explored in the telephone interviews and opposing opinions were recorded:

Yes, assumptions are made e.g. fundamental evangelicals are anti-gay is an assumption that could bias a discussion to one area and focus on one thing rather than generate a discussion about feelings and general principles on the part of parents and on the part of the child. Prospective adopters do adapt their views too and all the time there is a need to build openness...⁸²⁹

In my experience social workers do not make assumptions. There is a need to discuss homosexuality with all couples, after all it's important to think through how you would cope with managing some of the stresses of teenage life and the engagement with matters of sexuality. If entrenched or rigid views were discerned that would make a social worker concerned about a prospective adopters ability to be adaptable or open to new ideas.⁸³⁰

It is to be hoped that objective social workers are able to assess Christian prospective adopters opposed to homosexual practice, fairly. There is a need for a two-way dialogue and flow of respect. David Hodge explains it thus:

people of faith should be encouraged to understand progressive narratives and to examine how their values interact with those of various progressive populations. However, it is just as important for gay men, lesbians, and other progressives to understand orthodox narratives and to examine how their values may affect their ability to provide culturally sensitive services to people of faith. To selectively portray complex issues from only one perspective restricts social workers’ access to important knowledge and fosters bias against people of faith.⁸³¹

The ‘one perspective’ factor has certainly been found in the attitudes of some Christian people who find that they cannot serve in adoption related arenas with views that are strongly opposed to homosexual practice.⁸³²

Some social workers had opinions that left room for discussions with applicants:

⁸²⁹ Social Worker: Telephone interview (7)

⁸³⁰ Social Worker: Telephone interview (8)

⁸³¹ David R. Hodge, ‘Epistemological Frameworks, Homosexuality, and Religion: How People of Faith Understand the Intersection Between Homosexuality and Religion’, *Social Work*, Vol. 50, no. 3 (2005), 207-218.

⁸³² Indicative cases include: Johanna Thomas-Corr, ‘Adoption Panel Ban For Christian’, *The Church of England Newspaper*, Article No. 5802 (13 January, 2006), <http://www.churchnewspaper.com> (accessed 16 April, 2006); Jonathan Petre, ‘Magistrate loses gay adoption appeal’, *The Daily Telegraph* (1 November, 2007), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/31/ngay131.xml> (accessed 24 November, 2007).

With the gay issue, it's a conscience thing and social workers are able to decide within the agency. Everyone can change... being a family changes our view of the world. We uphold adaptability and flexibility. ⁸³³

All people are worth working with, even the rigid and fundamental ones, but some attitudes have to be challenged. Some people think homosexuality 'can be cured.' ⁸³⁴

The views of social work professionals are externally assessed by inspection bodies, notably the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The most recent report suggests that not all agency practice or the attitudes of individual social workers models a truly open approach to prospective adopters:

Good agencies actively encourage an open approach to recruitment and have processes in place to ensure that approved adopters are matched with children in a timely manner... Inspectors found evidence in a small number of agencies that social workers undertaking assessments appeared less rigorous in their approach to the assessment of same sex couples for fear of appearing discriminatory. Panel members in a very small number of agencies have found it more difficult to recommend single and same sex couples and inspectors report that some placing social workers consider them as 'second choice' families. ⁸³⁵

Overall, these views illustrate open opinions about assessing all adults who seek to become prospective adoptive parents. They also illustrate some justifiable professional hesitation about placing children with the 'right' people.

7.3.3 Views of Christian Adoptive Parents

The survey of Christian parents asked those who were already approved as adoptive or foster parents, to consider their feelings about expanding the range of adults able to apply to adopt or foster children. The results are shown in Table 7.4.

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Stable relationships only	Yes - if children already present	Total
Married couples	58	0	0	0	0	58
Heterosexual, unmarried couples	38	18	1	1	0	58
Lesbian couples	21	33	3	1	0	58
Gay, male couples	21	33	3	1	0	58
Single females	32	23	2	0	1	58
Single males	29	26	2	0	1	58

Table 7.4. Views of Which Adults Should Be Allowed to Apply For Assessment as Prospective Adoptive Parents or Foster Carers

These views favour heterosexual couples adopting children, especially when they are married. There is a marginal support for single adults adopting and a marginal disapproval of same-sex couples.

⁸³³ Social Worker: Telephone interview (3)

⁸³⁴ Social Worker: Telephone interview (6)

⁸³⁵ Commission for Social Care Inspection, op. cit., 26.

When asked to explain concerns about opening up the approval criteria, parents raised many issues that are displayed in the bar chart of Figure 7.5.

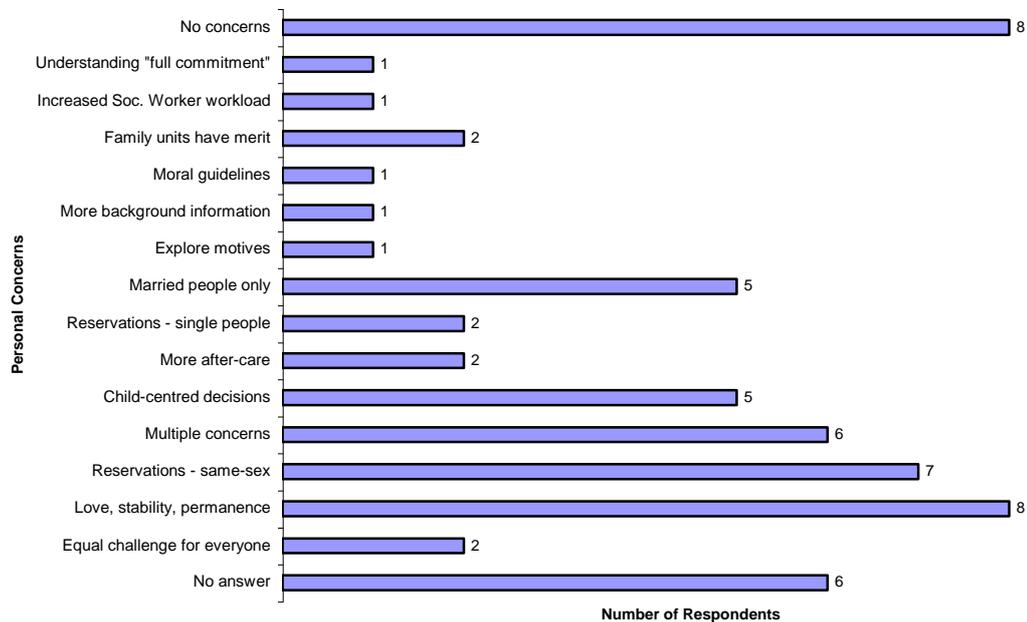


Figure 7.5. Bar Chart of Personal Concerns of Parents About Expanding the Range of Adult Adopters or Foster Carers

The following are a representative selection of comments and are centred upon the needs of adopted children themselves:

*In my experience it is hard enough for married couples I see to stay together. Adopted children need security and a married couple has more chance of providing this. The other categories have everything stacked against them and a positive outcome for the child.*⁸³⁶

*Concern that the rush to increase placements leads to compromise. Also, question whether it is driven by rights of prospective adopters rather than duty to find the best for a child.*⁸³⁷

*That people's motives should be fully explored; that prospective adoptive/foster carers should be prepared as fully as possible for the task ahead.*⁸³⁸

*All should be eligible to apply. We do, however, have serious reservations about the criteria for success. Raising children is hard work and the fact that many single parents are successful does not make their status as single parents ideal. Homosexual couples may also be able enough but in their cases there has to be consideration of the potential extra burden on the adopted child.*⁸³⁹

Given that the numbers of children awaiting a placement are increasing, these Christian parents were asked about how permanent homes can be found if they cannot be with their birth parents. The responses are shown in Figure 7.7.

