

For Theirs is the Kingdom: (Re)membering Young Children in the Gospel of Luke

By

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To my children, Becca, Joanna, and William;

To my god-children, Jake and Madeline;

and

To all the children of the congregations I've served—you have ministered to me far more than I could ever minister to you.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus Haereses</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>
<i>Att.</i>	Cicero, <i>Letters to Atticus</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Augustus</i>
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>Carm. saec.</i>	Horace, <i>Carmen Saeculare</i>
ESV	English Standard Version Bible
<i>Iber.</i>	Appian, <i>Iberike</i>
IGT	<i>Infancy Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>The Wars of the Jews</i>
LSJ	<i>Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement</i>
LXX	Septuagint (Greek translation of Hebrew Bible)
<i>M. (or m.)</i>	Mishnah
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NKJV	New King James Version Bible
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Study Bible</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
<i>Prat. Spir.</i>	John Moschus, <i>Pratum Spirituale</i>
<i>Prt.</i>	Plato, <i>Praetorium</i>
<i>RR</i>	Varro, <i>De Re Rustica</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature

TDNT

*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUNDS TO A CHILDIST<sup>1</sup> READING OF LUKE

*“Children in company should be seen and not heard.”*

- John Quincy Adams *Memoirs* (1876)<sup>2</sup>

*“Inquiry into what scripture says about children leads to ask what the scriptures allow children to say, that is, what we can find as traces of the children’s voices which are disturbingly silent at many points.”<sup>3</sup>*

- Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer, “(Stifled) Voices of the Future: Learning about Children in the Bible”

*“With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

-Luke 1:17

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<sup>1</sup> This term, unpacked later in this chapter, was coined as a liberative category in religious studies by John Wall in “Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility,” in *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, edited by Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010). Wall’s work is indebted to Marcia Bunge’s pioneering volumes, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2001) and *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2008). These works and my own passion are likewise indebted to the scholarship of Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore over the past two decades, first with *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) and more recently with *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003). In biblical studies, Julie Faith Parker first applied the term childist to her exegetical method in *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elijah Cycle* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Up until this publication the proverb was “A maid should be seen, but not heard,” originating with Augustinian in 1389 and made popular by John Mirk’s *Festial* in 1450 (Stanley J. St. Clair, *Most Comprehensive Origins of Clichés, Proverbs, and Figurative Expressions* [Minnville, TN: St Clair Publications, 2013] 100). This shift from the marginalization of women to female children to all children is at the same time disturbing across the board and a reminder of the appropriateness of applying a feminist hermeneutic to the characters of children in literary and biblical accounts.

<sup>3</sup> Ma. Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer, “(Stifled) Voices of the Future: Learning about Children in the Bible,” in Dillen – Didier Pollefeyt, Annemie, *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*. (Paris Walpole: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 91.

## Introduction

In the prologue to Luke's gospel account, the angel Gabriel prophesies that Zechariah's son John will "go before [Jesus] to turn the hearts of parents to their children (τέκνα), and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:17). The centrality that children play in God's Kingdom according to Luke is thus clear from the start. This point is further emphasized by the fact that John, about whom these words are addressed, is himself an unborn child at this point in the narrative.

Luke is the only canonical gospel to give an account of John's birth and Jesus' childhood and the most descriptive in its account of Jesus' birth and infancy. Nevertheless, Luke's gospel has heretofore received little attention in relation to what it has to say for and about the lives of real children, both then and now. Traditional scholarship tends to read child characters in Luke's account respectively as prologue to the main narrative and/or metaphor for adult discipleship. Lukan scholarship addresses the lives of children (if at all) almost exclusively within the confines of children's concerns within the broader context of family systems and first-century household structure. These discussions rarely distinguish between young children and their adult counterparts who continue to live under the *pater familias* of the eldest generation.<sup>4</sup>

Such adultist tendencies reflect a broader trend in the humanities to either coddle or protect the idealized image of "the child," with little attention to the contextualized nature of childhood(s) or the personhood of individual children.<sup>5</sup> Anna Mae Duanne explains that in the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. David Balch and Carolyn Osiek, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> On these two trends as they developed in the Enlightenment and kept hold into early modernity, cf. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) 132-133.

language of both the Enlightenment and modernity “the state of childhood is antithetical to full humanity—the child, like the barbarous nation, may have the potential for future rational autonomy, but both must undergo rigorous training to overcome their current state of incompleteness.”<sup>6</sup> Children and their concerns are thus marginalized in favor of the more rational and complete adult agenda.

Such an agenda is born out of the patristic hierarchy that dominated the first-century Mediterranean world. Ray Laurence explains,

The preconceptions in our sources—which view a city as made up of an adult male group (citizens) and constructed from houses and households in which these adult males act as head of the household—cause freeborn women as well as freeborn children (let alone slaves and foreigners) to disappear from the relevant literature. Yet the *polis*, with its focus on its own internal logical as a political community...was accompanied by the training of the sons of the leading men.<sup>7</sup>

At the margins of society, children were not deemed worthy of explicit or extensive mention by the adult males trained in writing, and consequently have all but disappeared from the ancient sources. It is notable that, even as recent trends in scholarship have sought to uncover such oppressed voices from the margins, children in the first-century Mediterranean world continue virtually unseen. So much so that while Robert Knapp, in his otherwise excellent monograph *Invisible Romans*, turns his eye away from emperors, philosophers, and senators, to the “ordinary” members of society, he still fails to produce a chapter on children.

Nevertheless, Luke’s gospel has long been read as a word of hope for those on the

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<sup>6</sup> Anna Mae Duanne, “Introduction,” in *The Children’s Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duanne (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ray Laurence, “Community,” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, ed. Mary and Ray Laurence, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 56.

margins. In the words of the gospel writer himself,<sup>8</sup> through Jesus God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” (1:52-53). The themes of reversal and divine preference for the poor pervade Luke’s gospel. These have been and continue to be successfully explored by liberation theologians among others.<sup>9</sup> Luke’s gospel has been interpreted, albeit not universally,

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<sup>8</sup> The name Luke does not appear to have been attributed to the two-volume work addressed to Theophilus until Irenaeus of Lyon around 180 CE (Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, translated M. Eugene Boring [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998] 240). There has been significant debate in scholarship about the identity of the author known as Luke; however, most of what can be said about the author is solely conjecture based upon what is known from the Gospel traditions themselves. I concur with Schnelle and others that “Luke knew traditions about Paul’s missionary work, but was not a personal associate with Paul during these missionary journey” (242). However, since my project is primarily interested in “Luke” as author rather than historical figure, I will not engage further on the question of authorship. Instead, hereafter I use the terms Luke and Lukan author synonymously to refer to the unknown author of the two-volume work that tradition has come to call Luke-Acts.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Loveday Alexander, “Luke’s Political Vision,” in *Interpretation* 66:3 (July 2012) 283-294; Michael Andres, “The Filled Hungry and Empty Rich,” in *Perspectives* 23:10 (December 2008) 6-9; Mary Ann Beavis, “‘Expecting Nothing in Return’: Luke’s Picture of the Marginalized” in *Interpretation* 48:4 (Oct 1994) 357; James A. Berquist, “Good News to the Poor” - Why Does this Lucan Motif Appear to Run Dry in the Book of Acts” in *Bangalore Theological Forum* 18:1 (January 1, 1986) 1-16; Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000); Nancy L. Cocks, “Magnificat: Theology by Handmaiden,” in *Toronto Journal Of Theology* 2:2 (September 1, 1986) 226-231; William Domeris, “Biblical Perspectives on the Poor,” in *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa* 57 (December 1, 1986) 57-61; Lawrence R. Farley, *The Gospel of Luke: Good News for the Poor* (Chesterton, IN: Conciliar Press, 2011); Joel B. Green, “Good News to Whom? Jesus and the ‘Poor’ in the Gospel of Luke,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 59-74; Paul Hertig, “The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes,” in *Missiology* 26:2 (April 1, 1998) 167-179; Paul Hertig, “The subversive kingship of Jesus and Christian social witness,” in *Missiology* 32:4 (October 1, 2004) 475-490; Thomas Hoyt, Jr., “The Poor/Rich Theme in the Beatitudes,” in *Journal Of Religious Thought* 37:1 (March 1, 1980) 31-41; Julius Kiambi, *Postcolonial ‘Redaction’ of Social-economic parables in Luke’s Gospel: Bible and Making of the poor in Kenya*. (Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic, 2011); René Krüger, “Luke’s God and Mammon, A Latin American Perspective,” in *Global Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Patte (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004); Ivan Shing Chung Kwong, *The Word Order of the Gospel of Luke* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); D. O. López Rodríguez, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of the Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Gail R. O’Day, “Singing Woman’s Song: A

