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Protection Against Good Intentions: The Catholic Role in the Campaign to Ban Proxy Adoption, 1956–1961

Abstract: The debate over the practice of proxy adoption sheds light on changing notions of proper intercountry adoption practices and standards of family planning as they developed in the mid-twentieth century. The practice of proxy adoption was born out of a loophole in U.S. immigration legislation, initially used by Americans to adopt European orphans after World War II. After the Korean War, the practice was again utilized to bring Korean children in even greater numbers to the United States. Through proxy adoption, adoptive parents bypassed the standard checkpoints of the adoption process as established by U.S. social welfare agencies. Although initially hailed as a humane practice, proxy adoption was ultimately banned in 1961 after a successful antiproxy adoption campaign waged by a coalition of social welfare workers, Catholic leaders, and U.S. senators. The role of Catholic agencies in this debate is essential, yet remains largely unexplored. This article sheds light on this significant and underresearched history of the Catholic institutions involved in the proxy adoption debate.

The Catholic agencies, namely the National Catholic Welfare Conference and the Catholic Committee for Refugees, stood apart from both the government social welfare establishment and other humanitarian actors. Their actions must instead be understood through the context of their own institutional history of domestic social

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welfare programs and overseas humanitarian work, dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This article analyzes their relationship with the U.S. social welfare establishment, as well as joint advocacy efforts to reform intercountry adoption practices.

Keywords: intercountry adoption, Korea, proxy adoption, Catholic, social welfare, Korean War

In the aftermath of the Korean War, as abject scenes of war-torn poverty flooded U.S. media outlets, many Americans felt compelled to rescue Korean children by adopting them as their own. However, no permanent legislation yet existed regarding the intercountry adoption of foreign children in the United States, leaving legislators and humanitarians with little precedent to reference when attempting to process the adoptions of Korean children.¹ Social welfare officials, religious humanitarians, and government leaders debated over the appropriate standards and regulations for intercountry adoption practices of Korean children—specifically, over the merits and legality of proxy adoption—a practice that allowed adoptive parents to vest an individual with the power of attorney, and, through that individual, adopt children. Using proxy adoption, parents could legally adopt children sight unseen. This practice upended decades of progress in standardizing and regulating adoption practices in the United States, and the controversy that ensued brought competing value systems to a head.

Though American media outlets and politicians lauded proxy adoption as a humanitarian practice in 1955, by 1961 Congress banned its practice, citing many cases of negligent and abusive adoptions by proxy. Proxy adoption practitioners initially found advocates among American citizens, journalists, and humanitarian volunteers. These advocates believed that proxy adoption was an effective humanitarian measure to address the crisis of human suffering in Korea. They considered the existing adoption process, as practiced by social welfare officials, to be too slow and mired in unnecessary bureaucracy, especially in light of the dire human need in Korea. And for a time, proxy adoption advocates gained public approval and favorable coverage from American media outlets. However, through a joint coalition effort by leaders from social welfare and Catholic organizations, proxy adoption came to be seen as a rash and naive practice, lacking sufficient safeguards and protective regulatory measures. Catholic and social welfare leaders convinced the American public and congressional leaders that proxy adoption in fact endangered the children it was meant to help.

In the nineteenth century, adoptions in the United States were largely unregulated, as most parents were hesitant to formalize adoptions through legal methods because of the social stigma and financial costs attached to adoption.² Catholic agencies were among the few organizations that facilitated adoptions within their communities at that time. Catholic leaders sought to ensure that children of the Catholic faith would be placed in Catholic adoptive families. However, their control over adoptions was challenged in the first half of the twentieth century by the advent of the social welfare establishment, represented mainly by the U.S. Children's Bureau (USCB), a federal agency established by Congress in 1912, and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), a national organization established in 1921.³ Social welfare officials from the USCB and the CWLA attempted to gain intellectual and administrative control over the practice of adoption.⁴ Family life was no longer considered a purely private matter, but had become a matter of public interest. State and federal officials turned their attention to regulating adoptions and promoted the notion that social welfare processes could be rationalized and controlled.⁵

By the time of the Korean War, social welfare organizations enforced a standard set of guidelines for proper termination of parental rights of the child's birth parents, evaluations of the adoptive parents, and evaluative periods to determine the adoptee's adjustment.⁶ Proxy adoption, however, allowed adoptive parents to bypass this process and adopt a Korean child without the involvement of any official social welfare agency. Because the practice eschewed the regulatory hand of the state, proxy adoption was antithetical to the increasingly scientific and standardized social welfare regulations.

In the proxy adoption debate, Harry Holt, a farmer from Oregon, figures prominently as an individual who challenged regulatory measures and standardized practices set by the social welfare establishment. He criticized social welfare organizations for being overly bureaucratic and bypassed their regulations in order to adopt Korean children by proxy for other American parents.⁷ In the years following the Korean War, Holt brought thousands of Korean children to the United States without using any social welfare agency. Initially, his efforts were widely praised by U.S. media outlets as effective and immediate aid for the Korean crisis. Many scholars have analyzed Holt's adoption efforts in Korea and his impact on the development of intercountry adoption more generally. Christina Klein highlights connections between Holt's efforts and the desire of American parents to forge emotional connections with Asians in the context of the Cold War.⁸ Klein argues that an

Orientalist culture flourished during the Cold War as an anticommunist discourse, which provides important context for the history of intercountry adoption.⁹ And in her monograph on Korean adoption, Arissa Oh analyzes the religious aspects of Holt's work, specifically within the context of "Christian Americanism."¹⁰ While Holt was the figurehead of the Christian Americanist project, Oh writes, he himself was not a Christian Americanist.¹¹ Holt's primary concern was that the adoptive families be "saved" and "born again" Christians.¹² Christian Americans practiced their humanitarianism by infusing their religious beliefs with a desire to improve America's reputation globally, whereas pure Christians believed that a Christian family's love could transcend religious and racial differences. For example, the American writer Pearl S. Buck, a prominent Christian Americanist figure, urged American parents to adopt Korean children as a fulfillment of their patriotic duty.¹³

This article will make a further distinction between these two groups and Catholic agencies. Catholic agencies, mainly represented by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) and its subsidiary agency, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), had a long history of social charitable work dating back to the late 1800s, unlike Holt, whose efforts started in 1955.¹⁴ Catholic institutions stood apart from other religious and social welfare groups, and their actions must be understood through the context of their own institutional history of domestic social welfare programs and overseas humanitarian work. Their role is an interesting one, yet it is unexplored by most of the secondary literature on Korean intercountry adoption. Catholic agencies opposed Holt's proxy adoption efforts, aligning themselves instead with the social welfare establishment. Catholic leaders not only denounced proxy adoption, but they also actively participated in the campaign to pass a congressional ban on proxy adoption. This article will focus on the Catholic role in the proxy adoption debate and will analyze their actions through the lens of their long-term institutional interests and relationship with the social welfare establishment.

The racialization of the intercountry adoption process and the role of the Korean government are worthy of scrutiny in their own right, but are beyond the scope of this article.¹⁵ This article is instead situated in the literature on the history of the social welfare establishment and Catholic charities in the United States. Using archival research primarily from congressional and Catholic institutional archives, this article addresses the Catholic response to the increasing rationalization and standardization of social welfare standards—the "scientific charity" development—in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶

The inability of U.S. immigration law to meet the growing demands of the adopted Korean children and the rise of maverick humanitarians disrupted the progressive rationalization of American adoption. Catholic leaders were forced to maneuver these new circumstances and find a way to resolve their institutional interests with the changing times. Though they continued to strengthen their alliance with social welfare establishment groups by denouncing proxy adoption, Catholic leaders were also careful to protect their institutional autonomy from the growing reach of federal control. Analysis of the Catholic role in the proxy adoption debate is crucial for understanding how private religious charities negotiated their control over social services in an era of increasing government intervention. This article will show that Catholic participation in the proxy adoption ban was instrumental in affirming their standing as an independent social services organization in the United States.

