

# REL SEMINAR SERIES

## THE ORPHAN AND ABANDONED CHILD:

## THE CARING AND ADOPTION PRACTICES OF MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

The presence of the orphan or the abandoned child is a concern for many faithful Catholics and Muslims, as is exhibited by the missions at four sites in South Africa's Western Cape province. For instance, the objective of an initiative sponsored by the diocese is to support biological relatives in order for orphans to remain with kin persons. The purpose of this is to make sure that orphans avoid becoming a part of the foster care system by remaining with their biological family. This is accomplished by providing financial and material support to those family members who serve as legal guardians. The practice of an institution operated by a religious order is to house abandoned children in a transitional residence until a permanent placement is secured. The objective of a third site, a maternity home, is the rehabilitation of unwed mothers toward living a moral life following their residency. It has forged alliances with private adoption agencies to oversee that these abandoned children are adopted by "proper parents." At another site, an orphanage, the residents are children and adolescents whose parents have either died, abandoned them or were unable to look after them. As far as the orphanage being engaged in adoption practices, the desire and goal is to have its residents adopted. The site has a hosting program. A host family is a couple who will host one of the residents for the weekend or over a school break. The host family option is meant to spur interest in piety towards orphans among the local Muslim community. But the hope that the children will be taken in permanently by foster parents has not necessarily been as successful as hoped for. Once people realize that when it comes to a foster child that at any point that child can be reunited with their biological family, they immediately lose interest. Furthermore, many prospective adoptive parents have preferences: not to be foster parents, to adopt only one child as opposed to siblings, and to adopt children without emotional health issues.



**PRESENTED**

**BY:**

**MR MICHAEL HARRIS**

**(PHD RESEARCHER)**



**17 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**13H00 - 14H00**

**REL SEMINAR ROOM**

**LS 5.67**

Michael Harris is PhD researcher in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations at New College, University of Edinburgh. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in History at Morehouse College in Atlanta. Before beginning a career as a secondary school history teacher in California's San Francisco Bay Area, he completed a Master of Arts in Educational Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Prior to his doctoral studies, in 2021 Michael completed a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (Comparative Theology) at Loyola Marymount University. His PhD research focuses on the presence of orphans and adoption practices in the New Testament and Quran and how these textual presentations influenced subsequent adoption practices within Catholic theology and Islamic law. The thesis draws on textual sources and also cultural practices through qualitative research among Catholic Christians and Sunni Muslims in contemporary South Africa.



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