as a message of hope for those who have been marginalized due to their income, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Even in the midst of ongoing setbacks in the continued struggles for justice, great strides have been made for many marginalized groups since Thomas Jefferson naively suggested that freeing slaves would be analogous to “abandoning a child.”<sup>10</sup> However, scholarship is only beginning to acknowledge and so to address the second layer of marginalization that exists in such statements of prejudice that discount not only the enslaved person but also the child with whom they are compared. Literary theorist Anna Mae Duanne describes this oversight. She writes,

Much of the most exciting work in the humanities today seeks to recover the voices of those who, like Jefferson’s rhetorical slave, have been infantilized because of their gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This work often makes the case for removing the excluded group from the childish realm to which it has been consigned and for including it within the parameters of our imagined ideal citizen—an autonomous private agent. Yet this expansion of the class of the citizen-subject often stops short of engaging the child figure against which the citizen-subject continues to be measured.<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1990’s, awareness of the lacuna that Duanne identifies has grown and resulted in the formation and growth of the interdisciplinary field called Childhood Studies. Even more recently, a group within religious studies has identified their work as Child Theology and they,

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Hermeneutic of Liberation," in *Currents In Theology And Mission* 12:4 (August 1, 1985) 203-210; Raymond Pickett, “Luke as Counter-Narrative: The Gospel as Social Vision and Practice,” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36:6 (Dec 2009) 424-433; Michael P. Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4.16-30)* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); John O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Duanne, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Duanne, 6.

together with a number of emerging biblical critics, have sought to place concern for children at the center of their scholarship.

Joining this growing cry for justice for children together with Luke's elevation of the downtrodden and marginalized, my project thus proposes an alternative reading of the place of young children in the family systems resisted and created in Luke's narrative. Working within what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza defines as the Rhetorical-Emancipatory Paradigm,<sup>12</sup> I employ a child-centered lens for the purpose of liberating children—inside and outside of Luke's text—from the adultist concerns within which they have been entrapped. In a social and political climate in which children experience oppression and aggression at both the micro and macro levels of their lives, it is ethically imperative that as adult interpreters of the Bible we take seriously the ways in which our reading impacts the lives and discipleship of children. This project is thus aimed at both remembering the characters of children in Luke's Gospel account and re-membering them into the circle of disciples around whom Luke's Jesus begins to build the Kingdom of God.

To this end, I draw upon the language and process that Julie Faith Parker uses in her work on children in the Hebrew Bible, employing what she and hereafter I refer to as *childist interpretation* of the text.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation grows out of a long history of both secular and biblical scholarship, culminating in the development of the interdisciplinary field of Childhood

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999) 44-46. I have loosely based the structure of my method on Schüssler Fiorenza's paradigm, specifically borrowing the categories of resistance, reconstruction, and revisioning as hermeneutical tools. However, the difference between sex as a biological given and childhood (like gender) as a more complicated social construct, complicated even further by my own removed identity as an adult reading for the liberation of children, has led to adaptations in my hermeneutic, particularly in the areas of specifically drawing on her use of social science and historical methods to support a narrative approach to (re)constructing the characters of young children.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, 86.



Studies and its corollary in child-centered approaches to Biblical Criticism. In what follows I trace these historical and theoretical developments in broad strokes, highlighting those scholars and movements most directly related to the development of childist biblical criticism as I employ it in this project. With this history of scholarship in mind, I then return to the specific study of children in Luke's gospel. Highlighting the few studies that have addressed this topic directly, I address the lacuna in attention to child characters in Luke's gospel account as a whole and suggest a way forward in reading Luke's gospel from a childist lens. Such a reading demands a linguistic and contextual framework, which the last section of this chapter seeks to provide; concluding with a movement toward reclaiming a subject-oriented biblical childhood as the task of the remainder of this work.

### **Children in the Bible and Antiquity: A Theoretical and Historical Framework<sup>14</sup>**

While there has not always been agreement about what constitutes a child or childhood(s), there have always been children. Moreover, children of the past were not always or unilaterally passive and silent. Recent archaeological findings point to the presence of children as artists alongside their adult counterparts in the prehistoric French caves of Rouffignac and Gargas, roughly 13,000 years ago.<sup>15</sup> Archaeologist Jessica Cooney explains, "What I found in Rouffignac is that the children are screaming from the walls to be heard. Their presence is

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<sup>14</sup> This section represents a sweeping review of a broad movement in scholarship. It is intended not as a comprehensive resource on the development of childhood studies, but rather as a contextualization of the history out of which my own childist readings emerge. For a more thorough review of the various understandings of childhood as they have been presented (and resisted) across history and the ways in which these constructions inform a childist reading of biblical texts, cf. Parker, 21-39.

<sup>15</sup> Jessica Cooney, "Scribbles on the Wall: How Can the Study of Finger Flutings Add Children to the Upper Paleolithic Cave Art Narrative?" (presentation, 5<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference of the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past, Cambridge, England, 2011).

everywhere.”<sup>16</sup> Even when the development of print literacy pushed the voices of young children who had not yet mastered this discipline further into the margins, shadows of their presence remain in many texts from antiquity, including both the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament.

Before surveying the work that has been done to reclaim the voices of children in the biblical texts, however, a brief review of the development of childhood studies as a discipline is necessary in order to inform both the motivations and the methodologies of its manifestations in biblical studies. Such a review properly begins with Philippe Ariès and the formal study of childhood; continues with the development of Childhood Studies; and ends with the manifestation of this field in child-centered approaches to theology with an emphasis on biblical studies.

### *Philippe Ariès and the Formal Study of Childhood*

In the early twentieth century developmental psychology had become the primary voice on childhood—following a Child Theory largely developed by Charles Darwin that asserted childhood as a largely biological category of immaturity and development. This branch of study focused almost solely on the biological nature of children and the study of childhood as a positivistic science (largely neglecting Darwin’s observations about the concomitant social character of childhood). As a result, this period saw the institutionalization of the social category

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<sup>16</sup> Jessica Cooney, quoted in Caroline Davies, “Stone-age Toddlers Had Art Lessons, Study Says,” in *The Guardian* 29 September 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2011/sep/30/stone-age-toddlers-art-lessons> (last accessed 13 Sept 2015).

of childhood under the purview of “experts” in such discrete disciplines as pediatric medicine<sup>17</sup> and child psychology.

Among the most influential authors of this period, Jean Piaget published *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932),<sup>18</sup> Erik Erikson was just publishing his work on *Childhood and Society* in 1963 (a year after *Centuries of Childhood* was translated into English),<sup>19</sup> and various educational reformers were making their waves around Europe, its colonies, and into the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Into this climate, Philippe Ariès’ published *Centuries of Childhood* (1960, 1962) as the first historical treatment of the subject in this era. Although some of its claims have been contested, this social history largely pioneered the study of childhood as an independent discipline. Using what he observes as differences between artistic renderings of children before and after the Enlightenment to argue for an ideological shift in the thinking about children in the Enlightenment, Ariès’ most fundamental contribution to the history of childhood has been to name it as a social construction that varies across time and space. Joseph Hawes and Ray Hiner call this the “bedrock on which the history of childhood has been built.”<sup>21</sup> Both for those who

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<sup>17</sup> Pediatric medicine has existed in its most basic form since antiquity, with the acknowledgment that children were particularly vulnerable to certain diseases and needed to be treated differently than adults. However, in light of Child Theory, pediatrics took on a new ‘institutionalized’ status, moving from simply treating illness to ascribing value and meaning to the particular developmental phases of immaturity.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gabin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1932).