MODEST BEGINNINGS OF THE CATHOLIC ADOPTION PROCESS BEFORE 1956

The international arm of the NCWC, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), worked closely with a small number of international NGOs and other religious agencies to provide relief for Korean orphans affected by the war. Initially, these aid groups did not practice intercountry adoption, but instead focused their relief efforts on providing clothing, monetary aid, and food donations. In one aid organization's pamphlet to collect aid, the orphans were described as the "innocent victims of cruel and unprovoked aggression."¹⁷ This rhetoric typifies the depoliticized accounts of the orphans' suffering as popularized by U.S. media outlets. Eleana Kim argues that this phenomenon of depoliticization precipitated the "collapse of egocentric motives into altruistic discourse," thereby transforming the Korean orphan into a "sentimentalized figure" and helpless "war waif" in the popular imagination.¹⁸ For example, in 1955, several students in New York were so moved by the suffering of Korean children, they "adopted" a Korean girl named Ah Jong through the Save the Children Foundation program, and sent her monthly donations and Christmas gifts. These humanitarian efforts were infused with familial warmth; the students and teacher referred to themselves as Ah Jong's "47 Ma's and Pa's." The teacher described this unique intimacy: "[Ah Jong] has brought us a warmth and spirit, both individually and as a group, that none of us has ever experienced before."¹⁹ By personalizing U.S.-Asian relations in terms of familial love, American citizens and journalists reframed American

involvement in Asian countries as one of benevolence and love, rather than imperialist self-interest.²⁰

Following this wave of sentimentalized depictions of Korean orphans, Catholic families began to inquire about possibilities to adopt Korean children. One pair of American Catholic parents wrote directly to a Korean orphanage inquiring about a Korean orphan girl.²¹ They had learned about her through a bulletin announcement posted by an American soldier stationed in Korea. The parents described themselves as a “well-qualified and happy Catholic family” with two children attending university, and two younger children at home. The mother wrote that she was motivated to adopt because she was unable to have more children of her own, and felt that she had “so much love left to share with another child.”²² She explained that their family preferred a little girl adoptee because of their youngest daughter: “The adjustment should be easier for our little adopted child, and we know it would bring us much happiness in our home to have another daughter.”²³ Other families also responded to this same bulletin posting and put forth their cases for adoption by focusing on their existing family dynamics, rather than citing any nationalist or other lofty principles. One mother wrote, “My husband and I have two adopted children, a ten year old boy and a three year old girl. A five year old girl would fit between the two beautifully.”²⁴ Another family writes, “We already have three little ones, and we feel we need another little girl to round out our family.”²⁵

In other adoption cases, racial matching was an explicit factor. Catholic officials often faced difficulty finding homes for mixed-race African American–Korean and Filipino–Korean orphans. A Filipino–American soldier wrote to the NCWC asking for their help in adopting a Korean orphan boy. The Catholic official stationed in Korea wrote to the headquarters in New York, asking whether their organization could facilitate this adoption, especially given the difficulty of placing Filipino–Korean children with families. The official explained that the little boy resembles the soldier and would therefore make a “perfect match.”²⁶

In order to facilitate these adoptions on behalf of Catholic families, Catholic aid programs utilized preexisting systems of communication with local Korean orphanages. Although Catholic aid programs had developed these communications systems during their decades of work overseas, their intercountry adoption process is best described as a reactive effort in response to numerous requests from parents in local parishes. Catholic officials only began to reach out to their Catholic contacts in Korea, asking

about the possibility of bringing children to the United States, after recognizing the high demand from their congregations' family members.

Because early Catholic adoptions would work on a case-by-case basis, the state of their ad hoc communications would sometimes lead to confusion. For example, the New York CRS headquarters would sometimes make plans for an orphan, without informing the CRS office in Seoul. The Catholic officials in Seoul would then try to place that same orphan with a family in Korea, only to find out that a local U.S. agency had already processed an adoption for that child by parents in the United States. In other cases, adoption plans for a Korean child by parents in the United States would fall through, but the child's file would not be referred back to the Seoul office. By 1958, two years into their intercountry adoption work, CRS officials in Seoul were still trying to settle communication channels with officials at the New York headquarters. Catholic officials in Korea continued to face confusion over whether a child was available for placement with a family in Korea, or if the child had already been assigned to a family in the United States. In 1958, a CRS officer in Seoul wrote to the New York office explaining their confusion and that they hoped to prevent further miscommunication. He requested that the New York office inform them whenever a child was referred out to a local U.S. agency.²⁷

Despite the improvised nature of communications between agency offices, Catholic leaders always paid careful attention to the legal aspects of intercountry adoption. In 1953, the director of a local Catholic organization wrote to Emil Komora, the executive director of the Catholic Committee for Refugees (CCR).²⁸ The director had received requests from parents in his local parish for help in adopting Korean children, and he was looking to the CCR for guidance.²⁹ Komora responded that the Refugee Relief Act allowed for four thousand orphans to immigrate to the United States, and that the law requires that the child's background in their home country verify that the child is free for adoption. As a leader of the CCR, Komora paid close attention to laws and regulations pertaining to adoption and ensured that local agencies did as well.

Even as they were in the incipient phase of processing adoptions, Catholic officials emphasized the importance of following state regulations. For example, Catholic leaders wrote that adoptive parents must obtain the approval of an official social welfare agency, and must follow an enforced probation period before finalizing the adoption. They also strictly enforced Section 5 of the Refugee Relief Act, which stated that a social welfare agency must sign an affidavit assuming responsibility in the case that the child is not ultimately adopted.³⁰

In order to process the adoption paperwork for a Korean child, Catholic social welfare officials used family registration forms to prove that adoptive parents had officially agreed to adopt the child. However, they emphasized that completing the family registration form did not amount to an official adoption; family registration was solely used for the purpose of obtaining travel documents: "We look upon this as a step necessary to obtaining a Korea passport and ultimately a visa for the child."³¹ The adoption could only be processed after the child arrived in the United States, and certain regulatory standards were met. Namely, the agency would observe the child in the adoptive family's home for a provisional period, and conduct a thorough inspection of the parents' backgrounds before completing any adoption.

Once the child was matched with a potential adoptive family, the parents were charged with the responsibility for paying the cost for the child's overseas and inland transportation. The costs amounted to an estimated \$253 in 1956 (around \$2,000 in today's costs).³² Many parents, however, were unable to pay such a large sum. In their attempt to subsidize these travel costs, Catholic leaders worked closely with social welfare agencies. Both the NCWC and the International Social Service (ISS), a nongovernmental social welfare organization, needed help paying for the transportation costs of children who were being processed for adoption. Though many children were eligible for visas under the Refugee Relief Act, no federal government funds had been allocated as subsidies for the children's transportation costs. Together, the ISS and the NCWC petitioned the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) for funding to subsidize the costs of transporting orphans to the United States.³³ They managed to obtain the support of a UNKRA official who requested that the UNKRA donate \$50,000 to the NCWC and the ISS.³⁴ The official suggested that the UNKRA help both these organizations by siphoning off money from other projects. It is significant to note here that Catholic agencies not only worked in close concert with an international aid organization like the UNKRA, but that they did so alongside an official social welfare agency, the ISS. This close relationship between Catholic groups and social welfare organizations was not only a valuable asset for both groups in subsidizing transportation costs, but would also prove to be a significant factor in later reforms of intercountry adoption.

As discussed, humanitarian aid for Korean children initially took the form of monetary aid and clothing donations. Adoption was not a common practice and did not seem to be the inevitable option for aiding Korean children. That adoption would become the most popularly discussed aid option in 1961 was largely the result of state-level political maneuvering, the media's

depoliticized and sentimental depictions of Korean children, and the actions of the Korean government.³⁵ As American media outlets continued to fixate on Koreans' rejection and hostility toward Korean biracial children, inter-country adoption to the United States became a more common practice. In 1955, *Ebony* reported that, in Korea, "Racial purity is a deeply entrenched social fetish."³⁶ American citizens, reading these articles or hearing stories from army men returning from Korea, would write to their senators or religious leaders to ask for specific types of Korean children.³⁷ Whether the parents were motivated by nationalism, sentiment, or a desire to add to their families, the number of parents' requests grew. The arrival of an Oregonian farmer in Korea later that year would catalyze the rapid growth of Korean adoption and force Catholic and social welfare organizations to seek legal recourse to enforce their standards.