⁸³⁶ Parent (10)

⁸³⁷ Parent (14)

⁸³⁸ Parent (15)

⁸³⁹ Parent (35)

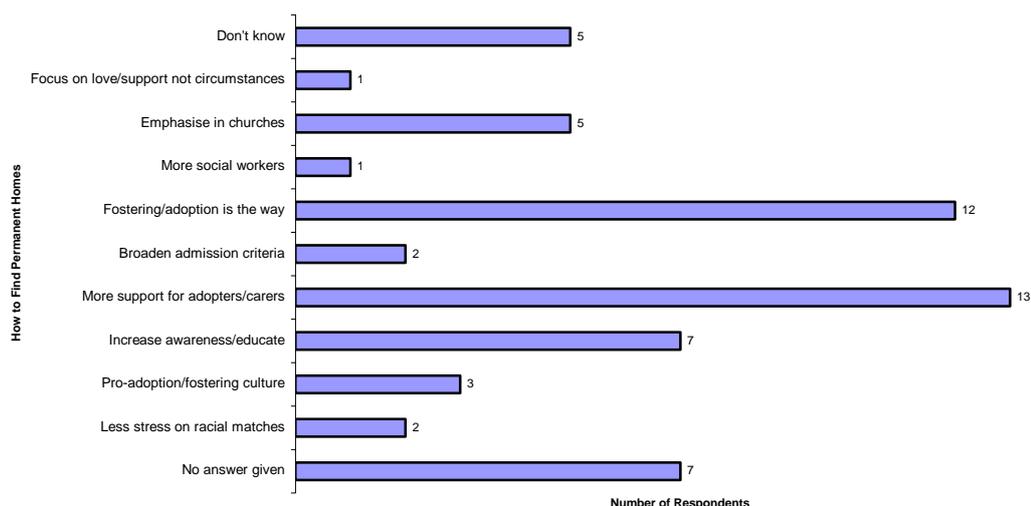


Figure 7.7. Bar Chart of Ideas for Finding Permanent Homes for Children Needing Adoption or Foster Care

The two leading categories support the desire for more children to be fostered or adopted and for more support to be given to those that offer this kindness. Parents were keen that others should enter into this relationship with full understanding of the potential problems. Adoptive parents and foster carers felt motivated to educate people about fostering and adoption as well as to encourage others to take up the opportunity. Some felt that the problem of too few adopters was due to ‘stigma’ and the lack of a culture supporting this way of building a family. Others saw that church connections could be reinforced to increase the numbers of Christian people involved in these types of parenting. Some of the comments written in the survey are given below:

*1) Recreating a culture where adoption and fostering are valued and higher up the list of options for infertile couples; 2) Targeting promotion of fostering/ adoption to churches (and possibly other faith communities) from agencies; 3) Programmes of teaching in churches on family, community and inclusivity; 4) Stalls at all the big Christian gatherings (e.g. Spring Harvest/New Wine) to promote fostering/ adoption.*⁸⁴⁰

*It is good that more people should be able to adopt. It is not an easy process and therefore ANYONE deciding this route must really want a child, with a lot of love to give. This must be better, no matter what their relationship, gay etc. than for a child to remain in a harmful, disruptive and uncaring environment.*⁸⁴¹

Finding permanent homes for looked after children is a perennial problem especially as the children now requiring permanent placement tend to be older and damaged by moves within the system and by unsuccessful attempts at rehabilitation. Better planning and earlier decision making would make a real difference. One possible avenue to recruit families that Family Placement workers might pursue is through the Christian Churches (making presentations at services, in meetings, providing promotional materials) although I imagine some workers might find this a problem! There should be a huge untapped resource here – if Christians take seriously the

⁸⁴⁰ Parent (3)

⁸⁴¹ Parent (11)

command to care for ‘Orphans’ and the Church as a whole takes up the challenge to support those who offer a child a home. While it is not everyone’s calling to provide a home, most could provide support.⁸⁴²

These opinions were pursued in telephone interviews. Responses reflect a desire to do more to promote adoption, especially in a Christian setting, whilst also desiring good outcomes for all children:

Churches should encourage more people to adopt and foster. I am convinced that only married couples can do this job but adoption has changed so much.⁸⁴³

Depends on the need for adoption and adopters... I believe you need a man and a woman to raise a family and I find no examples of a gay couple forming a family in scripture. However, I do question what should happen if the supply of heterosexual adopters is exhausted, then is a homosexual adopter better for the child than that child staying in care?⁸⁴⁴

If you really want to adopt, you’ve got to go for it. This is not altruism but realism – you have to want to and the life you’ll have is different and you will need help. There should be more talks in churches about adoption and a different type of family life.⁸⁴⁵

Anyone mad enough to put their life on the line for a child should be considered! Being part of a faith community offers a great deal about openness, inclusion and hospitality... I do have some concerns about some strands of the Christian community or any community that is very rigid.⁸⁴⁶

Analysing the feedback from parents, the inherent ‘rightness’ of a married couple having children and being supported by the Church family is evident. They have risen to the challenge of adopting children and desire that like-minded others do the same, within a Christian context. If this situation cannot be attained, then adoption by others would be desirable for the sake of the children. Child-centred responses are a distinctive element of the comments from these Christian people. Christian adoptive parents and social workers are in agreement on this matter.

7.4 Contemporary Adoption and Christianity

For most, the suggestion that family life could or should be like [the traditional model] is just incredible, and when Christians attempt to recreate the images and social structures of yesteryear they mostly succeed only in adding to the guilt that oppresses the lives of so many within the church – not to mention the fact that, as often as not, their own children see no relevance in that kind of faith, and give it up as soon as they have the opportunity to do so. People outside the church are mystified by such attempts to turn the clock back, and the irrelevance of doing so merely reinforces their image of Christians hopelessly out of touch with changing social realities.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴² Parent (45)

⁸⁴³ Parent: Telephone interview (1)

⁸⁴⁴ Parent: Telephone interview (2)

⁸⁴⁵ Parent: Telephone interview (3)

⁸⁴⁶ Parent: Telephone interview (8)

⁸⁴⁷ Drane and Fleming Drane, op. cit., 3-4.

John and Olive Drane accurately express the view that the stereotypical Christian family is dissimilar to very many real families today. Churches do not appear to engage with family life in all its' complexity. In the Western world, the traditional nuclear family is in decline.⁸⁴⁸ Just as was the case for the Church in the first centuries after Christ, today's Church needs to cope with the tension between how to maintain marriage as a God-given union and family life within the church, and how it cares for those children raised in families that do not fit with a traditional model. This thought is echoed by Adrian Thatcher who says that churches 'need a theology of marriage which assumes that marriage is normative, while at the same time accepting without reservation alternative relationships and family forms, and providing encouragement and support for them.'⁸⁴⁹

All three of the mainstream denominations have made accommodation for the changes in family life in society. The official position of the Roman Catholic Church is the most traditional and the most clearly expressed: children are best served by care from a married couple. Within adoption work, however, there has been a quiet and gradual move to approve unmarried heterosexual couples as well as single people. This illustrates a drift away from the doctrinal position and moves closer to the reality of the lived experience of some Catholic people. Approval of same-sex couples remains an obstacle to agencies being able to implement the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Roman Catholic social work professionals do not hold as rigorous an opposition to these approval issues as those who formulate the official Church position.

The Anglican Church has accepted the views of wider society with respect to, for example, the use of contraception but cannot present a unified front on the issue of 'family', divided as it is between conservative and liberal theological arguments. Despite this, its adoption agencies have been working with an expanded approval policy for many years.

The Methodist Church has the most evidently liberal official position. The adoption agency most closely connected with Methodism has an open policy for recruitment of adopters, consistent with this view. This openness presents challenges and there remains diversity of opinion as prospective adopters enter the assessment process, especially with regard to adoption by same-sex couples.

Theological and sociological evidence support the approval of married couples as adoptive parents when they can demonstrate permanence, suitability and stability. Some of these qualities can be demonstrated by single adults, or by cohabiting heterosexual or

⁸⁴⁸ Popenoe, op. cit.