<sup>19</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of Montessori, Waldorf, and Emilio Reggio schools with their respective focuses on the individual needs and potentials of children, with many of these pedagogies growing in influence by the mid-1900’s.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, “Introduction” in *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective: An International Handbook and Research Guide*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 3.

affirmed his thesis and those who called it into question, Ariès work sparked a more focused interest in the history of childhood than had previously been seen in Western scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the manner in which Ariès portrays the construction, or lack thereof, of childhood in the pre-Enlightenment period has caused many to call his conclusions into question. In particular, his notion that childhood did not exist as a social category before the Enlightenment. He writes,

In medieval society [and before] the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society [and before] this awareness was lacking.<sup>23</sup>

He bases this conclusion in large part on the lack of distinguishing characteristics between children and adults in medieval art and the preponderance of art from antiquity rendering children as “little men.”<sup>24</sup>

From this conclusion, however, Ariès does not draw the inference that children were understood to be the same as adults. To the contrary, he writes, “Nobody thought, as we ordinarily think today, that every child already contained a man’s personality.”<sup>25</sup> Instead, he points to a comment made in a 17<sup>th</sup> century French play, “The little girl doesn’t count,”<sup>26</sup> generalizing backwards in time to insinuate a lack of any distinct nature ascribed to the very

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<sup>22</sup> For a more complete review of the social history of childhood Tony Chatrand-Burke that has been conducted since Ariès, cf. Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2013) 12-21.

<sup>23</sup> Ariès, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Ariès, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ariès, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Molière, *Le Malade imaginaire*, quoted in Ariès, 39.

young. Due to high infant mortality rates in antiquity, Ariès suggests that parents did not bond with their children.<sup>27</sup>

In response to Ariès' jarring and at times stark claims regarding the emergence of childhood as a social category and ancient affections (or lack thereof) toward children, many have pointed to philosophical, pedagogical, and medical texts from antiquity that describe unique stages and corresponding treatments of children in refute.<sup>28</sup> Answering the claim that children in antiquity were treated as miniature adults, Valerie French cites Plato and Aristotle's description of the five stages of childhood, Cicero's comments on the greater effectiveness of education in childhood, and the existence of ancient pediatricians as "a discrete branch of medicine, demonstrating a knowledge of afflictions suffered particularly by children and their greater vulnerability to infection."<sup>29</sup> At the same time, early challengers to Ariès portrait of disinterested parents emphasize the affection shown by ancient parents for their children, particularly in funerary inscriptions.<sup>30</sup>

Hawes and Hiner note that the historical record provides "two contradictory portraits of childhood in classical antiquity": one with a "pattern of childrearing" that was "Attentive, nurturing, valuing the child" versus another that was "neglectful, destructive, demeaning the child."<sup>31</sup> However, in each case, such essentialization of childhood flattens the experiences of children in all of their complexity and diversity.

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<sup>27</sup> Ariès, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Valerie French, "Children in Antiquity," in *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective: An International Handbook and Research Guide*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 13-21.

<sup>29</sup> French, 17; 18; 20.

<sup>30</sup> Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1989); French (1991); Beryl Rawson, *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Hawes and Hiner, 4.

The idea of a single objective truth about ancient constructions of childhood that both Ariès and his early challengers sought to reveal is itself flawed. Not only does the slippery nature of history as itself a construction preclude such certainty, but to assume that there was only one construction of childhood static across all of antiquity, or even within any particular moment or place, is to miss the magnitude of Ariès discovery that the idea of childhood is itself a construction. Such an extension was the early contribution of the pioneers of *Childhood Studies*.

### *The Development of Childhood Studies*

Newly aware of the constructed nature of childhood as described by Ariès, sociologists and cultural anthropologists in the latter half of the twentieth century began to notice a diversity of childhoods rather than a single structure of childhood in various cultures across time and place. Meanwhile, a growing youth movement in the political sphere, and continued developments in the fields of sociology and psychology proper, led the study of children to expand across the disciplines. Hawes and Hiner explain,

The extraordinary interest in children since the 1960s has been encouraged by several factors: (1) youth movement of the 1960s, (2) efforts of historians to investigate the lives of those ‘inarticulate’ groups, including children, who generally had been neglected or ignored by scholars, (3) growing understanding that children in the past were central to the reproduction of class and transmission of culture, important elements in the maintenance of political stability, and a significant source of labor for their families and communities.<sup>32</sup>

Interest in the formal study of children thus blossomed throughout a variety of discrete academic disciplines into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, in the 1980’s a new interdisciplinary field began to emerge, calling itself Childhood Studies.

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<sup>32</sup> Hawes and Hiner, 2.

Driven by the insights of such sociologists as Alison James and Alan Prout, Childhood Studies insisted that childhood, like gender, is a social construct that, despite its ties to certain biological givens, remains variable and that childhood should therefore be studied in its own right.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, James and Prout contend, “Children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.”<sup>34</sup> This thesis moves beyond the identification of childhood as a social construct to see children as agents in its construction and consequently to pay attention to the multiplicity of constructions that emerge out of the diverse social and historical contexts from which children come.

John Wall summarizes, “What is introduced by the new field called ‘childhood studies’ is a historically new sense of children’s agency and social constructedness.”<sup>35</sup> He then goes on to classify these first realizations about and arguments for children’s agency as a “‘first wave’ of childhood studies.”<sup>36</sup> This first wave, if you will, was focused largely on the act of conscientization—bringing social constructions of childhoods and their consequent implications for the lives and dignity of children into the light.

One fairly immediate effect of this conscientization was the United Nations’ 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. This document, while not the first to lay out a corpus of rights for children, reflected for the first time many of the initial insights into the social

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<sup>33</sup> Allison James and Alan Prout, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise, and Problems,” in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. by Allison James and Alan Prout (Basingstoke: Falmer Press, 1990) 8.

<sup>34</sup> Allison James and Alan Prout, “Introduction,” in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (New York: Routledge Falmer, 1997) 4.

<sup>35</sup> John Wall, “Childism: The Challenge of Childhood to Ethics and the Humanities,” in *The Children’s Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duanne (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 69.

<sup>36</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 69.

constructedness of childhood and the self-agency of children being talked about in the field of Childhood Studies. Moreover, it was met with widespread approval and has remained, to date, the most broadly ratified document in the UN's history, with the sole exception of the United States. Even more significantly, though, Wall explains the importance of the declaration on Children's Rights in that

it contains a third and new kind of right for children, the six so-called 'participation' rights: the right to be heard, the right to freedom of expression, freedom of thought and religious, freedom of association, the right to privacy, and the right to access to media and information. Participation rights are closer to Rousseau's bottom-up model in that they seek to include in the general public will the agency, voices, and citizenship of all.<sup>37</sup>

Moving into the 1990's, then, there was a growing awareness both among scholars and politicians not only of the entitlement of children to basic human rights of protection, but also to their entitlement as *subjects* to the full rights of personhood, including participation—bringing their own voices and agency to the table.

It is with such awareness that Wall suggests we moved into “a ‘second wave’ of childhood studies.”<sup>38</sup> He identifies this wave with “increasing efforts since the late 1990s to include children themselves as research and societal participants.”<sup>39</sup> Explaining,

The idea is that children should not just be studied and treated as objects of adult research and policy but also from the points of view of children's own concerns and agendas. Children should be empowered to help formulate research questions, contribute to academic and policy conferences, and take part in larger social and political processes... This second wave also takes up questions of social policy, investigating how children may be empowered as citizens, political participants, parliamentarians, legal self-advocates, culture makers, media users, and the like.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 81.

<sup>38</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 70.

<sup>39</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 70.

<sup>40</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 70.