THE "TIRED HUMANITARIAN": HARRY HOLT'S ADOPTION PROCESS

When Angela Sonaggere, a Catholic social welfare official stationed in Korea, met with Harry Holt in 1956, she had already heard of his adoption efforts through news stories. The NCWC had provided overseas aid through its satellite organization, the CRS, since the 1940s; however, Holt had gained greater publicity that year for adopting eight Korean orphans in one trip. Sonaggere believed that Holt was "now engaged in a wholesale 'round-up' " of more Korean orphans.³⁸ He had returned to Korea on a purported mission to help as many American parents as he possibly could to adopt orphans, and asked Sonaggere if the Catholic orphanages would turn over orphans to him. He mentioned that he had heard several complaints from American Catholic couples who claimed that the NCWC had been slow to respond to their requests. Holt thought he might be able to help these parents adopt immediately if Catholic orphanages transferred orphans to his adoption program. Although Sonaggere turned down his offer, the meeting ended amicably. Holt complimented the NCWC for their adoption work, which he deemed to be speedier than the work of government social welfare organizations like the ISS. Holt believed that the NCWC's home investigations to approve adoptive parents were much more efficient than the ISS's cumbersome and bureaucratic methods. When Sonaggere later wrote back to the NCWC offices in New York, she shared her private suspicions that the American Catholic parents using Holt's services had only turned to Holt after Catholic agencies decided they were unfit or ineligible to be adoptive parents.

Holt had no social work training, and was not associated with any of the social welfare organizations that had been working on intercountry adoption since World War II—namely, the ISS and the USCB. Holt learned about the plight of Korean orphans through a local film screening on the Korean War.³⁹ Specifically, scenes of abandoned, mixed-race GI-babies—children of American GI men and Korean women—affected Holt. Bertha Holt later reflected on their reaction to the film, “[Harry] was motionless and tense. I knew every scene had cut him like a knife. There is so much we have never known. We had never heard of such poverty and despair.”⁴⁰ Stricken by the orphans’ suffering on the war-torn peninsula, the Holts traveled to South Korea and adopted eight children. At the time, immigration laws limited American parents to adopting two children abroad, but Holt enlisted the support of Oregonian Senator Richard Neuberger in order to bypass this quota.

Initially, mainstream media publications framed Holt’s work as a valiant effort to bypass state bureaucracy and praised proxy adoption as a commendable humanitarian act. The *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed that Holt had “made something of life,” and described him as the “Adoption-by-Proxy Founder” who “shepherds waifs to new homes.”⁴¹ The *New York Times* described Holt as a “tired humanitarian” who had fought the state bureaucracy, which prevented adoption of more than two children, and eventually prevailed by adopting eight: “‘Oh, I’m tired,’ Mr. Holt said, with an orphan in each arm on his landing at Portland. ‘But I’m awfully happy.’”⁴² He was lauded as an individual who managed to overcome the bureaucratic hindrances of immigration law through sheer determination and will: “Holt went to Korea early in 1955. He found eight children quickly. But then he ran into the immigration laws. . . . He appealed to Oregon’s congressional delegation. Congress passed a special law, authorizing his adoption of the eight.”⁴³

Holt not only garnered favor among journalists, but he also gained support from hopeful adoptive parents. Through his letters to supporters (his “Dear Friends” letters), Holt encouraged American parents to write to their congressional representatives urging them to pass legislation that would allow orphans to immigrate in greater numbers. Holt also gained the support of Senator Neuberger, who helped him bypass the immigration quota laws. By making a sentimental case and emphasizing the situation’s dire urgency, Holt convinced Neuberger of his mission’s worthiness and the need for expedient action. Holt petitioned Neuberger to encourage Congress to allow this adoption of Korean children by making sentimental appeals and conveying a sense of urgency: “The only way these children can be helped is at once; next year may be too late. I’m sending you the names and pictures of the little ones,

hoping that by your having them, you will be able to ask that an exception be made in their case; it might save their lives.” Holt convinced Neuberger that, unless these Korean children were immediately adopted by American parents, they would certainly die. He also appealed to Neuberger’s humanitarian imagination by sending him photos of the children. Holt wrote, “These little ones do not thrive well here because they do not have the resistance to parasites and disease that full-blooded Koreans have.”⁴⁴ Holt, however, does not provide any medical evidence or specific analysis of the health risks faced by Korean children. This description capitalized on the stereotypical perception of the Korean environment at that time—as dirty and unfit for children. Holt’s informal assessment of the situation in Korea stands in stark contrast to the social welfare establishment’s later reports that relied on heavily detailed case studies. However, as unsubstantiated Holt’s claims were, they were nevertheless effective in helping Holt to achieve his objectives.

After Holt successfully adopted eight Korean children by receiving congressional approval to bypass the quota, he expanded his adoption efforts to meet the demands of other American parents who had grown impatient with social welfare services and wanted to expedite the adoption process. The Holt Adoption Program offered a speedier route through the use of proxy adoption. By granting Holt the power of attorney, adoptive parents did not have to travel to Korea, but could adopt a Korean child using Holt as their proxy. The Holts also used considerably less regulation than Catholic and social welfare agencies in their investigation of adoptive parents in order to determine whether they were fit for adopting a child.⁴⁵ Senator Neuberger, as Holt’s ally, lauded Holt’s proxy adoption efforts and petitioned for the continued allowance of immigration of Korean children as nonquota immigrants. Similarly, the World Vision Overseas Director, stationed in Korea, described Holt’s proxy adoption efforts as a “worthy and humanitarian” mission, especially given the fact that the “mixed-blood,” unlike the “pure-blood,” orphans would not fit in Korean society and would have no viable future in Korea.⁴⁶

Holt hired a private agency to conduct home investigations in order to approve adoptive parents as fit for adopting a child. After obtaining the power of attorney from hopeful couples, Holt traveled to Korea to adopt orphans on behalf of Americans. This method of proxy adoption was born out of a loophole in the Refugee Relief Act.⁴⁷ Although Holt’s proxy adoption efforts continued to garner favorable press and political support, the Catholic and social welfare groups believed that Holt’s hasty actions seemed humanitarian but were ultimately naive. American parents who used proxy adoption might have had good intentions, as most sought to adopt children out of love;

however, Katherine B. Oettinger, the head of USCB, cautioned, "Love is not always enough."⁴⁸

The social welfare and Catholic officials' public disapproval of proxy adoption, like Oettinger's, was more often empathetic than not. The practice of proxy adoption was deemed to be a case of good intentions gone awry. The practice represented a deviation from the progressive standardization of adoption practices, which characterized the trends in social welfare work in the earlier half of the twentieth century. The Catholic organizations, namely the NCWC and CCR, allied with the social welfare establishment groups in formulating a strategy to ban proxy adoption.

In order to understand the Catholic officials' actions throughout this process, it is essential to use their institutional history as context. As previously discussed, Catholic groups had always followed legal guidelines issued by government agencies. Thus, proxy adoption, as a deviation from these standards, was an unacceptable practice for Catholic organizations. However, unlike the state officials, Catholic leaders had a unique agenda as a religious organization. Their charitable efforts were neither purely nationalist nor purely humanitarian, but deeply intertwined with the future of the Catholic Church. Their underlying institutional motives played a significant role in shaping their practices. While Holt's mission was to bring as many orphans to the United States as possible and speedily approve American parents for adoption, the NCWC and CCR only provided their adoption services to Catholic families.⁴⁹

By the time of the Korean War, Catholic agencies had stationed several representatives in Korea who acted as liaisons with their national offices in Washington, D.C. These national offices oversaw the enforcement of uniform policies in all regional Catholic social service offices. In 1954, an American sergeant stationed in Korea wrote to Emil Komora, the CCR executive director, asking for legal guidance in adopting a Korean child. The twenty-four-year-old military sergeant wrote that he was a devout, church-going Episcopalian. He had started to care for a Korean child while on duty, and knew that the Korean mother did not have the resources to properly care for the child. The sergeant explained that he would not only be able to better provide childcare, but he would also receive financial and emotional assistance from his parents in the United States. Despite the sergeant's qualifications and attachment to the child, Komora turned him down and responded that the NCWC would only help Catholic parents adopt children.⁵⁰

And in the face of other sentimental language, Komora did not budge. A Catholic representative in Korea wrote to Komora about an older couple

whose adoption application was rejected by the Catholic Charities, but seemed “sincere and truly touching.” Catholic Charities had rejected the couple’s application on the grounds that they were too old to care for a child, and the representative asked Komora if the NCWC could help these parents instead: “It would seem a shame if some little waif here were denied a happy home so filled with love.”⁵¹ Komora responded that it would be impossible to make an exception for these parents, given the charities’ initial rejection. Despite the sentimentality of petitions or the children’s needs for guardians, Komora consistently adhered to institutional policies.