⁸⁴⁹ Thatcher, op. cit., 134.

homosexual couples. There are reasons, however, why some of these adults should not be approved to adopt. Single adults require good support systems since a two-parent adoptive situation is more sustainable. Data exists that suggests a cohabiting relationship between any unmarried couple is much more unstable than a married relationship. There is no evidence that same-sex couples cannot be good parents but there are strong theological arguments why this environment is not ideal for children. As Elaine Storkey writes, however, ‘although they are not the options that the Bible urges, stable cohabitation lies much closer to the biblical end of the spectrum than promiscuity, and the same is true of faithful homosexual partnership.’⁸⁵⁰ Given that one measure of ‘faithful partnership’ is an official civil partnership, one might conclude that some same-sex relationships were set for permanence that was closer to marriage than many unmarried heterosexual couples could demonstrate, if both were applying to adopt children.

The above debates are much more centred on discussions about adults and their inter-relationships than on the needs of children. David Popenoe summarises it this way:

People today, most of all children, dearly want families in their lives. They long for that special, and hopefully life-long, social and emotional bond that family membership brings. Adults can perhaps live much of their lives, with some success, apart from families. The problem is that children, if we wish them to become successful adults, cannot.⁸⁵¹

It is beholden on the Christian community to respond to the need of children and enable them to move into permanent families. The Government has tackled the problem of children who wait for placement in families by legally expanding the range of adopters. Social workers apply this thinking. Those Christian parents who are already adopters are looking to the Churches to do more to raise the profile of adoption, especially since Government and Churches alike are agreed that marriage provides the best environment within which children can thrive. Adoption agencies are unable to make this claim directly, as they work within the law, but they can work more closely with Churches to draw in more prospective adopters who align their values and lifestyle with traditional Christian principles. This would be a distinctive Christian response from ‘grass roots’. It would enable a policy of openness to be a reality for Christian adoption agencies without offering offence to any adult. It would also, more importantly, secure the maximum advantage for children.

This chapter has attempted to answer the question whether adoptive families should be traditional or radical creations. If a traditional family model is currently one that fails to provide enough adopters then, for the sake of children awaiting permanent placement in

⁸⁵⁰ Elaine Storkey, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵¹ Popenoe, *op. cit.*

families, it needs to be challenged. Christian distinctiveness in adoption must come from Churches themselves since it cannot come from adoption agencies. Christians who believe in the merits of marriage and family life need to campaign for adoption and not against adopters. Adoptive families are always radical creations!

8 Christianity and Contemporary Adoption

This thesis has explored the present and future scope for Christian work in adoption. In particular, it has examined the adoption work of Christians and Christian churches to see if it is essentially the same as offered by those without faith. Investigation into the historical and legal background of adoption has shown that Christian individuals and groups have been highly influential in the past. In line with more liberal and individualistic behaviour within society, the past forty years has adjusted the dynamic and emphasis that can be made by faith groups in this work. Whilst this has been accepted by those active within almost all adoption agencies, it has also been resisted by some Christian voices who have argued that wide-ranging adjustments to the shape of family life, through the activity of adoption, is counter to both tradition and stability for a child in a new environment. Consequently this thesis has looked at existing relationships in adoption work and asked: What is the relationship between Christian adoption agencies and Local Authorities? What should the Church expect concerning the influence of secular legislation and control in adoption social work? What should society expect from organisations and people that are Christian and involved in adoption work? These questions have been answered by researching the activity of Christian adoption agencies and the views of adoption social workers and Christian adoptive parents. A theology of engagement that draws upon Christian and non-Christian sources has been used, as a means for establishing common ground in some instances and Christian distinctiveness in others. Drawing on this approach, it is possible to address the Christian voices that feel that traditional values are being challenged, whilst also drawing attention to the excellence of the work that is being done by Christian people in adoption work.

8.1 Conflict or Communion?

Because of their historical and theological interactions, Christianity and adoption find themselves in a binding relationship to one another. There are areas of misunderstanding that need to be removed, and areas of excellence that need to be publicised and all in 'the best interests' of the child. At heart, this is where there is real communion of spirit and motivation, both Church and State desire that children thrive and develop to attain their full potential within society. Promoting this truth will bring any perceptions of conflict into perspective.

The Christian Church could confess to causing much of the present day tension

between state and Church in the whole of area of raising children. Historically, the conflict was between human nature and the Church's advocacy of celibacy. Despite the preaching of the Fathers, the reality was that humankind was insufficiently self-disciplined to abstain from sexual relations. The Church was forced to accommodate 'unwanted' children born within and without marriage (2.1.1). Though the Church tightened its theology of marriage, it also cared for children who were illegitimate – never more than when Christian evangelicals saw the immense deprivation of street children in post-industrial cities across the United Kingdom. The actions of these men resulted in the provision of welfare for neglected children (2.1.3). This activity generated its own tensions: tension between denominations and tension between Church and state. The key issue was one of ownership and responsibility: Whose children were these children? Expressed this way it is clear that children were still voiceless objects, a situation that needed improving upon despite the best efforts of the compassionate work of the day.

The charitable and institutional care of unwanted and neglected children devolved away from the Churches and into the hands of the state during the twentieth century. The Church is unlikely to be able to reclaim this ground. Whilst the Church's work with children needing adoption has drastically reduced, the Church must be encouraged to recognise that it is not losing 'the battle'. There is a perception in Christian circles that the Church is in conflict with secular Local Authorities, now that the latter have nationwide coverage for adoption matters. The reality is fundamentally different: co-operation and not competition. More education of what adoption work is and does, would greatly diminish the harmful perception of 'us against them'. Furthermore, if this were done alongside teaching about Christian principles of welcome and hospitality, such as those alluded to in the theology of adoption (2.2), then it may encourage some parents to recognise a personal vocation to care for children who have no permanent family life. Whereas in Isaiah 43.19 the 'new thing' of which the prophet speaks is the possible new exodus for the Israelites, the coming out of Babylon and coming home, in adoption the 'new thing' that God intends is a homecoming that creates a new family. The past becomes the story that shapes and makes the new family and within this new environment there is a work of creation, timeliness, love, serving and belonging. These qualities are applicable to all of God's children, while being specifically applicable to adopted children and their new parents.

The result of adoption is the formation of new relationships. These are hopefully positive and enduring within the new family. There are also transitory and influential relationships between the social worker and the prospective adopters. These relationships

are affected by social policy and the vagaries of politics (3.2.1). The presence of a Christian influence in this mix, introduces ethical and spiritual aspects to the discussions. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires that applicants are assessed for suitability, stability and permanence. Such general and inclusive criteria create possible areas of conflict for some Christian traditionalists concerning child welfare and issues surrounding eligibility to adopt (3.3).

Denominationally Christians have worked with children's welfare in distinct ways. A possible, theological model for an adoption agency was proposed in **chapter 4**, which combined denominational strengths with added support from the Church. The Church needs to generate interest and engagement in adoption issues by increasing levels of practical, spiritual, educational, and financial support. In appealing to local churches to respond to increased awareness of adoption related matters, Christian people would be developing a new sense of what it means to be a family. This would deepen the day-to-day relationship of Christian people with adoption and with existing adoption agencies, Christian or otherwise.

The theoretical approach for being a Christian adoption agency was tested against the contemporary reality by using data from surveys and telephone interviews. The results illustrated the existence of a distinctive outlook (4.3.1), professionalism (4.2.2) and faith (4.2.3). Christian agencies had been externally inspected and found to operate with commendably high standards when compared to others. This can be used to argue two things: (1) the general population can recognise that Christian adoption agencies are already able to demonstrate that their work is a direct benefit children needing families; and, (2) additional resources provided by the Church would not be a wasted investment but would be used to extend existing good work, experience and expertise. The ability of a Christian agency 'to go the extra mile' and to place 'hard to place' children has distinct echoes of the enthusiasm of the Christian pioneers who first established this type of work. Here is a place for enhancing existing 'communion', between Local Authorities and Christian adoption agencies.