Insomuch as Childhood Studies raises these questions of voice and participation, it pushes against the systems of domination that have previously dictated children's rights and needs and have even defined childhood. Such dismantling of voice and privilege is necessary in order to give space for the agency of children themselves—it is, so to speak, bringing their voices to the table.

Nevertheless, as long as these voices remain at the margins of the conversation, dictated largely by the structures of academic and political discourse and the levels of specialization that continue to be required to engage, bringing children to the table in a meaningful way remains difficult, if not at times impossible. Such difficulty is due to the continued growth and (inter)dependencies characteristic of children. This is not to suggest that such an undertaking be abandoned, but rather that particular care and attention are needed as we envision together with children the best ways in which to represent their interests. To this end, Wall calls for a new, third wave of engagement that he calls “childism,” to which I return in my methodological framework.<sup>41</sup>

### *Child Centered Approaches to Biblical Criticism*

Before entering my exegetical project, which is informed by this third movement in Childhood Studies more generally, it is first necessary to review the ways in which the theoretical approaches of all three movements have been and continue to be applied in the field of Biblical Studies already. Here I approach Biblical Studies more generally rather than New Testament Studies in particular due to the greater attention that biblical children and childhoods have received in Hebrew Bible scholarship over the past decade.

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<sup>41</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 68.

While approaches to the study of the two testaments cannot always be directly transferred, New Testament Studies has much to learn in this area from the pioneers in Hebrew Bible and my project is indebted to them. As such, my review of critical scholarship focuses on New Testament literature in the first two interpretive frameworks, which have received significant attention from scholars of both testaments; however, in the third, more ideological, framework, where Hebrew Bible scholarship has led the day and New Testament Studies is only now beginning to catch up, I treat the interpretive frameworks of scholars of both testaments together. To this end, I identify three distinct, though somewhat overlapping, modes by which children and childhood have been foregrounded in New Testament Studies: metaphor, character, and lens.

#### 1. Children in Metaphors in New Testament Literature

The most common academic interpretation of New Testament texts dealing with children beyond their role as recipients of instruction in the household codes understands children as a metaphor for discipleship. While such an interpretation has a long history in interpretive tradition, it has become particularly enticing in Western scholarship in recent times alongside growing idealizations of “the child” as an idyllic type in Western culture.

Since the Renaissance and within the last century in particular, the contribution of children to the maintenance of the household in Western European and North American countries has receded. This has resulted in a need to preserve the value of children within their households by placing an increasing value on the intrinsic worth of children regardless of their contributions.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Ronald Clark observes, “Children today are seen as innocent, humble,

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<sup>42</sup> The notion of children as valuable in themselves is not an innovation of Western culture or of Christianity, but has its roots in the Hebrew Bible itself. What has changed in recent times,

trusting, and pure.”<sup>43</sup> As the value of children within a household has become less apparent externally, Western culture has sought to transfer this value to such internal qualities as innocence and morality, which the adult population, clearly subjects of the Fall, can be seen to benefit from.

In order to illuminate the metaphor of the child, critics have sought to understand the role of children in first-century Roman and Palestinian culture at large. While there is much that is not known about the daily life of children in these cultures, particularly children of the lower class, certain generalizations have been made. Following the Ariès – Rawson divide in classical studies, such critics have drawn respectively on images of children as lowly and marginalized or as treasured and innocent.

One of the earliest book-length treatments of children in modern New Testament studies is Hans-Reudi Weber’s *Jesus and the Children* (1979). Weber employs a literary critical technique of looking for intertexts, focusing on Jewish and Christian texts contemporary with the synoptics and seeking connections that would hold the meanings of the two texts together. Weber finds reference to the sexual innocence of children in a parallel teaching from the Gospel of Thomas<sup>44</sup> and elaborates upon a Talmudic teaching regarding receiving the Kingdom of God;<sup>45</sup> however, he ultimately rejects both of these as intertexts in the technical sense of the term. Instead, focusing on the active role of children in “receiving” the Kingdom of God (at least in Mark and Luke’s accounts), Weber reads “the child as a metaphor of ‘objective

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however, is the accent that is placed on this value over and against the relative drain that a child would be on the average Western household otherwise.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald R. Clark, “Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness: A New Context for Luke 18:15-17” in *Stone-Campbell Journal* 5 (Fall 2002) 240.

<sup>44</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) 24.

<sup>45</sup> Weber, 25-26.

humility.”<sup>46</sup> Divergent from mainstream generalizations about children, Weber maintains that such humility is not distinct in that it is any greater than an adult’s, but rather in that it is more natural or habitual. While he thus acknowledges the error in assuming that children are by nature more innocent, moral, or humble than adults, Weber remains committed to the metaphorization of children in the text, as the subtitle of his book suggests, as “resources for study and preaching.”

Even after Rawson and others had published broader portraits of childhood in the first-century, many New Testament interpreters at the turn of the twenty-first-century continued to emphasize the low status of children in the ancient household, yielding an emphasis on Jesus’ preference for the marginalized and oppressed. This view is perhaps best summarized by John Dominic Crossan’s description of childhood in first-century Palestine: “To be a child was to be a nobody, with the possibility of becoming a somebody absolutely dependent on parental discretion and parental standing in the community...A kingdom of the humble, of the celibate, or of the baptized comes later. This comes first: a kingdom of children is a kingdom of nobodies.”<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, commentaries that carry over descriptors such as smallness (both in stature and in the eyes of society) and humility, which Crossan attributes to a second layer of tradition, also retain the same effect—a reading first-century society at large as one that devalued children.<sup>48</sup> The metaphor of humility—lacking pride—implies, particularly when described as a

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<sup>46</sup> Weber, 28.

<sup>47</sup> John Dominic Crossan, “A Kingdom of Nobodies,” in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) 269.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Lester Bradner, “The Kingdom and the Child,” *Anglican Theological Review* 3:1 (May 1920) 62; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993) 880.

natural state, that there is nothing about their being for children to take pride in and continues to link them with the downtrodden and the dispossessed.

In contrast, James Francis, Beverly Gaventa, and Jennifer Houston McNeel, all writing in the past decade, have taken up the historical work of Rawson and others to present a more tempered view of children and childhood in antiquity. Drawing on material and epigraphic evidence from the first-century Mediterranean world, they read New Testament metaphorizations of children, particularly in the Pauline corpus, in light of children as both valued and cultivated resources who are treasured and nurtured members of the household.

James Francis' monograph, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (2006), is the first book-length treatment of children in the New Testament that spans the corpus more broadly and does not group childhood with motherhood of other family themes. This builds on Francis' earlier article, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament" (1996), with both examining the metaphorical significance of children in New Testament texts. Francis helpfully distinguishes between what he calls "the imaging of childhood" and the representation of actual children as such.<sup>49</sup> "Since there is little evidence of how children themselves viewed the world," he contends, "such imagery reflects essentially adult perspectives, in terms of both the valuing of children and in expressing wider social and religious world-views and aspirations."<sup>50</sup> What is retained in New Testament depictions of childhood is not a window into first-century Palestinian childhood, but rather into how a certain group of adults perceived this childhood.

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<sup>49</sup> James Francis, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006) 14.

<sup>50</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 14.

Paying attention to both what can be known about first-century childhoods in the Greco-Roman world and the images of childhood that appear in New Testament texts—specifically, the gospels and epistles—Francis draws two conclusions. First, “Jesus’ use of the child image did not influence the church in so far as the place of child rearing, education, and role modeling remained largely unchanged.”<sup>51</sup> This observation is significant because it counters recent cultural tendencies to assume that Christianity is necessarily better than all of the religions that preceded it, particularly Judaism.

In as much as the Christian church has been favorable to children across history, Judaism has showed similar, and at times greater, favor. Christian ethics around children have, in fact, largely emerged from their Jewish counterparts. Bonnie Miller McLemore thus warns, “Hyperbole about [Jesus’] love of children has potentially harmful as well as positive consequences. He stands within a Jewish context where children received a certain kind of respect that many Christians overlook.”<sup>52</sup> The children described by Luke’s gospel should be envisioned *within* the Jewish community.