By 1958, the differences between Holt’s and Catholic agencies’ adoption practices were stark, and whatever uneasy friendliness had existed between them in 1956 had dissipated. The NCWC asked their counterparts in Korea to cease cooperating with Holt, and Holt began to criticize the NCWC’s work in the “Dear Friends” letters that he sent to all his adoptive parent clients. Holt wrote that while his adoption program acted in the orphans’ best interests, the NCWC was being “far too technical” and their delays were harming the livelihood of Korean children.⁵²

Although Holt had initially referred all Catholic families to the NCWC, he said that most of these families returned to him because of his speedier methods. He claimed that Catholic nuns at Korean orphanages were eager to cooperate with his adoption efforts, but NCWC officials stepped in and forbade orphanages from giving Holt any children. Holt wrote, “I saw hundreds of little girls in an orphanage in Taegue where the Sister said she would do ‘almost anything to have them adopted into homes,’ but the NCWC refused to release these children to us.”⁵³ He also criticized the NCWC for its policy of only helping Catholic children: “As far as we are concerned, a Christian is a Christian whether they call themselves Catholic or Protestant. We are firm believers of unity of the Body of Christ. The scripture says, ‘Is Christ divided?’ we are extremely sorry that Satan has been able to divide the testimony of Christians, but we know that there is no division in the Body of Christ.”⁵⁴

As a national institution with decades of domestic and international experience, the NCWC used tactics that fell in line with their broader institutional vision: to promote the Catholic faith. Their institutional interests distinguished their adoption policies from Holt’s methods. While Holt focused on the children’s suffering, emphasizing expediency and the potential for universal Christian love, Catholic leaders saw intercountry adoption as a part of their larger scheme of humanitarian work, and pursued the strategic options that best fit their long-term institutional interests. As Holt’s public image grew, publicity for his adoption work exploded in the U.S. media, and Holt

increasingly took to publicly criticizing Catholic and social welfare agency tactics. His adoption work came into direct conflict with the interests of Catholic and social welfare leaders who eventually took steps to put an end to Holt's proxy adoption efforts.

TURNING TIDE: PUBLICIZING THE ILLS OF PROXY ADOPTION

Between 1955 and 1961, Holt conducted 57 percent of the intercountry adoptions of Korean children in the United States.⁵⁵ In 1955, before he began facilitating proxy adoptions, the total number of Korean children adopted abroad was 59. Just one year later, he processed the adoptions of 211 children to the United States. And in 1957, Holt surpassed every other agency in the number of adoptions he facilitated; of the total 486 Korean children adopted in 1957, 322 children were adopted through the Holt Adoption Program. Holt not only increased the numbers of Korean children being brought to the United States, but he also catalyzed the growth of intercountry adoptions by drawing public attention to his work.

Catholic and social welfare officials, who had long disapproved privately of Holt's methods, began to publicly oppose Holt's proxy adoption work. In 1957, Komora wrote to regional directors that Catholic agencies should not participate in proxy adoptions.⁵⁶ He also advised Howard J. Carroll, the NCWC general secretary, that the NCWC should officially stand against proxy adoption: "As an agency we would be against proxy adoptions, as it would be best to have the sponsors approved by a child welfare agency prior to placement."⁵⁷ Catholic leaders and social welfare officials began to utilize their political clout and their relationships with congressional representatives in order to pursue a legal ban on proxy adoption. In this campaign to ban proxy adoption, the close relationship between Catholic and social welfare groups proved to be an essential determinant in shaping the proxy adoption debate and its outcome.

Catholic leaders found that Holt's growing efforts posed a threat to the reputation of Catholic adoption services in local communities. One Catholic couple from San Francisco wrote to the NCWC complaining that they had requested to adopt a Korean girl, but had still not received any response from Catholic services. Holt had written to these parents and claimed that Catholic orphanages in Korea refused to release any orphans to him even though he had successfully processed many adoptions. The parents asked why Catholic organizations would not release these children who were "badly in need of good homes."⁵⁸ When Sister Philomena forwarded this

letter her counterpart in San Francisco, she remarked, “It is the old story—the Holt is out for trouble.”⁵⁹

In reacting to Holt, Catholic organizations were guided by the policies that they had developed and followed from the turn of the twentieth century, when they faced the threat posed by the rise of government social welfare organizations. Since its founding in 1917, the NCWC faced the challenge of maintaining control over social services to Catholic families, especially after the founding of the U.S. Children’s Bureau (USCB) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA).⁶⁰ Catholic organizations had been the predominant caregiver to the poor and needy, but with the advent of New Deal policies, government services began to provide unemployment relief and old-age insurance to the same communities previously served by Catholic organizations. However, in decisions about childcare and adoption, Catholic charities earned a significant voice in the development of American welfare.⁶¹ Through the growth of social welfare legislation in the 1930s, Catholic groups learned to master special interest and reform politics, and stayed the reach of state and federal control in key social welfare legislation.⁶² Thus, by 1956, when Harry Holt came on to the scene of adoption, Catholic leaders had long-established relationships with government social welfare groups, and they had developed vested interests in maintaining their position as leaders of social services. Catholic participation in the campaign to ban proxy adoption was a continuation of their long-standing support of government-approved adoption standards for humanitarian work overseas.

In June 1958, leaders from religious and social welfare organizations sought to enact legislation that would ban proxy adoption and met in New York to discuss their agenda.⁶³ While legislative measures had successfully allowed orphans to immigrate as nonquota immigrants, Holt’s proxy adoption practices highlighted legislative shortcomings. The group concluded that they would advocate for an amendment of existing legislation to include an explicit ban on proxy adoption, and would do this by asking Congressman Francis Walter to propose a legislative amendment in Congress. Komora, who attended this meeting as the CCR representative, wrote to the NCWC headquarters, asking if the legal department would approve their participation in proposing this amendment to Congressman Walter.⁶⁴ Once they received approval from the NCWC legal department, Komora joined the committee to approach Walter about the amendment.⁶⁵ Walter had sponsored the McCarran-Walter Act six years before, and had since harbored a “known antipathy” toward proxy adoption and was eager to pass a law banning its practice.⁶⁶

At this time, the ISS and the CWLA released a joint report on a study of proxy adoption, in which they concluded that proxy adoption was “a long step backward in the development of sound adoption laws.”⁶⁷ The report, written by Laurin Hyde and Virginia P. Hyde, found that many Korean mothers and parents had given up their children without fully understanding that the separation would be permanent. The Hydes also criticized the proxy adoption process for failing to meet the needs of the child, and only satisfying the desires of adoptive parents: “The agents of proxy adoption are busy finding children for prospective parents, and the wishes of the prospective parents are the primary concern. However well-intentioned the parents may be, the adoption process becomes skewed, and children’s needs will not be met.”⁶⁸ The report’s conclusions reflected concerns in response to some of Holt’s parent-centric rhetoric. For example, in one of his “Dear Friends” letters in 1957, Holt promised parents that he would travel to Europe after more adoption legislation was passed in order to avoid the obstacles that impeded him in Korea. He wrote, “I still have hopes that we will be able to find some children somewhere.”⁶⁹

The report concluded that although parents had used proxy adoption to adopt children from Japan, Italy, Greece, Austria, and Germany, proxy adoption disproportionately affected Korean children. The Hydes suggested two reasons for this: first, Korea presented a particularly “desperate” case, given that so many of the children were “mixed-blood” offspring of American GI men and Korean women. And second, because the “dislocation and suffering ha[d] been most intense” in Korea, the pressure for immediate action was greater than in other countries.⁷⁰

Using case studies, the Hydes showed how proxy adoption posed a threat to adoptees’ safety because of the unregulated placement and the lack of safeguards in the event that the adoption failed. In many case studies, parents proved to be mentally unwell, physically unfit, or financially unstable. Often, these parents were ill-equipped to handle the cultural gaps and differences in physical appearance between themselves and their adopted children. Parents physically and emotionally abused the adopted children, abandoned or neglected them, and, in some cases, sent them away to other families. And while government social welfare and Catholic agencies were legally responsible for failures in adoptions they facilitated, in proxy adoption cases no agency or individual was responsible if the adoptive parents abandoned, neglected, or abused adoptees. The report found that children were not only left in unstable

situations, but were also placed in legal limbo, and detailed how adoptive parents were often not fully informed about their adopted children's physical and mental conditions. In some cases, the report found that adoptive parents did not understand the fundamental legal details of the adoption process.