'Hard to place' children, alongside all adopted children, need to develop a healthy sense of identity and belonging to enable them to accept the movement away from the first family. Whatever the reason for this move, the fact that adopted children are 'different' requires society to make every effort to secure the most stable, secure and permanent environment it can. Every step taken must ensure that the child is nurtured in a way that enables them to overcome the insecurities that can be born of 'difference.' Alongside

emotional, physical and intellectual needs, the spiritual life of a child must not be neglected. This statement gets wide-ranging support in medical and educational literature yet because of the connections between spirituality and religion, the social work field regards it with suspicion. Opinions about spirituality and children are potential sources of conflict in the field of adoption.

Christian spirituality includes the ability to relate to the experience of the adoptee and offer emotional hope. The work, life and experience of Jesus can make a connection with the experience of adopted children (5.2). Parents who seek to help a child discover their own place can tell Jesus' story and an adoptee's story alongside each other. This respects the spiritual journey of a child. This fact strengthens a case for social workers being better able to understand the nuances of the Christian faith when Christian couples apply to become prospective adopters.

In assessing people who apply to become prospective adoptive parents, mutual understanding and a good rapport between the assessing social worker and the would-be adopters is fundamentally important. Whilst this relationship does not begin with ideas of conflict, it is recognised as being perceived as a place of power and judgement. Descriptions can be misleading to the adoption panel making a final decision, especially when words such as 'Christian' have an extraordinary breadth of meaning (6.2). Judgements based upon popular stereotypes should be avoided. This statement applies to misunderstandings about some Christian practice and some attitudes towards parental discipline (6.2). The need for education and awareness applies to both those assessing prospective adopters and those coming forward for adoption, who need to have better understanding of the environment within which a vulnerable child should be nurtured. Such preparedness can only enhance the regard for would-be Christian adopters.

Within Christian denominations, one word with a breadth of meaning is 'family.' With respect to an understanding about 'family', each denomination places itself in a different position on a theological spectrum from conservative to liberal, and within each denomination there will be a similar spread of diverse positions (7.1). Single adopters are acceptable to all adoption agencies. Unmarried prospective adopters, heterosexual or homosexual, have some Christian objectors who favour more traditional family forms. I argue that denying unmarried couples, in stable, permanent relationships, the chance to adopt children may be an action that works against the best interests of some children, in an environment where too few married couples are applying to adopt. Christian adoptive parents argue from a child-centred perspective hoping for more married prospective

adopters to come forward but accepting that being adopted by a loving adult is the greater need for the child than being condemnatory about the lifestyle of the adopters. Such parents are seeking to harmonise adoption work with Christian tradition. What can seem to be an area of conflict needs to be an area of greater co-operation and consistency for Christian people. The Church should promote adoption and not restrict the numbers of potential adopters. This is about fully engaging with the resourcefulness of the past and the potential of the present, so that adoption might become a characterising motif for the Church in the future.

8.2 Better Together: Christianity and Adoption

A fundamental integration of Christian effort, service and teaching in the field of adoption, can build upon the existing and historical strengths of the work. It can witness to the ongoing care Christians have for vulnerable children in society. Such a service could be both welcomed by wider society and a form of incarnational witness to Christian values. By genuinely engaging with new forms of family life, the Church can explode the myth that it consists of an exclusive family based upon marriage and biology. The Church has valued family life in the past; it can illustrate the importance of creating permanent families in contemporary society.

This final section of the thesis integrates the discussion of **section 8.1** with some existing facts. By encouraging a sense of vocation to work in the adoption field, Christians can provide input into society that works in the best interests of children and provides excellence in ethos, energy, enthusiasm, experience, and engagement.

8.2.1 Agencies with Ethos

*Where's the religion? Everywhere. Religion infuses agency self-presentation, personnel, resources, decision-making processes, and interactions with clients and among staff in faith-based agencies.*⁸⁵²

The past 130 years have seen a marked transition from Christian people prompting state and society into recognising the need to care for vulnerable children, to state welfare and legislation defining how Christians should operate. Whilst this sounds too prescriptive for some, the fact that the state is looking to the voluntary sector, including faith-based groups, to provide specific welfare services is both a challenge and an opportunity.

As part of a general secularising of society and a radical reconstruction of what good child care looks like, the traditional family beloved of Christians has become one of multiple

⁸⁵² Ebaugh et al, op. cit.

options within which an adopted child can flourish. This 'looked after' child is no longer subjected to the whim of external agencies but has rights and interests that society seeks to respect.

Chapter 2 recorded that the first people to transform adoption from the chaos of disreputable baby farming were acting out of their need to see justice done, while showing loving kindness to vulnerable children. They were people of deep Christian conviction, doing the work of God. There was a strong sense of vocation and faith in pioneering the 'saving' of children. There was also a sense that wider social stability was connected to responsible caring for children.

The numbers of adoptions reached its peak in 1968 and halved in the decade beginning 1970. The Abortion Act 1967 and the Divorce Reform Act 1969 greatly changed family and social dynamics and alongside the widespread use of contraception, this meant that far fewer babies were available for adoption. The nature of adoption began to change. Child adoption is still closely associated with infertility or an inability to have children but the fall in the number of 'healthy white babies' has changed the primary role of adoption agencies. Increasingly adoption concerns securing long-term welfare for 'hard to place' children; a phrase used to describe older children, children with mental or physical disabilities, children of a non-Caucasian background and children with behavioural difficulties.⁸⁵³ The need to seek non-traditional prospective adopters has been precipitated by declining numbers of people coming forward to adopt, alongside the added requirements of cultural and racial matching of prospective adopter and child.

Christian adoption agencies seeking to work in the best interests of the child, as they are legally obliged to do, have had to accept that whereas in historical terms the church once held sway over marriage and acceptable forms of parenthood, these responsibilities are now firmly in the hands of the state. The full impact of this position was felt most keenly by the Roman Catholic adoption agencies and their expressed desire (in 2007) to seek exemption from the Equality Act that obliged them to include unmarried couples as prospective adopters.

The undoubted emphasis for all adoption agencies is the successful placement of a 'looked after' child into a new home. All agencies are constrained by limited resources and an externally imposed set of legal and functional requirements. Christian adoption agencies operate as a charitable business and are dependent upon income from external sources

⁸⁵³ Matthew Higgins and Warren Smith, 'Engaging the Commodified Face: The Use of Marketing in the Child Adoption Process', *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 11, no. 2 (2002), 179-190.

(4.2.4). The income is primarily from Local Authorities, who work in response to Government directives and direct their resources accordingly. In business terms, voluntary adoption agencies are viable if they can provide sufficient prospective adopters to be matched with children who are freed for adoption. This business is operated nationally. Agencies do better if they have a broad selection of adopters that can be matched with children of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Examining adoption as a marketing topic, Matthew Higgins and Warren Smith found that:

The process of categorising and targeting types of people is justified due to the need of efficient and effective use of very limited resources. The demands of matching child and parent force agencies to generate ever more complex categories of both child and prospective adoptive parents.⁸⁵⁴

Christian adoption agencies have an enviable record of conduct and achievement in adoption work, especially in placing ‘hard to place’ children (4.3.2). Despite evidence that their Christian foundations are increasingly invisible, the ethos of these adoption agencies permeates their professional work. This is a noted attribute of faith-based agencies even when agency workers may have no active faith themselves. One group of researchers, cited in the opening quotation to this section, described this as being ‘infused’ with faith.⁸⁵⁵ The fact that these agencies are specialists in adoption, giving their social workers extensive, specific experience, has considerable merit that is recognised by independent inspecting authorities. Examining the engagement between the sacred and the secular, adoption agencies in both public and voluntary sectors work diligently to secure permanent and stable homes for children. The distinctive aspects of the Christian agencies are their preparedness to attend to ‘hard to place’ children; their ability to specialise in one specific childcare field; and their structural capacity to ‘go the extra mile’.