The goal of my project is not, therefore, to suggest a unique valuation of children by one ancient community over another. Rather, I am primarily interested in retrieving a fuller picture of the first-century valuation of children in general as it is portrayed in Luke’s gospel account. In light of such cultural valuation, I then take up the question of how children are portrayed by Luke to have integrated into the early Jesus movement and what implications such integration has for the integration of children in Christian churches, where they are often neglected today.

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<sup>51</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Jesus Loves the Little Children?: An Exercise in the Use of Scripture,” in *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 1:7 (October 2010) 30.

Second, James Francis poignantly observes, “It may be the case that the influence of Jesus’ image of the child is to be found in how it contributed to (and arguably defined) discipleship.”<sup>53</sup> Ironically, a reading of New Testament portraits of children that touts a supercessionist view of the sudden Christian valuing of children is not only historically questionable at best, but in fact serves to devalue the actual role of child characters in the text. Here Francis takes a great stride toward re-valuing the role(s) of children in the New Testament world. Namely, he associates the images of children portrayed in New Testament texts with the active characterization of discipleship.

However, by such an association Francis neither implies that children were or were not disciples. He is concerned solely with the way in which adult portraits of children influenced adult concepts of discipleship. For him, the historical child reflected in the text is irretrievable. Thus, his study of images of childhood does not seek to learn of or from any children in the New Testament texts at all. To the extent that Francis raises consciousness about children and their concerns, this is a side product of his adult-centered project of interpreting the adult use of children as metaphors for adult concepts such as discipleship.

Francis’ inquiries into children in antiquity thus have the same end—to better understand the use of children as images and metaphors by the adult authors of the New Testament. To this end he falls middle of the road in the Ariès debate—concluding that ancient feelings about children were neither entirely negative nor positive: “In the ancient world children had both a marginal and liminal existence...[thus,] children and children’s activity may be metaphorized in terms of various desirable and undesirable values.”<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, Francis argues that it is precisely through this vehicle of metaphorization that child imagery in the New Testament

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<sup>53</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 17.

flourished. The position of a child in a Christian household remained largely unchanged across history in comparison to the position of a similar child in a pagan or Jewish household. Indeed, Francis writes, “It may be that child imagery enabled the Church to embed the prophetic call of the kingdom within the domestic obligations and responsibilities of existing households.”<sup>55</sup>

Francis reads each use of child imagery in the various New Testament texts in light of both their historical and textual contexts, asking what current understandings of first-century childhood add to the significance of the metaphor in each text. Thus, the majority of his work, albeit well grounded in both historical and literary methodology, does not directly apply to the goal of retrieving the characters of children themselves and their roles in early Christian communities from beneath the authorial depictions remaining in the New Testament texts.

For the purposes of this goal, the most enduring development to come out of Francis’ work is his observation of the power reversal brought about by emphasis in New Testament texts on “childlikeness.” He explains that, despite retaining prevailing cultural attitudes toward childhood, the New Testament (particularly the gospels) places remarkable emphasis “on childlikeness whereby it is not only the role of the child to be taught by the adult but that the adult may learn lessons of faith from the child, and indeed must become as a child in trustful dependency and in the discovery of God in the marginalized.”<sup>56</sup> In order for the metaphor of the child to be instructive for an adult disciple, it is necessary to revalue the image of children themselves—liberating such children as unique and agential individuals from beneath the flattening essentialization of a single metaphor. Indeed, the necessary correlation is that children, in so far as their images are instructive, become themselves the instructors of adults in terms of

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<sup>55</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> James Francis, “Children and Childhood in the New Testament,” in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 84-85.



what it means to be a disciple or a possessor of the Kingdom of God. This is a point on which I will build in my discussion of discipleship in the fifth chapter.

Published only one year later, Beverly Gaventa's *Our Mother Saint Paul* explores maternal imagery in the letters of Paul through literary analysis of the places where Paul refers to himself or other apostles as mothers alongside those places where he refers to the communities to whom he writes as children. Such treatment is based on the perceptive assumption that parent metaphors entail children and vice versa. To this end, Gaventa engages in detailed literary and historical analysis, grounding each metaphor in both first-century Mediterranean literature and cultural context. Such attention, particularly to the social and cultural histories of children, makes Gaventa's monograph landmark in its field. Moreover, in her first chapter, Gaventa takes the connection between parents and children one step further, defending a translation of 1 Thessalonians 2:7 that understands Paul as referring to himself *both* as an "infant" and a "nurse." Concluding that, despite apparent contradictions, these metaphors should be held together, Gaventa writes: "For what the text suggests is that the apostles of Christ are not to be understood in an ordinary way. To understand them, just as to understand the gospel itself, one must employ categories that seem outrageous outside the context of Pauline paradox."<sup>57</sup> This move towards a paradoxical understanding of the apostles—and, I would argue, the whole Christian community—is a point to which I will return as I construct my own reading of children in the Lukan texts.

Most recently, Jennifer Houston McNeel is concerned primarily about children in terms of what a greater understanding of childhood in antiquity can add in the interpretation of child metaphors, specifically Paul's reference to himself as both infant and nursing mother in 1

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<sup>57</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 27.

Thessalonians 2:5-8. Based on cognitive metaphor theory and social identity analysis, Houston McNeel observes, “When a person or group is the target domain of a metaphor, the metaphor whether conventional or new, exerts influence on self-understanding.”<sup>58</sup> She consequently examines the literary and historical source material of infants and nurses in order to understand how Paul is appealing to what she seems to assume to be a primarily adult Christian community in Thessalonica to understand itself.<sup>59</sup>

Drawing heavily on the historical and social analysis of Beryl Rawson and others, Houston McNeel favors a favorable reading of children and childhood in antiquity that, while acknowledging the difficulties, sees them as loved and valued members of the household.<sup>60</sup> Her interpretation of the Pauline metaphor relies on this interpretive frame and consequently continues to hold the fuller picture of ancient childhoods advocated by more recent scholars of antiquity in the center of biblical interpretation, as opposed to early readings of Ariès that favored one-dimensional views of childhood as nonexistent and children as undervalued in the first-century household.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, her study does not pay explicit attention to children within the early Christian communities from which the metaphors are sourced.

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<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Houston McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother: Metaphor, Rhetoric, and Identity in 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014) 24.

<sup>59</sup> This assumption, while nowhere stated outright, seems to be assumed by the level of political involvement that Houston McNeel pictures the Christians in Thessalonica engaged in leading to and in response to their persecution (cf. Houston McNeel, 89-91; 97-98).

<sup>60</sup> Houston McNeel, 62-72.

<sup>61</sup> As an example of such a bleak interpretation dominant in the middle of the twentieth century following the publication of Ariès’ work, cf. T.R. Hobbs: “In the ancient world children were: 1) socially equal to slaves, 2) considered small people with very little rights, 3) not protected under many Jewish laws, and 4) subject to abuses. Children did not gain recognition until puberty... While children were taught the Scriptures they were not viewed as mature citizens of the community and were classed with slaves, women, and imbeciles” (“Crossing Cultural Bridges: The Biblical World,” *McMaster Journal of Theology* 1:2 (1990) 12, summarized in Clark, 240-241).

## 2. Children as Characters in New Testament Literature

Moving beyond the emerging focus on the complex picture of childhood and Pauline Studies, in 2009 Cornelia Horn and John Martens co-authored a landmark survey of childhood across early Christianity titled, *“Let the Little Children Come to Me”*: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. Drawing heavily on the research of early Roman family scholars, Horn and Martens argue that first-century Mediterranean children were viewed as “a precious commodity.”<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the view of Ariès still frequently carried over into gospel scholarship prior to their monograph, Horn and Martens conclude that much of the material evidence suggests that children “were cared for, loved, and mourned in death.”<sup>63</sup>

To this end, Horn and Martens describe the metaphorical use of children in the gospel accounts as something more complex, something that cannot be reduced to one or two “natural” or typical character traits. They write:

There is something about children and their place in the kingdom that is simply not reducible to innocence, vulnerability, humility, lowliness, lack of prestige, simplicity, purity, nearness to God, openness to Christ, or any other attribute one may suggest. It is all of this and more, for their place in the kingdom is by virtue of their being simply children of God.<sup>64</sup>

Here, indeed, by seeing the value of children in their very *being*, Horn and Martens move beyond reading children in the New Testament solely as a meaning category to be applied to adults towards understanding the value of children in and of themselves in the Kingdom of God. This is particularly the case in their discussions of children in the synoptic gospels.