The report emphasized that safeguards were especially important for the adoption of foreign children. Given that foreign children often spent their early years in extreme poverty or deprivation, their transition to a new country was bound to be extraordinarily challenging. Trained social workers were essential for ensuring that adoptive parents were equipped to handle the transition, and would respond with “warmth and flexibility in spite of racial and cultural differences.”⁷¹ While the Hydes acknowledged the importance of “prompt and heroic” measures for children in need, they cautioned, “One must also know that removing a child from a bad situation and placing him in another that is bad in a different way can only add to his ultimate damage.”⁷²

Catholic agencies circulated this report internally after its release, and wrote to government officials supporting the proxy adoption ban. The NCWC wrote directly to the Secretary at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) detailing the dangers of proxy adoption. They echoed the Hydes's report and argued that proxy adoptions were inherently dangerous for adopted children.⁷³

A few days after they met in New York, leaders from Catholic agencies and social welfare groups testified together before Congress on the perils of proxy adoption. This congressional hearing on June 23, 1959, was especially significant because the temporary immigration legislation that allowed Korean orphans to immigrate as nonquota immigrants was set to expire on June 30, 1959.⁷⁴ At this hearing, both Catholic and social welfare leaders argued that proxy adoption was a harmful practice that should be banned by federal legislation. One official who worked with Greek adoptions said that proxy adoption had led to “international baby racketeering.”⁷⁵ In light of these negative consequences, the official argued that allowing proxy adoption practices to continue would be “morally and perhaps criminally wrongful.”⁷⁶ The head of the ISS also criticized proxy adoption practitioners for damaging the reputation of the United States abroad: “Some of our fellow citizens appear as though they were a breed of international baby snatchers. They make frantic visits to courts, to institutions, and I can assure you it is not building goodwill or a good name for the United States.”⁷⁷

By 1959, the media picked up on these criticisms and reported on the dangers of proxy adoption, moving away from the favorable portrayals of proxy adoption as a humanitarian act. Articles criticized proxy adoptions as haphazard, and wrote favorably of the social work establishment's efforts to standardize the process. These articles did not attack Holt directly, but rather criticized his proxy adoption process for lacking sufficient oversight. *The Washington Post* reported that proxy adoptions were often driven by the misguided intentions of both the adoption facilitator and the adoptive parents.⁷⁸ *The New York Times* described proxy adoptions as "risky" and cited the ISS's statements on the dangers of proxy adoption.⁷⁹ After the Hyde report was released, the *New York Times* also published the details of the report's findings, referring to proxy adoption as a "mail-order business abroad."⁸⁰

Media outlets also characterized the proxy adoption process as one rife with corruption. *The Washington Post* reported that proxy adoptions often involved brokers charging adoptive parents substantial fees.⁸¹ The *Chicago Defender* quoted a report from the Church World Service strongly denouncing proxy adoption: although the need in Korea reached "appalling proportions," the situation was worsened by proxy adoptions and, without high standards in adoption procedures, there was "needless suffering both to the orphans and adopting parents."⁸²

The overwhelming consensus in the media became that proxy adoption, though motivated by good intentions, was a dangerous practice and hazardous for adoptees. The CRS executive director, Edward Swanstrom, acknowledged that Holt was acting on a humanitarian impulse, but warned that such an impulse gone unchecked would result in negative consequences: "It seems to be a very charitable and desirable thing for a man to go over to Korea and bring back eight children and put them in with his own family, but let's worry about what might happen ten years from now. Say something happens to him or his wife. Who is going to provide for those eight children?"⁸³ This statement characterizes the heart of the message that overturned Holt's campaign; although Holt's intentions were admirable, the long-term consequences of unchecked humanitarian action could be tragic and irreparably harmful for adoptees.

By 1961, public opinion had turned against Holt's practices. Catholic organizations and social welfare groups played a crucial role in the campaign to ban proxy adoption. By conducting case studies on proxy adoption gone awry and publicizing its negative consequences, Catholic and social welfare officials managed to successfully lobby the proxy adoption ban through Congress.

THE "OLD BATTLE" OF GOVERNMENT VERSUS CHARITIES

Throughout the proxy adoption debate, Catholic leaders aligned themselves with the social welfare establishment; but in significant ways, they kept apart and used proxy adoption as a platform to protect their institutional autonomy from encroaching federal control. Though Catholic and social welfare officials worked together to successfully lobby the proxy adoption ban, they held different opinions about the potential involvement of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). While social welfare officials wanted this federal organization to oversee intercountry adoptions, Catholic officials preferred for individual states to maintain regulatory control. This tension began in the early twentieth century, when Catholic groups were forced to reconcile their social programs with the growing role of the government in social welfare services. Catholic leaders feared that religious considerations would be eliminated from social service provisions, and that Catholic leaders would be unable to look after the children in their communities. The Catholic Charities director, John O'Grady, argued that the spiritual care provided by Catholic social services was irreplaceable: "State workers have a certain mentality which makes it more difficult to provide religious care. Many workers say they do not have any responsibility for the care of these children and compare themselves to 'teachers in the public schools.'"⁸⁴

Catholic leaders viewed the expansion of the USCB in the 1940s as a threat to their adoption services for Catholic communities and opposed the establishment of USCB chapters in every local community. Although O'Grady understood that the USCB should service rural areas or other areas of special need, he felt that government intervention was unnecessary in areas where Catholics had historically provided childcare services. In 1946, O'Grady wrote, "In most centers, our agencies are used by local governments for the care of children and are compensated on a per capita basis. We have had a terrific struggle in maintaining this pattern. It is the old battle of the Government versus private charities."⁸⁵

In order to prevent a government takeover and to prove their capabilities as an autonomous childcare institution, Catholic Charities established a central diocesan agency and incorporated the development of "scientific charity" in their charitable work. Catholic leaders believed they could maintain their autonomy by incorporating the methodology and ideology of government social service work. Catholic priests began to train in the social sciences, and Catholic social workers implemented secular social work standards into their practices. For example, Edward Swanstrom attended the New York School of

Social Work and obtained his PhD at Fordham University before becoming the executive director of the CRS. Other Catholic social workers took up leadership positions in government agencies, state legislatures, city councils, and congressional committees.⁸⁶ The Catholic University of America also trained priests in social sciences and Catholic laywomen in social work. In 1910, Catholic leaders founded the National Conference of Catholic Charities in order to bring local organizations under one national umbrella and ensure that Catholic social workers were following state and national guidelines.⁸⁷ The overwhelming message that Catholic leaders sent to state officials was that Catholic organizations would adopt state-issued standards and could thus continue operating autonomously.

Their maneuvering paid off: Catholic leaders gained the respect of government officials and eventually helped to create state social welfare policies. The major social welfare organizations, the USCB and the CWLA, invited Catholic leaders for their input in shaping legislation and appointed Catholic social workers to internal leadership positions.⁸⁸ In 1946, the USCB head, Katharine Lenroot, reached out to the NCWC asking them to send a Catholic representative to sit on the National Commission on Children and Youth, showing how close their relationship had become. She wrote to Swanstrom explaining that the NCWC's perspective would be essential "for the experience of your organization in its work for children and youth."⁸⁹ In 1955, Catholic leaders also became prominent members of the CWLA Standards Project.⁹⁰ The Standards Project was the cornerstone of the midcentury conversation on defining adoption standards; it brought together social work experts, national organization representatives that worked with childcare, and professional groups that were considered to have the requisite knowledge and experience with child welfare practices.