In Christian terms, this comes close to the reasons why passionate nineteenth century evangelicals founded adoption agencies. Christian adoption agencies have an ethos that carries an element of incarnation. Contemporary agencies work in a climate where the theological background to their work has to accommodate the legal and sociological framework of the day. They are fearful of being distinctively Christian in a multi-faith, social marketplace and they are not best situated to remove this fear. Sponsoring denominational bodies, the Christian churches, are better situated to promote and resource the work, elevating the profile and achievement of this increasingly small group. The Church should not retreat from the challenges of contemporary adoption. In many ways, the work could be better resourced both spiritually and financially. This would certainly be of benefit to wider

⁸⁵⁴ Higgins and Smith, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵⁵ Ebaugh et al, *op. cit.*

society, making a specific statement of care for children and the way families are created. This thesis draws the conclusion that Christian adoption agencies are a resource to adoption work of which the Church should be justifiably proud.

8.2.2 Parents with Energy

Parents do not simply will themselves to love a stranger in their midst. They are commanded by God to love the children entrusted to their care as parents, entailing a particular relationship which is not shared with friends, neighbours and strangers.⁸⁵⁶

The adoption of children is the result of adults being prepared to be assessed by social workers and then approved by an adoption agency's panel, as parents who are able to love the stranger as their own child. In adoption work, society reconstitutes, re-stories, the narrative – people are reminded of their duty to be child-focussed: we give parents to the child and not children to adults. We cannot expect easy solutions to the task of finding parents for children with complex histories of abuse, neglect and maybe multiple foster homes.

The determination and motivation of prospective parents to undergo inquiry about infertility, relationships, natural and unnatural parenthood, the rights of the child, and contact with the birth family is in itself evidence of some sense of vocation to be parents. Not all prospective adopters will be assessed as suitable parents. For those that are recommended, however, they await adoption in the knowledge that their children will face distinct intellectual, social and emotional difficulties as they mature.

Adoptive parents work without any pre-existing biological connection to children. They frequently find that this is an unnecessary and over-emphasised quality within family life. One adoptive father wrote to his son, about his theological reflection on the whole matter, saying that:

Children are a gift God gives parents, and usually this gift turns out to help both parents and children... At some point it became clear to Mom and me that – without any biological connections at all – you had nevertheless become our son, and we had become your parents. This too is a gift God gives, even if it's not given in the natural, biological way. So adoption goes beyond biology – but also mimics it.⁸⁵⁷

As adoption mimics biology, so humankind is created in the image of God and has a spiritual component. Society continues to judge children mostly on their cognitive abilities, yet children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development all combine to affect

⁸⁵⁶ Waters, op. cit., 250 (original emphasis unaltered).

⁸⁵⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, 'Letters to Derek' in Jackson (ed.), op. cit., xxvi-xxvii.

expressions of faith and their spiritual awareness.⁸⁵⁸ A good parent is a practitioner of love and compassion for the child that they are rearing. More than offering love alone, attention to total well-being is fundamental.⁸⁵⁹ In addition, adoption qualifies the nature of the relationship between parent and child. It can offer freedom from expectation and a positive sense of individuality and worth.

The UN Convention, and health and education professionals all recognise the worth of engaging with a child's spirituality as they grow up. Since it is understood that adopted children have emotionally and spiritually demanding journeys, then choosing parents that can offer energy and insight to this aspect of nurturing is essential. This can be pain-staking work; especially when a child may have attachment disorders and carry considerable 'emotional baggage' into their adoptive situation. Qualities of endurance and persistence, alongside strong external support systems, can enable adoptive parents to provide intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support to children. According to clinicians, 'It is vital to be open about values but not coercive, to be a competent professional and not a missionary for a particular belief, and at the same time to be honest enough to recognize how one's value commitments may or may not promote health.'⁸⁶⁰ This thesis has illustrated how one couple was educated out of misguided thoughts about disciplining children. It has shown that Christian parents can be highly invested, self-aware adults who are prepared to work with the specific challenges raised by loving adopted children. Additionally, the local church can provide practical and spiritual support that help adoptive parents to survive the rigours of their parenting situation. This wider network of support makes a positive contribution to the assessment process.

As they approach an adoption agency, prospective Christian adopters need reassurance that their specific approach to being a Christian is understood by their social worker. Prospective adopters should not fear discrimination on the grounds of faith. It is the conclusion of this thesis that Christian adoptive parents can offer their children a distinctive spiritual engagement that nurtures their overall well-being.

8.2.3 Social Workers with Experience

Christianity embraces a broad spectrum of theological and spiritual positions. It is difficult to define, even though Christianity reflects the nominal faith position of 72% of the

⁸⁵⁸ Yust, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁸⁵⁹ Crompton (2001), *op. cit.*, 6.

⁸⁶⁰ P. Scott Richards, John M. Rector, and Alan C. Tjeltveit, 'Values, Spirituality, and Psychotherapy' in Miller (ed.), *op. cit.*, 144.

population.⁸⁶¹ Attendance levels at Christian worship, however, is significantly lower at 6.3% of the population in England.⁸⁶² This indicates a general trend towards accepting Christianity as a passive belief system rather than an active faith. Pertinent to this thesis, this translates as a generalised lack of familiarity with what being an active Christian means in reality.

The professional code of social work ethics makes no specific mention of any faith, religion or spirituality. The code makes reference to beliefs, values and culture and a definition of culture includes 'systems of belief, religion, mores and customs.'⁸⁶³ In legislation, the words religion, culture and race come together with great frequency. Misunderstanding of the distinctions between these descriptors is a source of confusion to many, including social workers who have judgements to make when assessing these elements in the lives of prospective adopters.

There is evidence that knowledge of the Christian faith is an inherent assumption of social worker training courses, rather than a specific module alongside teaching about other faiths. This does not equip social workers for the assessment task. Potentially this distorts their understanding towards prevailing stereotypes, rather than using training and informed experience to affect their judgement. Specifically, some social workers have formed associations between evangelicalism and inappropriate forms of discipline.

The primary ethical task facing social workers is the exercise of judgement through assessment. The 1989 Children Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Children are agreed that children have the right to be protected from religious indoctrination in ways that differ from their family of origin. Birth parents have the right to declare a wish that a child might be raised within a particular religion. In adoption, therefore, a judgement has to be made when matching children of no distinct religious background to adoptive parents with a faith and vice versa.

It could be argued that placing a child in a Christian home, constitutes a spiritually restrictive environment. It can also be argued that secular or humanist parents would be raising an adopted child within another restrictive environment. Professionally the social worker is expected to pay respectful attention to the client's worldview, to 'maintain contact with and respect for the reality of the client's world and his perception of it.'⁸⁶⁴ In a country where practicing Christians are increasingly few, Christians should be seen to be part of a

⁸⁶¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954> (accessed 3 September, 2005).

⁸⁶² English Church Census, 8 May 2005 <http://www.christian-research.org.uk/Quadpres.pdf> (accessed 11 March, 2008).

⁸⁶³ O'Hagan, op. cit.

⁸⁶⁴ Neil Leighton, 'Personal and Professional Values – Marriage or Divorce', in Watson (ed.), op. cit., 81-85.

culturally distinct group whose beliefs need handling ‘in a culturally appropriate’ manner.⁸⁶⁵ In most cases, a social worker is better equipped to engage in issues of faith or religion if they are themselves people of faith.⁸⁶⁶ Failing this, training in the subtleties of any faith expression would make a useful contribution to this part of assessment work. A proper engagement with the nuances of language and religious practices within the Christian faith would be supportive to both social workers and prospective adopters.

Experience in adoption work is more easily gained in Christian adoption agencies because they are specialists. Whereas as social work departments have to cover the broad range of child welfare issues, in Christian adoption agencies, the focus is on adoption itself. This counts highly in the eyes of external inspection authorities. It is highly probable that the potential to work in the best interests of the child may be best found in places where Local Authorities can contract out their adoption work to voluntary adoption agencies and their experienced social workers.

8.2.4 Families with Enthusiasm

*Under the freedom of God, the ties of nature are important but not absolute. Families can be built as well as they can be begotten...*⁸⁶⁷

The adoptive family is a radical, new creation since adoption introduces the exciting and demanding challenge of children in a previously childless situation or alternatively the added dynamic and influence of adopted children in a family with existing birth children. Either way, approaching the new creation with enthusiasm is a virtue both for the individuals affected and for the church as they work to support and encourage the family.