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<sup>62</sup> Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, *“Let the little children come to me”*: *Childhood and Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009) 346-347.

<sup>63</sup> Horn and Martens, 346-347.

<sup>64</sup> Horn and Martens, 259.

Similarly, Marcia Bunge, together with Terence Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, published an edited volume on children in both testaments, titled *The Child in the Bible*, the year before Horn and Martens' monograph was released.<sup>65</sup> Similar to Horn and Martens, Bunge seeks to undertake a vast survey in this volume, encompassing thousands of years of biblical history and a diverse range of interpretive methods. However, whereas *Let the Little Children Come* was the collaboration of two authors with a particular focus on the role of children and childhood in the NT, most of Bunge's authors are approaching children in this text for the first time.<sup>66</sup> As a result, the authors of Bunge's volume as a whole (with the notable exception of Judith Gundry's<sup>67</sup> article on Mark's Gospel, addressed below) approach the texts through their preexistent reading lenses, foregrounding children within these broader questions.

John Carroll's essay, "What Then Will This Child Become?": Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of Luke" is an example of this.<sup>68</sup> Carroll's essay successfully introduces the reader to the presence of children in Luke's gospel account and the need for further attention to their perspectives. However, the limits of the intentional survey nature of this piece prevent him from going in depth into the particularities of these characters and their perspectives and the

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<sup>65</sup> Marcia Bunge, Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmann's, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Laurel Koepf-Taylor explains, "...most of [Bunge's] authors do not see children and childhood as the primary focus of their work (at the time of writing). Rather, they are established biblical scholars whom Bunge has asked to reexamine a text they have researched previously, only foregrounding children and childhood" (5).

<sup>67</sup> Note that she authors earlier work under the name Judith Gundry-Volf and this essay, as well as others, under the name Judith Gundry. For consistency I follow this latter usage except in applicable footnotes and bibliography.

<sup>68</sup> The most notable exception to this lacuna is John Carroll's excellent essay "What Then Will This Child Become?": Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of Luke," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann's, 2008) 177-194. My project is a response to the call for scholarly attention to children in the Bible issued by the broader project of which Carroll's essay is a part. I am therefore indebted to his work, together with that of the editorial team of *The Child in the Bible* and Judith Gundry for her extensive work on children in Mark's gospel account both within and outside of that volume.

implications of their presence for one's reading of Luke's narrative as a whole, and to date he has not done so in any other work.

On the other hand, Judith Gundry's essay on children in Mark, as a part of the same volume, stands as a continuation to an earlier essay on the same topic and focuses on several key texts, including Jesus' blessing of children in Mark 10:13-16. As such, her essays read with a more concentrated attention to the place and role of children in the gospel account than Carroll's overview.

In her exegesis, Judith Gundry avoids most over-generalizations of children by returning to a social description of their first-century reality, similar to what is done by Gaventa, Francis, and Houston McNeal primarily in the Pauline corpus. However, Gundry does not stop at the application of such realities to elucidate a range of meanings in metaphor. Rather, by foregrounding actual children and families, as demonstrated by the research into the first-century context(s) of childhood(s) in the Greco-Roman world, she, like Horn and Martens, combats the systems of adult domination that have plagued New Testament scholarship. By engaging the dynamic nature of the real children behind the gospel text, Gundry problematizes attempts to reduce conceptions of childhood(s) into neat categories in order to decode it as metaphor and distill a core message for adults.

Instead, Gundry focuses on the lived realities of children as small and dependent as she examines their unique role in the gospel text. She writes, it is "not any particular quality of the child, but 'the child's littleness, immaturity and need of assistance, though commonly disparaged, [that] keep the way open for the fatherly love of God.'"<sup>69</sup> Here, like Horn and

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<sup>69</sup> Judith M. Gundry, "Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus' Blessing of the Children (Mark 10:13-16) and the Purpose of Mark," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge, et. al. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008) 152.

Martens, she focuses on the essence of being a child—in as much as any such “essence” can be assigned—in order to understand the relation of these children to Jesus in the gospel text. Such a treatment, while it may at times flirt with the dangers of essentialization, serves primarily to humanize the child characters in Luke’s gospel account. They are no longer mere interpretive frames for understanding Jesus’ message of the Kingdom, but rather characters in their own right, reflecting the lived reality of first-century children and consequently with something to say about the role of children in God’s Kingdom both then and now.

Nevertheless, while Gundry foregrounds children as characters in the text, she reads them primarily as static characters, representing the smallness and dependency that she understands to primarily define childhood in the first-century. In this light, she concludes that “despite children’s inaction, absence, and even resistance, Mark’s Jesus brings the blessings of the kingdom to children *solely* on the basis of their need.”<sup>70</sup> The child characters, in this way, serve primarily as foils by which Jesus shows the far-reaching extensions of the gospel. The more complex and dynamic state of “being” a child described by Horn and Martens above is thus lost when Gundry dismisses any potential autonomy or contribution by children in favor of highlighting the expansive action of Jesus.

Bunge’s volume thus broadens the field of those writing on children and childhood in biblical studies. Yet, the articles themselves are not always motivated by the same series of assumptions as child-centered readings that come out of the interdisciplinary framework established by Childhood Studies. The articles in Bunge’s volume thus fit more easily into the treatment of children and childhood as a theme within biblical texts, rather than a concerted effort to allow the constructed natures of childhood to inform the authors’ readings of the texts.

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<sup>70</sup> Gundry, 152.

These articles do not emphasize the social constructedness of childhood(s) and the agency of children both within and outside of the literary text, as more recent readings of Hebrew Bible texts, such as Koepf-Taylor and Parker's volumes, which read from a childist lens, have done. Nevertheless, such thematic approaches represent a marked shift from the traditional treatment of children and childhood as metaphor that has previously dominated much of New Testament scholarship.

In the midst of the general neglect and metaphorization of children by the majority of biblical scholarship, several voices have emerged that challenge this norm. Marcia Bunge and the contributors to her edited volume, *The Child in the Bible*, do this well by foregrounding the presence of children in the New Testament as well as the Hebrew Bible, even if the survey nature of much of their work does not allow for sustained analysis. The primary effect of both her survey and that of Horn and Martens serves to raise the profile of children in the discipline and present a case for future study of children and childhood in biblical studies.

Similarly, A. James Murphy's monograph, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels*, engages in a survey of the treatment of children across the synoptic accounts.<sup>71</sup> Departing from previously positive portraits of children in the New Testament world, however, Murphy performs a deconstructive reading that challenges assertions, primarily by Christian theologians, that Early Christianity valued children more than its ambient first-century Roman and Jewish cultures. Relying on Gerd Theissen's sociological model, which assumes early disciples included a combination of wandering radicals who identified directly with the Jesus movement and settled sympathizers who maintained their Jewish roots, Murphy concludes that the culture of wandering radicalism demanded by early Christianity as Theissen

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<sup>71</sup> A. James Murphy, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

distinguishes it from broader Jewish culture was not only not conducive to the discipleship of young children, but in fact, dangerous for and harmful to them.

On account of this dissonance between what he sees as the cultural implications of Jesus' call to discipleship and the teachings about children in the synoptic gospels, Murphy suggests that the place of children in the early Christian community was actually much more precarious than the gospels depict. He highlights themes of child abandonment, such as in the synoptic accounts of Jesus' passion, and concludes that, although Jesus heals children in the synoptic gospels, the fact that the gospel authors do not describe the children following him itself creates a paradigm for child abandonment.