However, despite the growing closeness between Catholic and government officials, Catholic leaders took steps to hedge the growth of federal control over adoption. Throughout the proxy adoption debate, Catholic groups continued to pursue their agenda of maximizing their institutional autonomy and maintaining control over social services for Catholic families. In his congressional statement in May 1957, Komora spoke on the importance of banning proxy adoption while emphasizing that Catholic social work should remain as autonomous as possible.⁹¹ Komora argued that, unlike other non-state agencies, the NCWC and the CCR had and would continue to uphold the professional safeguards for overseas adoption. While other adoption facilitators failed to cover financial costs or replace a child due to breakdown in original placement, Catholic groups consistently accepted full responsi-

bility for children. Speaking on behalf of Catholic leaders, Komora made the case that while the federal government could regulate the NCWC and the CCR by imposing standardized policies, further intervention would be unnecessary.⁹² Specifically, Komora hoped that the new legislation banning proxy adoption would also eliminate the ever-encroaching role of the Department of HEW in Catholic social services work.⁹³

In May 1959, the House passed HR 6118, which extended the temporary adoption law for two more years, allowing certain categories of immigrants afflicted with tuberculosis to be lawfully admitted. Congressman Walter and Senators James Eastland and John F. Kennedy planned to use this legislation as a vehicle to shape general adoption legislation by adding an amendment that would permit a two-year extension of orphans' legislation, terminate proxy adoptions, and vest regulatory authority in the Immigration and Naturalization Services agency at the Department of Justice, rather than with HEW. The NCWC legal department official, Harmon Burns, wrote that these amendment proposals met each of the sponsoring politicians' needs: Walter would eliminate proxy adoptions, Eastland would be satisfied that the legislation would not enlarge the program, and Kennedy would get public credit for supporting orphan legislation.⁹⁴ This amendment would also help the NCWC and the CCR because it would eliminate HEW's role in the oversight process, thus preserving the maximum amount of autonomy for Catholic social welfare organizations.

While Walter, Eastland, and Kennedy made this proposal, Senator Richard Neuberger and HEW Assistant Secretary Elliot Richardson recommended that the responsibilities for overseeing adoption be transferred from the Department of Justice to HEW.⁹⁵ Neuberger said that while he did not want to implement unnecessary oversight of the adoption process, he believed that HEW would be the federal agency best equipped to oversee intercountry adoptions. He argued that HEW would be more qualified than the Department of Justice to provide safeguards for proxy adoption and should thus be given the responsibility of issuing nonquota visas for orphan children.

Richardson followed by presenting a bill that would provide safeguards for the proxy adoption of orphans adopted after June 30, 1959, and vest the Secretary of HEW with sole responsibility for setting adoption standards and approving parents for adoption. Under his proposal, HEW would delegate the responsibilities for overseeing proxy adoptions and approving adoptive parents to the USCB. Richardson argued that the USCB would be equipped for overseeing adoptions nationwide because of

their existing relationships with government agencies and with a network of voluntary agencies at local, state, and international levels.⁹⁶ He bolstered his arguments for unifying the domestic and international adoption processes under a single federal agency by pointing to the agency's functional basis: "This responsibility would be vested in us on the basis that this is an undertaking that is exercised normally in the adoption process in this country by welfare agencies." Under this proposed bill, Richardson explained that proxy adoptions would still be possible, albeit with added safeguards. Ultimately, the House Committee on the Judiciary rejected Richardson and Neuberger's proposals and concluded that HEW should not manage the adoption process. The House Committee reasoned that giving HEW oversight over adoption processing would be an unproductive addition of another bureaucratic arm in a complicated process and recommended instead that adoption immigration procedures continue to be overseen solely by the Departments of State and Justice.⁹⁷ The House Committee's decision represented a significant win for Catholic leaders.

The ban on proxy adoption finally passed in 1961, as part of the first form of permanent legislation on intercountry adoption. Representatives from HEW resubmitted the proposal for HEW to take over managing intercountry adoptions in 1961, and their petition was again rejected. Congress instead decided to permanently vest responsibility for the orphan program in the Department of Justice, under the attorney general. Catholic agencies were thus able to maintain control over their adoption services, without further involvement of the federal government in their local offices. In September 1961, Congress approved Public Law 87-301, which required an adoptive parent to personally observe the adoptee child prior to or during the adoption proceeding. This provision prevented parents from adopting children through proxy, before ever having met the child in person.⁹⁸ That same year, the Immigration and Nationality Act was amended to grant non-quota status to eligible foreign orphans. Prior to this amendment, orphans were given nonquota visas on a temporary basis, and by granting nonquota status to alien orphans, this amendment gave intercountry adoption a permanent place in American legislation.

CONCLUSION

At its heart, the proxy adoption debate was driven by the question of translating good intentions into effective humanitarian practices. While social

welfare leaders and Catholic officials stressed the importance of regulated standards for intercountry adoption, other voluntary humanitarians and American citizens criticized these standards as too constrictive. At a 1960 symposium on “The Adoption of Oriental Children by American White Families,” a social science researcher asked: “What would be the worst thing that could happen to the child in a mediocre adoptive family as compared to his possible survival and best thing that could happen to him in Korea or Hong Kong? There are times where we over-differentiate and over-professionalize relative to the social needs. This is where our value systems have to be introduced again, even to the extent of suspending some of our finer work as professionals.”⁹⁹

The researcher’s comments illustrate the appeal of proxy adoption. The researcher, like thousands of other Americans, believed that a child’s livelihood would inevitably improve if she were removed from abject poverty and placed in a comfortable, albeit “mediocre,” American home. The researcher suggested that social welfare officials might have been better off suspending professional standards, given the levels of devastation and suffering on the Korean peninsula. This line of thinking helps explain the rapid growth of Holt’s proxy adoption work. Holt’s message was effective because of its simplicity: Korean children need loving homes. Sentimental depictions of orphans launched Holt’s cause into mainstream American media, and Holt’s humanitarianism and use of proxy adoption captured the imagination of the American public.

However, as proxy adoption continued, the American public realized that the consequences for suspending professional standards in adoption could be quite severe. Furthermore, the debate highlighted the dangers of utilizing sentimentality in humanitarian work and the potential for sentimentality to blind humanitarians from fully understanding the consequences of their actions. Emotional appeals to humanitarian action became suspect, as proof surfaced of the negative consequences of Holt’s good intentions. Ambitious and unregulated humanitarian action eventually gave way to standardized practices, and the proxy adoption debate was ultimately won over by the discourse of responsible humanitarianism.

The reigning regime of social work expertise began to dismiss sentiment as a distraction. Officials from established social work institutions, after working for decades in war-torn conflict zones, became familiar with abject conditions. In a 1961 report published by the Church World Service, officials considered this world-weariness to be an asset in humanitarian work: “The

sentimentality which marks so much of what is written about ‘orphans’ is happily absent. Because of their backgrounds, human suffering, squalor, and frailty were not unknown to the team.”¹⁰⁰ Standards in adoption oversight were heightened, and courts began denying parents’ petitions to bring in Korean children that they had adopted by proxy.¹⁰¹

Adoption experts from both Catholic and social welfare groups did not consider adoption to be an act of pure love and generosity, as Holt had, but stressed that adoption was a social act complicated by politics and community dynamics. They were concerned with the lasting impact that intercountry adoptions had on a larger community: “Adoption of children is a social matter in which the community has a direct and vital interest, and which, therefore, requires social and legal sanction.”¹⁰² Catholic and social welfare leaders agreed that adoption should be regulated, but they faced the challenging question of whether the era of the private charity was now over. Catholic leaders knew that the answer to this question would shape the future of Catholic social welfare work. And in order to preempt their potential loss of relevance, Catholic leaders aligned themselves with the reigning value system of standardization and regulation in adoption. However, while allying with the social welfare establishment, they also bolstered their institutional autonomy by limiting the influence of the federal government in their charitable work. By straddling the line between public and private charities, Catholic leaders helped to shape notions of responsible humanitarianism and private social work in the twentieth century.

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NOTES

1. Although the data is limited, the adoption of foreign children became increasingly prevalent after World War II. Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago, 2008), chap. 6. In the 1940s, most adopted children came from Europe, and in the next two decades most children came from Asia. Richard H. Weil, “International Adoptions: The Quiet Migration,” *International Migration Review* 18, no. 2 (1 July 1984): 276–93. Although the first U.S. provision for intercountry adoption was passed in 1945 in order to address the needs of refugees and unaccompanied minors from Europe, the 1953 Refugee Relief Act marked a watershed moment; unlike previous legislation, this act contained explicit adoption provisions. Kirsten Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice,” *International Migration Review* 34, no. 3 (1 October 2000): 907–49. Adoptive parents used proxy adoption to adopt children from Germany and Greece in the aftermath of World War II, but the use became widespread in Korea

after the passage of the 1953 Refugee Relief Act. Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York, 2013), 20, 86. Rachel Winslow argues that, between 1948 and 1961, immigration law became the chief vehicle for an improvised international adoption policy because conflicting state laws and a lack of federal or international adoption legislation created a policy vacuum. Rachel Winslow, "Immigration Law and Improvised Policy in the Making of International Adoption, 1948–1961," *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 319–49.