More than ever, the church has a role in supporting children and their parents. Family forms are so diverse, that attention to children and parents should be a characterising motif of the church and its’ teaching, over and above marriage and sexuality. This is not to belittle the affirmation of marriage or the recognition that it is both God’s ideal and a known contributor to the stability of wider society. Indeed marriage and family can be regarded as a ‘presumptive ordering’ for parentage.⁸⁶⁸ Working with children and parents has the potential to reach adults in search of stability in family life and in their spiritual journey. These people need the church to be inclusive of all adult experience including divorce, separation, single-parenthood, infertility and so on. It all starts with an improving attitude towards the needs of children, since, as Brent Waters claims, ‘Children are the first step in establishing a family

⁸⁶⁵ BASW, op. cit., 3.

⁸⁶⁶ Furman et al, op. cit.

⁸⁶⁷ Post, op. cit., 124.

⁸⁶⁸ Waters, op. cit., 40.

as a mission base for extending hospitality to strangers. Covenantal fidelity embodies an expansive love, embracing larger spheres of affection and service.⁸⁶⁹ In a world that promotes individual rights and the power of the purchaser, children can be unwelcome intruders rather than valued contributors. The Church has a role in providing for and protecting families with children. It can facilitate the path that children can take to be integrated into loving families where this experience has previously been denied them.

In recent decades, debates have concentrated upon the construction of the family. David Atkinson suggests that models of family life espoused by the Christian church must at the very least 'address the social conditions within which family cohesion is economically viable and socially worthwhile.'⁸⁷⁰ Christian theology upholds certain truths, centred on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. This singularity is compelling and clear but the easy extension of the idea of one salvation, one way, into one type of family 'presents an ideal to which only some can approximate, and others not at all. It is this attribute of family theology which makes people believe there is a crisis in the family while the real problem is the gap between the ideology and reality.'⁸⁷¹ Where too much stress is placed on one ideal image of family structure then families may simply opt out of Christian church life rather than be exposed to perceived criticism for their life choices.

Enthusiasm for building a new family starts with prospective parents perceiving a role and seeking to fulfil a desire. This may originate with childlessness but the pool of children who are freed for adoption is such that these adults alone will not diminish the numbers sufficiently greatly. Existing families who are open to the possibility of having extra children through adoption need to be reached. The Church has a role to play here since 'If God is not designing the new family, who is? The answer is: the *culture* is; and the task of Christians is to contribute to this creative cultural task.'⁸⁷² Following this line of thinking, Christians who co-operate with building new families have an opportunity to work for Christ in transforming society and both embody discipleship and a vocation to work within particular relationships.⁸⁷³

Church communities who have respect for family life and the worth of each individual, are good places to draw attention to an extended parenting role and its place within Christian teaching. Here is a place of potential stability, tolerance and mutual respect.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., 125-6.

⁸⁷⁰ David Atkinson, *Pastoral Ethics: A Guide to the Key Issues of Daily Living* (London: Lynx Communications (SPCK), 1994), 75.

⁸⁷¹ Gittins, op. cit., 167.

⁸⁷² Thatcher, op. cit., 118.

⁸⁷³ Cahill, op. cit., 17.

Here is a place where children can find a special, life-long, social, emotional and spiritual bond. Rodney Clapp believes that this family can transform society: ‘The Christian family is not the nuclear family focussed inward on the welfare of its own members but the socially-transformative family that seeks to make the Christian moral ideal of love of neighbour part of the common good.’⁸⁷⁴ Gerard Loughlin builds on this argument saying, ‘The idea of the Christian family turns sour when it ceases to promote fidelity, mutuality and the dispossession necessary for the reception of children as gift, and instead becomes a means of attacking those whom it itself excludes and constructs as ‘threat’.’⁸⁷⁵

Enthusiastic Christian families that come in a range of styles and sizes can testify to an inclusive, compassionate love that is more effective in its witness to Christ than many specifically church-related outreach events. If the adoption of children were to be claimed by the Christian church as one of its characterising motifs, then it would offer a practical witness to society that the Christian family is not self-serving. Love really does extend beyond the walls of the church. The church must, however, be more ‘peaceful’ about its attitude to unconventional family constructions.

Brent Waters makes a thoughtful and well-argued case for considering that the family unit is something that is both flexible and defined within society:

The task of social and political ordering is to enable families to bear witness to the providential ordering of natural and social affinities by providing a mutual and timely place of belonging. Recognising this providential pattern and trajectory, however, does not imply that the cultural manifestations of the familial social sphere must embody a universal and unchanging structure.⁸⁷⁶

For him, ‘enduring fidelity’ and covenantal relationships are illustrative of the vocational nature of family life.⁸⁷⁷

In a restricted sense, there is an adoptive element in every family, for although procreation and childrearing extending from the one-flesh unity of marriage is the norm, God nonetheless intends all children to be provided with a place of mutual and timely belonging.⁸⁷⁸

This last point is fundamental to an argument that starts with the needs of children awaiting permanent families and ends with relativising the stress upon traditional family forms as being the *only* place for raising children. Active toleration of diverse family forms and practical examples of the success of traditional family forms can both be offered as means of helping children with no family life. Enthusiasm for family life is the starting point. Christian family life is one that has considerable merit and if the Church as a whole can

⁸⁷⁴ Clapp, op. cit., 148.

⁸⁷⁵ Gerard Loughlin, ‘The Want of Family in Post-Modernity’ in Barton (ed.), op. cit., 320.

⁸⁷⁶ Waters, op. cit., 166.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., 175.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., 183.

demonstrate its openness to all families, whilst simultaneously encouraging adoption, then it will be able to offer justice to children.

8.2.5 Churches with Engagement

If the family is little more than the aggregate of its members, however, then the only available avenue for promoting the family in the public arena of late liberal society is to assert the substantial evidence that when it is diminished children tend to suffer. In this respect, the church also serves as a child advocacy group. But in distilling Christian principles to a plea for better childcare, we encounter not so much common ground as an empty space, begging to be filled by substantive theological and moral discourse.⁸⁷⁹

Churches have had a problem with children for millennia. Children should be the responsibility of their parents. Parents should exist and function within prescribed roles established by the Church: they should be married, only conceive children within marriage, always want to parent their children, never forsake their children, enable their children to worship and become faithful with minimal disruption to the functioning of the Church. Failure in these areas has generated practical and theological problems for churches.

Tightening laws about marriage and procreation generated numerous unwanted, illegitimate children with the result that the Church acted as a parent in monasteries and convents by caring for children abandoned at the Church door. The priest became spiritual teacher where parents could not understand the task. The Church instituted godparents to provide an extension to spiritual support systems at baptism. Historically the Church and the natural hospitality of adults, especially towards the extended family, have provided means of adoption for vulnerable children. Both of these groups are now more reluctant to care for the neglected and unwanted children, who remain in the care of the government as 'looked after' children with no permanent family. Sadly, the evidence for the Church's reluctance is found in both the reduction in numbers of adoption agencies and in campaigns associated with Christians that operate against expanding the numbers of adopters rather than providing adoption solutions.

The Church needs to revisit its engagement with adoption matters. In a classical way, with contemporary relevance, Paul speaks of each person being adopted as heir and brother or sister of Christ (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; Rom. 9:4). We are adopted into the family of God where he alone is our Father and our Mother and we are either daughter or sister or brother or son. Our familial connections are those of discovering filial love for others and love of God alone as divine parent.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 243-4.