Like Gundry, Murphy foregrounds the needs and concerns of children both as characters within the texts and as real people behind the text and, as a result of his understanding of the social and developmental realities involved, ultimately dismisses significant autonomous action by such children themselves. However, unlike Gundry, Murphy concludes with a far less positive reading of children in relation to the Jesus movement.

Highlighting texts that seem to call for the abandonment of family including children, such as Lk 14:26 and 18:29, Murphy builds on the scholarship of Stephen Barton and David Sim who have previously tackled what Sim describes as "this neglected and in some ways uncomfortable subject."<sup>72</sup> The basic argument is that, while Jesus may respond favorably to the child characters explicit in the gospel texts, the implicit children of the disciples and crowds whom Jesus calls to leave everything in order to follow him would have experienced significant hardship if abandoned. Murphy writes, "The problem as I see it is that their [children's] presence

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<sup>72</sup> David C. Sim, "What About the Wives and Children of the Disciples?: The Cost of Discipleship from Another Perspective," in *Heythrop Journal* XXXV (1994) 373.



has not been fully examined by scholars in light of sayings relativizing family ties, and against the lifestyle indicative of the radical call to discipleship of the broader Synoptic narratives.”<sup>73</sup>

Most treatments of children in the gospel texts, including Horn and Martens’ and Gundry’s respective work, which have become in many ways the standards on the topic, tend to gloss over this reality. Miller-McLemore describes this tendency, using Gundry as an example:

Twice, in footnotes rather than the main text of her 2001 chapter, she explains that attention to “Jesus’ seemingly inimical stance toward children” lies beyond the scope of her essay. She reserves “for a later occasion” analysis of “Mark 10:29-30; 13:12; Luke 9:59-62; 12:51-53; and 14:26, where he requires disciples to ‘leave’ and ‘hate’ family members, including children, for the sake of following him” (2001, pp. 36-37; see also pp. 52-53). To her credit, Gundry does return to these texts in her recent work, devoting a section to “Jesus’ family” (2008, pp. 158-162). But even here she actively works to soften their blow by drawing them into comfortable alignment with Jesus’ effort to create a new community of disciples.<sup>74</sup>

There is a tendency among a majority of scholars to either ignore or minimize those texts that do not fit as comfortably with our contemporary portraits of Jesus. To understand Jesus as anything other than one who “loves the little children”<sup>75</sup> fits into that category. As such, Miller-McLemore’s recognition of those scholars who have sought to refute this pattern is a helpful corrective. One can only address the liberative functions of a biblical text or texts for a marginalized group, such as children, if one is aware of and addresses those segments of the texts that could be read as harmful as well. To this end, the work of Barton, Sim, and Murphy is informative.

Inferring details about Jesus’ disciples from information and models about their social and cultural milieu, Sim concludes, “Their decision meant that they had to abandon their wives

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<sup>73</sup> Murphy, 102.

<sup>74</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Jesus Loves the Little Children?” 18-19.

<sup>75</sup> Clare Herbert Woolston, (1856-1927) “Jesus Loves the Little Children.”

and young children as well.”<sup>76</sup> While I will question the historical and literary assumptions of Sim’s conclusion in detail in chapter four, he, together with Barton and Murphy, raises an important point. Any comprehensive inquiry into the place and role of children in Jesus’ ministry cannot be complete without giving at least as much, if not more, attention to the many children implicit in the teachings and actions of the gospel narratives as to the few who are explicitly named. Murphy is correct to insist, “the Synoptic authors present child characters with challenges of household disruption and alienation as a consequence of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.”<sup>77</sup> This critique and the consequent connections between the synoptic narratives and the present-day demons of child abuse and neglect cannot be ignored.

Murphy’s book thus falls in line with, while distinct from, the surveys on biblical children that preceded him. He foregrounds child characters (both implicit and explicit in the gospel texts), takes seriously their place both as characters in the narratives and real people in the presence of whom the narrative was being developed, and wrestles with these implications for the present day Church. Thus, while he may come out with opposite conclusions to Gundry, Murphy, like her, continues to treat the children—both those explicit and implicit—in the gospel narratives as static characters. For Murphy, the children in the gospels are dependent and vulnerable victims of abandonment on account of whom we should approach the message with care.

In contrast, Sharon Betsworth, in her recently published 2015 monograph, *Children in Early Christian Narratives*, begins to move beyond such broad surveys of children in Early

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<sup>76</sup> Sim, 382.

<sup>77</sup> Murphy, 34.

Christian literature to consider children as they are treated in discrete New Testament texts.<sup>78</sup>

Most significantly, after an introductory chapter on the role(s) of children in the first-century Mediterranean world, Betsworth treats each appearance of a child or children in the New Testament texts within the particular literary framework and theology of its gospel narrative. As such, in cases, such as Jesus' reception of the little children, which appear in all three synoptic accounts, Betsworth treats each gospel writer's narration of the story separately.

Acknowledging the presence of hidden children beneath each of the gospel accounts, Betsworth chooses for the purposes of this work, to focus on the children explicitly named as characters in the text. Her orienting question is how these children so portrayed fit into each gospel narrative and its genre as characters. In relation to Luke's gospel account, Betsworth draws out the implications of the Lukan author's rhetoric of explicitly naming each child who is directly narrated as an "only child." To this end, she names both Mary and Jesus as children worthy of consideration within Luke's ancient *novella* account.

### 3. Child-Centered Approaches to the Hebrew Bible

In her recent monograph, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature*, Laurel Koepf-Taylor provides a sweeping overview of what she describes as "child-centered publications" in the Hebrew Bible. Among the scholars whose work has recently taken seriously the place of children in the Hebrew Bible within the broader scope of childhood studies, she includes, beyond her own work: Danna Nolan Fewell, Christine Hendricksen Garroway, Julie Faith Parker, and Naomi Steinberg.<sup>79</sup>

In her pioneering volume *The Child in the Bible*, Marcia Bunge calls for a re-examination

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<sup>78</sup> Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

<sup>79</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 3; for a more extended review of these works, cf. pp. 3-5.

of “biblical texts through the ‘lens’ or category of ‘the child’” in similar manner to previous hermeneutical use of “the lens of ‘gender,’ ‘race,’ or ‘class’ as categories of analysis.”<sup>80</sup> In adopting the term “childist interpretation,” Hebrew Bible scholar Julie Faith Parker reviews the variety of vocabulary for child-centered approaches that has emerged within the nascent study of children in the field of biblical criticism.<sup>81</sup> She ultimately responds to Bunge’s call for a new hermeneutical lens by appropriating Wall’s theological-ethical use of childism as a lens akin to the interpretive lenses of feminism, womanism, Marxism, and so forth.

Parker encourages biblical scholars to follow her lead, suggesting that this term, when used positively, can emphasize “children’s active role in shaping culture, instead of seeing them as largely passive or victimized.”<sup>82</sup> In this way, a childist approach to the biblical text shines a light on the frequently overlooked agency already present in human beings at infancy and into early childhood. She elaborates,

To speak of a childist interpretation seems appropriate for this book that explores stories of the Bible’s children much as feminist biblical scholars have focused on women. The approach here also reassesses previously neglected characters. Like feminist biblical interpretation, childist biblical interpretation becomes part of a larger movement that questions engrained patterns of thought that minimize the contributions of certain kinds of people.<sup>83</sup>

For Parker, the task of a childist interpretation consists of locating and understanding biblical children through the textual structure that separates these young characters from their contemporary readers. In her 2013 publication of her dissertation, Parker thus performs her childist reading as a hermeneutical lens on an otherwise literary critical approach to the text.

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<sup>80</sup> Marcia Bunge, “Introduction,” in *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia Bunge, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann’s, 2008) xxviii.

<sup>81</sup> For a full review of the terms that have been used and their various strengths and weaknesses, cf. Parker, 16-18.

<sup>82</sup> Parker, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Parker, 17.