2. Ellen Herman describes the development of adoption, which had initially been considered a "simple humanitarian act that anyone might perform." Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 20. In 1900, there was little to no state supervision of child adoption in the United States, but by 1950 state control of adoption had become pervasive. Herman calls the new process "kinship by design," and defines it as a "campaign to rationalize kinship," which replaced sentimentality, intuition, accident, and common sense with professional management, scientific validation, and expanded public bureaucracy. Ellen Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 353. For discussion of the centrality of gender and the role of evangelical women in this rationalization process, see Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890–1945* (New Haven, 1995).

3. The bureau was founded in 1912 and later folded into the Social Security Administration in 1946.

4. In 1938, the CWLA published for the first time a set of adoption standards titled "Child-Placing in Families: A Manual for Students and Social Workers." Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the rationalizers debated with those who opposed regulated adoption over cases that involved children of racially and ethnically mixed heritage and children with physical and mental disabilities. This debate culminated in 1955 at a major national conference in Chicago that was intended to celebrate the "peaceful revolution" in American adoption. In 1958, the CWLA published a new set of standards, marking the standardizers and rationalizers' victory in American adoption.

5. Barbara Melosh writes extensively on this subject, and analyzes how social welfare officials created measurements of "fitness" based on financial, emotional, and physical health. She argues that these adoption officials, "the rationalizers," championed the idea of kinship by design and their work began and continued to be a racialized discourse. Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

6. For example, in 1925 the state agency Child Welfare League of America had standardized the number of required visits to observe the physical and emotional needs of child being met in the adoptive home (four per year) and established an official trial period of at least one year that must follow any adoption. Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization," 345.

7. Choy, *Global Families*, 87. Holt criticized social welfare groups for being against proxy adoption and encouraged adoptive parents to write to their senators in favor of proxy adoption.

8. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, 2003), 23.

9. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

10. Here I refer to the distinction that Arissa Oh makes in her article "A New Kind of Missionary Work: Christians, Christian Americanists, and The Adoption of Korean GI

Babies, 1955–1961,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3/4 (1 October 2005), 161–88, and in her book *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford, 2015), chap. 2.

11. Arissa Oh writes that although Harry Holt became emblematic of the Christian Americanist adoption movement, Holt “never articulated a connection between his Christian faith and nationalist beliefs.” Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 80.

12. Choy, *Global Families*, 85.

13. M. Jay Racusin, “Pearl Buck Pleads for Orphans: ‘Half -Americans Dying in Korea,”” *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 January 1959. Joan Danforth, “Orphans Not Wanted,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 October 1957.

14. Catholic Relief Services was originally founded as War Relief Services in 1943. The NCWC was originally founded as the National Catholic Welfare Council in 1917 and changed its name to Conference in 1922. Catholic Charities USA was founded in 1910.

15. For more on the racialization of intercountry adoption, see Kori Graves, “Domesticating Foreign Affairs: The African-American Family, Korean War Orphans, and Cold War Civil Rights” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2011). See also Laura Briggs, *Somebody’s Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham, 2012), and Kim Park Nelson, “Mapping Multiple Histories of Korean American Intercountry Adoption” (January 2009), *The U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS (USKI) Working Paper Series*. For more on the role of the Republic of Korea Government (ROKG), see Eleana Kim, “The Origins of Korean Adoption: Cold War Geopolitics and Intimate Diplomacy” (October 2009), *The U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS (USKI) Working Paper Series*. Kim writes that the ROKG actively supported the growth of intercountry adoption, given that their spending was highly skewed toward military programs, at the expense of social welfare programs.

16. I draw the term “scientific charity” from Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 15. See also Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls* for an analysis of social work institutions’ laying claim to scientific objectivity through the pathologization of single mothers.

17. American Relief for Korea Pamphlet, 4 June 1951, Folder Korea, Box 38, Collection 23, Center for Migration Studies, New York (hereafter CMS).

18. Kim, “The Origins of Korean Adoption,” 4. Soojin Pate argues that Korean children were transformed into “militarized subjects” through the “militaristic gaze,” and this phenomenon facilitated the myth of American exceptionalism and promoted U.S. imperialist ambitions. She argues that without the U.S. military presence, Korean adoption would most likely never have existed. Soojin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee* (Minneapolis, 2014), 40.

19. James S. Barstow, “N.Y. High School Class ‘Adopts’ Korean Girl,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 December 1955.

20. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 23.

21. Letter from Mrs. George E. Bollinger to Sister Pauline of White Lily Orphanage, 10 March 1958, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Letter from Mrs. Peter Paulette to Captain Clearwater, 16 February 1958, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

25. Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Leo R Martin to Captain Clearwater, 15 February 1958, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
26. Letter from Grace Stephanson to Emil Komora, 31 March 1958, Folder 4883, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS. For more discussion of this, see Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 67–74.
27. Grace Stephenson to Komora, 24 April 1958, Folder 4883, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
28. Komora to Charles McCarthy, 21 January 1953, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
29. Ibid.
30. Komora to Sergeant Overstreit, 9 February 1954, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
31. Notes on meeting held at ISS, 21 February 1958, Folder 4883, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
32. Komora to Charles McCarthy, 21 January 1953, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
33. “The Problem of Transportation Costs for Korean Orphans Immigrating to the United States under the Refugee Relief Act,” January 1956, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
34. David L. Rolbein, Chief Division of Liaison, to John B. Coulter, Agent General of UNKRA, 31 January 1956, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
35. Both Tobias Hübinette and Eleana Kim argue that the Korean government’s underinvestment in social welfare services led to the reliance on intercountry adoption as a form of population control. Tobias Hübinette, “Nationalism, Subalternity, and the Adopted Koreans,” *Journal of Women’s History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 117–18. Eleana Jean Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham, 2010), 68–69, 217.
36. “How to Adopt Korean Babies,” *Ebony*, 1 September 1955.
37. In 1953, Reverend Charles McCarthy wrote to Edward Swanstrom asking for his counsel: “We have had several inquiries recently from people saying that they would like to adopt Korean orphans and bring them to the U.S.” From McCarthy to Swanstrom, 18 January 1953, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
38. Angela Sonaggere to Emil Komora, 3 April 1956, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.
39. Bertha Holt, *Seed from the East* (Oxford, 1956), 25.
40. Ibid.
41. Will Kern, “Made Something of Life: Adoption-by-Proxy Founder Shepherds Waifs to New Homes Adoption-by-Proxy Founder Explains Aims,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923–Current File), 19 March 1961.
42. “8 Korean Orphans in Oregon Family: Children of U.S. Soldiers Are Adopted by Couple Who Now Have Six,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1955.
43. The article exaggerates, as Congress did not pass a “special law,” but rather, allowed these Korean orphans to immigrate as nonquota immigrants. “Farmer Who Adopted 3,000 Orphans Dies: Harry Holt of Oregon Struggled to Find American Homes for Children of Korea,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923–Current File), 29 April 1964.
44. Letter from Harry Holt to Senator Neuberger, presented in U.S. House, Committee of the Judiciary, *Certain Korean War Orphans*, Hearing, 28 July 1955 (11819 S.rp.1216).

45. In his congressional testimony, the head of the Child Welfare League of America referred to the scant background-check process that Holt uses for potential adoptive parents: “[Holt] had placed some thousand children and primarily uses a credit-reference-checking bureau, and during our study we found a number of families who had been very brutal and should never have been given children in the first place,” from U.S. House, Committee of the Judiciary, Congress, Committee of the Judiciary, *Relating to Admission to U.S. of Alien Orphan Children*, 23 July 1959, Washington, D.C.), 1959.

46. Letter from Erwin W. Raetz to Senator Neuberger, presented in U.S. House, Committee of the Judiciary, *Certain Korean War Orphans*, Hearing, 28 July 1955 (11819 S.rp.1216).

47. Statement of Katherine Oettinger, Chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, 20 May 1959, Subcommittee of Immigration and Naturalization, Senate Committee of the Judiciary, Folder 15, Immigration: Alien Orphans, 1957–61, Box 24, USCCB Legal Records, American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter ACUA).