Family life is about life as parent and child. The Church supports this relationship. The Church needs to work to broaden its association with parents and children without stressing marriage or any traditional model that may or may not define the group that includes parents and children. Gerard Loughlin talks about the Church:

...nourishing and shaping the Christian body through care of its consumption and exercise of its members. The aim is to shape characters fitted for life in the story of Christ; characters who, shaped in and after the body of Christ, are able to follow him into his Kingdom. Such shaping consists in the formation of virtuous habits through communal practices.⁸⁸⁰

Christian adoptive parents have argued in this thesis that the Church should do more in its 'virtuous habit' of promoting adoption. The 'communal practice' would thus include wider support of adopters and adopted children and the support they need emotionally and practically. This could be achieved by promoting adoption matters in acts of worship to raise awareness of the issues, but also nationally and denominationally by enabling and facilitating stronger connections between Christian agencies and churches. Given acceptance of marriage as a worthy place for children, the status it rightly receives within churches, married couples without children and married couples with them, may both respond as prospective adopters. Increased adoption rates generated in this way would work as evidence to uphold a family structure that the Church has always treasured whilst simultaneously freeing adoption agencies to open their books to all adult prospective adopters without criticism. The assessment of suitability would remain with professional social workers, who may not approve all applicants, yet they may be the beneficiaries themselves of more prayer support and greater levels of understanding. Crucially, churches engaged with adoption issues would provide spiritual places within which to nurture vulnerable children and encourage more youngsters into permanent and stable environments.

The solution to this ethical and moral issue is conducted at this time, in this context and within this specific faith community. It is determined by history and conviction. Christians need to keep in touch with changing social realities and live lives faithful to the Kingdom. Here is an opportunity in the field of adoption, where acceptance of a range of adopters is a pre-requisite for maintaining a presence in this work. Accommodating legislation does not necessarily mean acquiescing to the values of society but rather it can have the power to work to transform society. Robert Benne expresses the point succinctly:

Above all, it is important that lay persons carry their Christian values right into the heart of the political process. Such witness will be far more effective than the sometimes necessary social statements or advocacy efforts of the institutional Church, because those lay Christians will be in the decision-making centres of political life in a way that the institutional Church cannot be. Such indirect ways

⁸⁸⁰ Loughlin, *op. cit.*, 87.

of political involvement are far more appropriate for an institution that is charged to proclaim a radical and universal Gospel.⁸⁸¹

This thesis has answered the question whether or not Christian people can make a distinctive contribution to contemporary adoption work. It concludes that Christian people can make at least as good a contribution to non-Christian others. It also concludes that there are important differences between the approach of Christian adoption agencies, social workers and adoptive parents that could be called distinctive. The contribution that is less emphatic than it could be, and which can operate in ways to revitalise Christian input, generating confidence and interest, is that of the Church. With an ability to support parents and children in newly created families locally, and an ability to resource adoption agencies at national and regional levels, the Church can work in more effective ways to illustrate its commitment to adoption. For theological and sociological reasons, adoption could and should be a characterising motif of the Christian family.

⁸⁸¹ Robert Benne, 'Christians and Government,' in Meilaender and Werpehowski (eds.), *op. cit.*, 341.

Appendix 1

This survey was originally produced as a folded A3 sheet for ease of distribution and completion. The specific content of the survey is accurately reproduced here for reference.

Project title:	The Ethics and Theology of Contemporary Christian Adoption		
Name of researcher:	Rev Sarah L Lamb		
Institution:	Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University		
Contact Address:	1 Loughbrow Park, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2QD.		
Contact details: Tel:	01434 604404	Email:	slamb21652@aol.com
Description of research project:	This survey forms part of a research PhD that explores the theology of adoption and the work of Christian people in this field: adopters, social workers and adoption agencies. This data will augment research into the history of adoption, adoption legislation and explore if Christianity can make a particular contribution in this field.		

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN ADOPTION AGENCIES

Please complete all sections.

Section A – About your Adoption Agency

1. What is the full name of the adoption agency registered at this address?
2. Is this agency part of a bigger organisation? *Please tick ONE answer.*
Yes No
3. If yes, what is the name of the bigger organisation?
4. How long has it been known by this specific name? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Less than 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 5 - 9 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 - 19 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 - 49 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 years or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. What, if any, was your agency's previous name?

6. How long has your agency been involved with adoption? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Less than 10 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 - 19 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 - 49 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 - 99 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
100 years or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. How many staff are employed as social workers at this agency? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Fewer than 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6-10	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 - 15	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 - 20	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. What are the main sources of funding for the adoption work of this agency? Please put a maximum of ONE tick in each column to indicate the highest sources in descending order.

	<i>First Source</i>	<i>Second Source</i>	<i>Third Source</i>
Direct charitable giving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grant from Church denomination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from clients (prospective adoptive parents, home studies, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local fund raising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>please specify</i>) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B – Relating to your Local Authority

9. How often has your agency met with representatives of your Local Authority Children Services Department between 1 June 2004 and 31 May 2005?

10. How would you characterise your relationship with the Local Authority? *Please tick all of the answers that represent your views.*

10

Contractual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cordial	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mutually beneficial	<input type="checkbox"/>
“Necessary evil”	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vital	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (<i>please specify</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

11

11. What is the *ONE* aspect of your agency’s relationship with the Local Authority that you value above all others?

12. How does the Local Authority’s approach to adoption differ from that of your agency?

13. What do you feel is distinctive about being a voluntary adoption agency rather than a Local Authority adoption agency? *Please tick all of the answers that represent your views.*

Caring attitude	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ethos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informality	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less bureaucracy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professionalism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sense of history	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stronger client relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (<i>please specify</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C – Being a Christian Adoption Agency

14. In what ways is it made evident to outside parties that you are a **Christian** Adoption Agency? *Please tick all of the answers that represent your views.*

Agency name	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agency's patron	<input type="checkbox"/>
Headed paper	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mission statement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of the word "Christian" in publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approval criteria	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific mention to applicants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>(please specify)</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Which of the following descriptions would best characterise the way that the Christian faith influences your agency's approach? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Faith-saturated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith centred	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith related	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith-secular	<input type="checkbox"/>
partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secular	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Do Christian Adoption Agencies have something distinctive to offer adoption work?

Yes *Please go to question 17.*

No *Please go to question 18.*

17. How do you think a Christian Adoption Agency might be distinctive?

18. Do you think prospective adopters apply to your agency specifically because it is a Christian adoption agency?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. Do you think prospective adopters avoid applying to your agency because you are a Christian organisation?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Don't know

20. Do you regard it as necessary that applicants understand that you are a Christian adoption agency?

Yes
No
Not sure

Section D – Impact of the Adoption and Children Act 2002

21. In the consultation phase preceding the Adoption and Children Act 2002 how did your agency respond to the discussion expanding the range of adults able to apply to adopt children?

22. With regard to approving prospective adopters, which issues have been specifically discussed by your agency? Which issues are agency policy? *Please tick all of the answers that apply.*

	<i>Discussed</i>	<i>Approved Policy</i>
Christian adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Christian adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial mix of adoptive parents / adopted child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maximum age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minimum age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homosexual couples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single-parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unmarried heterosexual couples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. In your opinion, which aspect of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 presents a Christian Adoption Agency with the greatest challenges?

Section E – Consent and Confidentiality

This section concerns the use of information contained in the survey. By signing at the bottom of this document you are making the following agreements:

- My contribution will be kept safely and securely with access only to those with permission from the researcher, Rev Sarah L Lamb.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time by contacting the researcher.
- I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to Rev Sarah L Lamb.

Please tick those that apply:

Either...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **without** preservation of anonymity,

or...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **with strict** preservation of anonymity.

Either... I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher,

or... I am not willing to be interviewed by the researcher

Name (*please print*):

Signed:.....

Date.....

12 Telephone:.....

.....

E-mail:.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. If you would like to make any further comments please attach a piece of paper. Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

Appendix 2

This survey was originally produced as a folded A3 sheet for ease of distribution and completion. The specific content of the survey is accurately reproduced here for reference.

Project title:	The Ethics and Theology of Contemporary Christian Adoption		
Name of researcher:	Rev Sarah L Lamb		
Institution:	Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University		
Contact Address:	1 Loughbrow Park, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2QD.		
Contact details:	Tel: 01434 604404	Email: slamb21652@aol.com	
Description of research project:	This survey forms part of a research PhD that explores the theology of adoption and the work of Christian people in this field: adopters, social workers and adoption agencies. This data will augment research into the history of adoption, adoption legislation and explore if Christianity can make a particular contribution in this field.		

A SURVEY OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Please answer all sections.

Section A – About Being a Parent

1. What is your parenting experience? Please tick ONE answer.

Foster parent only.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoptive parent only.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoptive and foster parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birth parent and foster parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birth parent and adoptive parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birth, foster and adoptive parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. How long ago did you begin this parenting experience? Please tick ONE answer.

Less than 5 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 to 9 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 to 19 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 years ago or more	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Why did you decide to be assessed as adoptive or foster parents? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

4. Please rate your perception of the challenge of your parenting responsibility, as adoptive parents or foster carers, compared to birth parents.

Much more challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly more challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identically equal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly less challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>
Much less challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What aspect of your parenting responsibility has been the most rewarding? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*
6. What aspect of your parenting responsibility has been the most demanding? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

Section B – About Being a Christian Parent

7. What is your denomination? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Anglican	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent Evangelical	<input type="checkbox"/>
No denomination	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methodist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious Society of Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
Roman Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Salvation Army	<input type="checkbox"/>
United Reformed Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>(please specify)</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. What is the frequency of your attendance at church (including worship services and mid-week church groups)? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Twice weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fortnightly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special occasions only	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Please define your spirituality using any of these words or additional words of your own choosing: *open, progressive, orthodox, catholic, liberal, traditional, evangelical, conservative,...*

10. How important is to nurture a child's spirituality? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very important	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly important	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither important nor unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Does your faith have an influence on your behaviour as a parent? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very strong influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly strong influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither strong nor weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Do you feel that being a Christian offers something distinctive to adoption or fostering work? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Yes *Please go to question 13.*

No *Please go to Section C.*

13. How can a Christian parent be distinctive?

14. What, if any, support have you received from a church or other Christian people? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

Section C – Being Assessed

15. How many social work agencies or authorities have you worked with? *Please tick ONE answer.*

One agency or authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
Two agencies or authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three or more agencies or authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Please give the names of the agencies or authorities who have assessed you for adoption or fostering.

17. During the assessment process(es), before you became a foster or adoptive parent, did the social worker discuss issues of faith with you? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Yes *Please go to question 18.*

No *Please go to Section D.*

18. What aspects of church, faith or spirituality were discussed? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

19. In your experience, were expressions of faith a positive or negative factor in your assessment? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither positive nor negative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly negative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very negative	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Which, if any, aspects of faith caused social workers to be concerned about you as prospective parents? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

Section D – Impact of the Adoption and Children Act 2002

The numbers of children available for adoption is increasing. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 expands the range of adults able to apply to adopt children.

21. In your opinion, which adults should be allowed to apply for assessment as adoptive or foster parents. *Please tick all that apply.*

Married couples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heterosexual, unmarried couples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lesbian couples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay, male couples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single females	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single males	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. What are your major concerns, if any, about expanding the range of adult adopters and foster carers? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

23. How can more children find permanent homes, if they cannot be with their birth families? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

Section E – About you

24. Are you:

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. How old are you? Please tick ONE answer.

21-29 years old	<input type="checkbox"/>
30-39 years old	<input type="checkbox"/>
40-49 years old	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 years or older	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. What was your marital status when you were approved to adopt or foster? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Married	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-habiting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single	<input type="checkbox"/>

27. How many children have you fostered and/or adopted? *Please write the number in the box.*

Adopted children	<input type="text"/>
Long-term foster children	<input type="text"/>
Short-term foster children	<input type="text"/>

Section F – Consent and Confidentiality

This section concerns the use of information contained in the survey. By signing at the bottom of this document you are making the following agreements:

- My contribution will be kept safely and securely with access only to those with permission from the researcher, Rev Sarah L Lamb.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time by contacting the researcher.
- I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to Rev Sarah L Lamb.

Please tick those that apply:

Either...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **without** preservation of anonymity,

or...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **with strict** preservation of anonymity.

Either... I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher,

or... I am not willing to be interviewed by the researcher

Name (*please print*):

Signed:.....

Date.....

Telephone:.....

E-mail:.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. If you would like to make any further comments please attach a piece of paper. Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

Appendix 3

This survey was originally produced as a folded A3 sheet for ease of distribution and completion. The specific content of the survey is accurately reproduced here for reference.

Project title:	The Ethics and Theology of Contemporary Christian Adoption		
Name of researcher:	Rev Sarah L Lamb		
Institution:	Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University		
Contact Address:	1 Loughbrow Park, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2QD.		
Contact details:	Tel: 01434 604404	Email: slamb21652@aol.com	
Description of research project:	This survey forms part of a research PhD that explores the theology of adoption and the work of Christian people in this field: adopters, social workers and adoption agencies. This data will augment research into the history of adoption, adoption legislation and explore if Christianity can make a particular contribution in this field.		

A SURVEY OF ADOPTION SOCIAL WORKERS

Please answer all sections.

Section A – About Being a Social Worker

1. What is the full name of the adoption agency by whom you are employed?
2. Is this adoption agency a voluntary or a local authority agency? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Voluntary adoption agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority Agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>please specify</i>) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How long have you worked in adoption social work? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Less than 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 - 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 and 9 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 years or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. What aspects of faith and spirituality have been covered in the training you have received as a social worker? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

Section B – About Being a Christian

5. What is your denomination? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Anglican	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent Evangelical	<input type="checkbox"/>
No denomination	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methodist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious Society of Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
Roman Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Salvation Army	<input type="checkbox"/>
United Reformed Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>please specify</i>) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What is the frequency of your attendance at church (including worship services and mid-week church groups)? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Twice weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fortnightly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special occasions only	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Please define your spirituality using any of these words or additional words of your own choosing: *open, progressive, orthodox, catholic, liberal, traditional, evangelical, conservative,...*

8. Does your faith have an influence on your work? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very strong influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly strong influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither strong nor weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very weak influence	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Do you feel that being a Christian offers something distinctive to adoption work?

Yes *Please go to question 10.*

No Please go to question 11.

10. How can a Christian social worker be distinctive?

11. Do aspects of your work discriminate against Christian social workers?

Yes Please go to question 12.

No Please go to question 13.

12. Which aspects of your work discriminate against Christian social workers?

Section C – Matters of Faith and Spirituality

13. How important is to nurture a child's spirituality, after adoption? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very important	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly important	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither important nor unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very unimportant	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. In your experience, are expressions of faith a positive or negative factor in assessing prospective adopters? *Please tick ONE answer.*

Very positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither positive nor negative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly negative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very negative	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Which, if any, aspects of faith cause adoption workers to be concerned about prospective adopters? *Please give as full an answer as you can.*

16. In your opinion, can the articulation of a strong faith lead to decisions against the approval prospective adopters and, if so, do you consider this to be discrimination?

Section D – Impact of the Adoption and Children Act 2002

17. In the consultation phase preceding the Adoption and Children Act 2002 how did your agency respond to the discussion expanding the range of adults able to apply to adopt children?

18. With regard to approving prospective adopters, which issues have been specifically discussed by your agency? Which issues are agency policy? *Please tick all of the answers that are known to you.*

	<i>Discussed</i>	<i>Approved Policy</i>
Christian adopters		
Non-Christian adopters		
Racial mix of adoptive parents / adopted child		
Maximum age		
Minimum age		
Homosexual couples		
Single-parents		
Unmarried heterosexual couples		

19. In your opinion, which aspect of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 presents a Christian Adoption Agency with the greatest challenges?

Section E – Consent and Confidentiality

This section concerns the use of information contained in the survey. By signing at the bottom of this document you are making the following agreements:

- My contribution will be kept safely and securely with access only to those with permission from the researcher, Rev Sarah L Lamb.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time by contacting the researcher.
- I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to Rev Sarah L Lamb.

Please tick those that apply:

Either...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **without** preservation of anonymity,

or...

I give my permission for the information I have given to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **with strict** preservation of anonymity.

Either... I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher,

or... I am not willing to be interviewed by the researcher

Name (*please print*):

Signed:.....

Date.....

13 Telephone:.....

.....

E-mail:.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. If you would like to make any further comments please attach a piece of paper. Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

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