48. Elsie Carper, “Hearing to Air Refugee Needs: End of Abuses Sought Many Found Unsuitable Born Out of Wedlock,” *Washington Post*, 22 June 1959.

49. Bertha Holt describes their decision to adopt Korean children as God’s work: “Only God could bring about such a miracle.” From Bertha Holt, *Seed from the East*, 44.

50. Overseit to Komora, 12 February 1954, Folder 4882, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

51. Komora to Stephenson, 24 February 1958, Folder 4883, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

52. Harry Holt to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Ross, 3 December 1958, Folder: Harry Holt Adoption Programs Correspondence, 1958–59, Box 9, Collection 24, CMS.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Holt wrote, “As far as we are concerned, a Christian is a Christian whether they call themselves Catholic or Protestant. We are firm believers of unity of the Body of Christ. The scripture says, ‘Is Christ divided?’ we are extremely sorry that Satan has been able to divide the testimony of Christians, but we know that there is no division in the Body of Christ.” *Ibid.*

55. Between 1955 and 1961, the Holt Adoption Program oversaw 57 percent of adoptions, the NCWC, 5 percent, the ISS, 6 percent. The remaining children were placed by the Korean Ministry and Seventh Day Adventists. From Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 82.

56. Komora to John W. Horvat (director, Catholic Charities, Kansas City, Kansas), 28 August 1957, Folder 4884, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Januaz to Sister Philomena (Star of the Sea Children’s Home), 22 December 1956, Folder 4884, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

59. Sister Philomena to Daniel Quinn, 8 January 1957, Folder 4884, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

60. The NCWC was originally founded as the National Catholic Welfare Council in 1917 and changed its name to National Catholic Welfare Conference in 1922. Catholic Charities USA was founded in 1910.

61. Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 4–8.

62. Catholic leaders influenced social welfare legislations in the 1930s—specifically, they worked on the 1934 Social Security Bill, which eliminated the possibility of mandated

state participation in financing child welfare services. They achieved this through a blitz of letter-writing and connections with Catholic congressmen. See Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 23.

63. The major religious groups—Catholic Committee for Refugees, Church World Service, United Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society—met with the ISS and CWLA in New York.

64. Komora to William Consedine, 20 June 1958, Folder 15, Immigration: Alien Orphans, 1957–61, Box 24, ACUA.

65. The ISS wrote this amendment.

66. Harmon Burns to William Consedine, 25 June 1959, Folder 15, Box 24, ACUA.

67. Laurin Hyde and Virginia P. Hyde, “A Study of Proxy Adoptions,” June 1958, Box 2, Collection 24, CMS.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Harry Holt to Mrs. Peter Silic in Kansas City, February 1957, Folder 4884, Box 153, Collection 23B, CMS.

70. The report claims: “Pressures for quick action have resulted in greatest use of adoption by proxy.” See Laurin Hyde and Virginia P. Hyde, “A Study of Proxy Adoptions.”

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

73. David Doyle (NCWC, Legal Department) to Komora, 25 August 1958, Folder 15, Box 24, ACUA. Doyle enclosed a letter, which had been addressed to the Chairman of the House Committee on the Judiciary by the Secretary of HEW.

74. Section 4 of the Immigration and Nationality Act had authorized the issuance of an unlimited number of nonquota immigrant visas to certain alien orphans, under 14 years of age. This section was extended for two temporary periods and finally expired on 30 June 1961, after which the INA was permanently amended to grant nonquota status to eligible orphans. During the four years in which the nonquota visas were temporarily allowed, 9,620 orphans entered the United States. From Walter and Ribicoff, “The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952,” 51.

75. United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Relating to Admission to U.S. of Alien Orphan Children*, 23 June 1959, 86th Cong., 1st sess., Washington, D.C. (Statement of Ernest Mitler).

76. *Ibid.*

77. U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Relating to Admission to U.S. of Alien Orphan Children*, 23 June 1959, 86th Cong., 1st sess., Washington D.C. (Statement of William Kirk).

78. Elsie Carper, “Hearing to Air Refugee Needs: End of Abuses Sought Many Found Unsuitable Born Out of Wedlock,” *Washington Post*, 22 June 1959.

79. “Proxy Adoptions Decried as Risky: ‘Sight Unseen’ Choice Held Unwise by International Casework Agency,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1958.

80. “Proxy Adoptions of Aliens Scored: Loophole in U.S. Law Said to Lead to ‘Mail-Order Baby Business’ Abroad,” *New York Times*, 1 August 1958.

81. Elsie Carper, “Hearing to Air Refugee Needs,” *Washington Post*, 22 June 1959.

82. “Problems of Orphaned; Abandoned Kids Subject of New Comprehensive Study,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 October 1961.

83. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Amendments to the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 3 May 1956, 84th Cong., 2nd sess.

84. John O'Grady to Reverend C. H. LeBlond, "The Care of Catholic Children Way from Their Own Home by Governmental Agencies," 7 March 1952, Folder 21, Box 84, Social Action: Child Welfare, 1949–55 Records, ACUA.

85. John O'Grady to Howard J. Carroll, 15 April 1946, Folder 20, Box 84, Social Action: Child Welfare, 1929–46 Records, ACUA.

86. Catholic Charities official Bernard Fagan became president of the New York's Conference of Social Workers. Catholic social worker Jane Hoey became assistant director of the New York City Welfare council. Reverend John C. Carr, director of Catholic Charities in Buffalo, New York, served as president of the NYS Conference on Social Work. Catholic social worker Rose McHugh became assistant commissioner of the NY Department of Social Welfare. Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 154.

87. Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 62.

88. Catholic official Mary Irene Atkinson was appointed a position in the Child Welfare Division of the USCB.

89. Katharine Lenroot to Monsignor Howard J. Carroll, 8 April 1946, Folder 20, Box 84, Social Action: Child Welfare, 1929–46, ACUA.

90. Zitha R. Turitz, director of the CWLA Standards Project, to John O'Grady, 9 December 1955, Folder 26, Box 18, Child Welfare League of America, Committee on Adoption Standards (1), ACUA.

91. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Subcommittee of the Committee of the Judiciary, *Statement of Emil Komora*, May 1957, Folder 15, Box 24, Immigration: Alien Orphans, 1957–61 Records, ACUA.

92. Ibid.

93. Harmon Burns to William Consedine, 5 May 1959, Folder 15, Box 24 Immigration: Alien Orphans, 1957–61 Records, ACUA.

94. Ibid.

95. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Relating to General Immigration Matters. Volume 1*, 20 May 1959, 3 May 1956, 86th Cong. 1st sess.

96. Ibid.

97. Oh, "Into the Arms of America," 368.

98. Francis Eugene Walter and Abraham Alexander Ribicoff, "The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 as Amended Through 1961," *International Migration Digest* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1964): 42. It is important to note that although proxy adoption was banned by legislation, the Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioner later opened a loophole by interpreting the law to allow Americans to adopt children from abroad without first seeing them as long as they proved to a licensed adoption agency that they intended to readopt the children in the United States. Therefore, proxy adoption could effectively continue with the involvement of the social work establishment. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 150. At the behest of critics and adoptee activists, the South Korean government fortified its adoption regulations in 2011 and now requires family court approval for every minor child adoption. Jinsu Yune, "The Reform of Adoption Law in South Korea," *International Survey of Family Law* 2013 (2013): 366–68. The South Korean government also has made concerted efforts to promote domestic adoptions over intercountry ones. Elise M. Prébin, *Meeting Once More: The Korean Side of Transnational Adoption* (New York, 2013), 27.

99. *Adoption of Oriental Children by American White Families: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, May 1950, Child Welfare League of America, New York, 1960, 56.

100. “Problems of Orphaned; Abandoned Kids Subject of New Comprehensive Study,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 October 1961.

101. For example, in *Montgomery v. Ffrench*, 299 F.2d 730, 735 (8th Cir. 1962), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit denied a Missouri couple’s appeal of the attorney general’s denial of their application to permit the immigration of a Korean child whom they had adopted by proxy. The court recognized that Congress had banned proxy adoption in an effort to eliminate hardships and abuses, and these petitioners, who had adopted children in the past, had a history of noncooperation with local adoption agencies and had repeatedly refused to allow local adopting agencies to make investigations into their home.

102. Hyde and Hyde, “A Study of Proxy Adoptions.”