Parker outlines her process, including: “Three steps of dissection (*Setting, Characters, Re-viewing the Plot from a Childist Perspective*) [to] examine the story’s details, before three steps of connection (*Childist Interpretation, Insights about Children, and Children and Textual Connections*) [to] discuss its wider insights and implications.”<sup>84</sup> By applying the childist lens to her reading, Parker is able to notice and explore new insights into the text that, when child character(s) are neglected, do not surface in the story. Moreover, her method demands a reading that preserves the dignity and respect of child characters as subjects in the narrative that unfolds.

The importance of the task of childist criticism lies not only in recovering the place and role of children as characters on the biblical author’s side of the narrative, but also in discerning from their characterization what such children can teach contemporary readers on the other side of the text. In this way, a childist interpretation (re)constructs the voices of children in and behind the biblical account, so that they might speak to the concerns of marginalized children in a contemporary context.

In the execution of such readings, Parker frequently uplifts the agency of children in the Elisha narratives that she examines, where otherwise such children have been treated solely as objects for the purpose of the progression of the plot. She is also sensitive to the ways in which such children remain dependent upon adults in the culture and world in which they live. Similarly, in this project I employ a childist lens that is aware of both the agency and the concomitant dependency present in early childhood. Such a lens offers a unique contribution to the field of biblical studies by providing a methodology for (re)reading biblical texts in light of the interdependence this dual role implies.

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<sup>84</sup> Parker, 87.

In order to accomplish this, sensitivity to the social world in which the biblical authors' conceptions of childhood were formed is necessary. To this end, Laurel Koepf-Taylor, working closely with Julie Faith Parker, has expanded upon this aspect of childist reading, in what she terms a child-centered approach. Koepf-Taylor describes her methodology as an interdisciplinary approach reliant upon "tools, questions, and perspectives" from childhood studies.<sup>85</sup> Situating this approach among various ideas about the way in which interdisciplinarity functions, she explains that for her,

Childhood studies is the conversation space in which the many disciplines that have historically studied children and childhood come together, joined by disciplines that have not traditionally given significant attention to children and childhood. Each discipline brings and shares its own ideas, questions, and methodologies. The conversation itself is the primary contribution of the interdisciplinary 'coffeehouse,' along with new ideas, questions, and methodologies that inevitably emerge out of the conversation.<sup>86</sup>

Bolstered by the ongoing conversation across disciplines with regard to the social construction of childhoods, Koepf-Taylor brings these questions into biblical studies. She explains, "The understanding that childhood is socially constructed, along with the other tools and insights of childhood studies, provides significant interdisciplinary contributions to biblical studies."<sup>87</sup>

To this end, Koepf-Taylor aligns with New Sociologists, such as James and Taylor and Jenks, to critique the Piagetian models of development that have been traditionally accepted in religious studies. She draws out the tendency of such models to set forth "Western adult ways of thinking as the ultimate goal of human development so that children must by necessity exhibit

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<sup>85</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 2.

varying degrees of deficiency.”<sup>88</sup> The application of the Western ideal of reason to children in Ancient Israel, or, I would add, the first-century Mediterranean world, is anachronistic. Instead, Koepf-Taylor posits that children not only are not deficient but rather possess different and unique capacities in comparison to adults. She cites as an example the adeptness with which contemporary Western children learn technology over and against the slower learning curve of adults.

In an effort to draw out a more nuanced picture of the ancient Israelite constructions of childhood that informed the authors of the biblical texts, Koepf-Taylor employs a more social scientific approach than Parker. She utilizes social history, ethnography, and material evidence to inform her reading of the biblical text. At the same time, however, she does not leave the literary world of the narratives behind. Instead, she sees her social scientific approach as necessary to inform her understanding of the characters as they are constructed and portrayed in the text. She explains, “By being attentive to child characters and the function of children as figures of speech, interpreters can comprehend the ancient authors’ intent with increased nuance.”<sup>89</sup>

Most recently, Margaret MacDonald, in *The Power of Children: Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (2014),<sup>90</sup> applies this child-centered lens to New Testament texts. Drawing upon recent trends in scholarship on Roman families that uplift the intersectionality of Roman household life over against monolithic readings of the patriarchal supremacy of the *pater familias*, MacDonald performs a socio-cultural interpretation of the early Christian household codes. She seeks a re-interpretation of these codes and the broader relationships they imply that comes through placing children at the center of her reading.

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<sup>88</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 11.

<sup>89</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 126.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret MacDonald, *The Power of Children: Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

MacDonald's work thus focuses New Testament scholarship on the moral tensions implicit in a plurality of family roles and circumstances, while, at an even more basic level, highlighting the pervasive presence of children in early Roman society and their roles and contributions in the household as the base of ancient society and power.

### *Conclusion*

Since the emergence of Childhood Studies in the 1990's, significant work has been done in applying historical and social realities of ancient childhoods to interpretation of the biblical texts. In many ways, scholars of the Hebrew Bible have led the way in this work, foregrounding children in their readings and applying specific and rigorous attention both to what is meant by the word child and the dynamic ways in which children interact and at times drive both their own character and the biblical narratives in which they are cast.

In New Testament research, studies of the historical and social realities of ancient childhood have more typically been applied as a means by which to understand children as referents in metaphors applied to understandings of discipleship for adults. This, in part, is due to the greater use of child metaphors in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's letters. However, a few scholars have stood out in their focused exegesis of child characters in the gospel accounts.

Among those scholars who have foregrounded child characters in the gospel accounts there tend to be two trends. On the one hand, authors such as Judith Gundry and the other New Testament contributors to *The Child in the Bible* tend to emphasize those passages that highlight Jesus' care for children. On the other hand, David Sim, Stephen Barton, and A. James Murphy emphasize those texts that highlight the disjuncture between Jesus' itinerant ministry and the needs of and care for young children. In either case, however, the portrait of such child characters in the gospel accounts tends to be a static picture of a group of dependent people,



small in stature, and susceptible both economically and physically to many hardships absent adult protection.

Despite the relatively recent movement toward listening to the voices of biblical children and respecting the agency that they represent, children have never been completely absent from the biblical text. Children have been hidden in plain sight by exegetes for far too long. How has this happened? Often, mention of children and childhood in the New Testament are so instinctively metaphorized to address the concerns of a largely adult (academic) audience that the presence of real children within and outside of the text out of which the metaphor arises are all but forgotten.

This treatment of children as metaphors can be particularly seen in, while not limited to, typical commentaries on Jesus' welcoming of children in Luke 18. At other times, children or activities (such as nursing) associated with them are used in metaphor, but interpreters have assumed contemporary entailments to such metaphors, ignoring what they can reveal to us about the children in such texts and concepts of childhood that stand behind their usage. Still further, there are characters who may or almost probably would have been understood by ancient audiences as children who, given the adultization of the New Testament<sup>91</sup> by modern scholarship, are rarely read as children today.

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<sup>91</sup> The term "adultization of the New Testament" was coined by Adrian Thatcher in 2010. He argues that the adultization of faith in the New Testament occurs when: "(1) Vocabulary of childhood... is metaphorically extended (usurped?) to bring to speech the adult relation to the divine Father; (2) vocabulary of parenthood is metaphorically extended (usurped?) to bring to speech the divine relation to human adults. The unfortunate result is that the anchoring of child-language in the situation of actual children and families is easily displaced ("Beginning Again with Jesus," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 144.

## **Approaching Luke's Gospel Account: A Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

Following in the trajectory of those more recent gospel critics who have sought to foreground children as characters, both explicit and implicit, in the gospel texts, this project embarks on a literary critical reading of Luke's gospel from a childist perspective. In terms of the motivating goals of such a reading, Anna Mae Duanne eloquently describes my purpose:

“Because the child has always been a deeply narrativized subject, any useful study of childhood and children must be willing to draw on the ‘humanistic turn of mind’ and its ability to illuminate, critique, and ultimately transform the narratives that both influence and occlude the lives of actual young people.<sup>92</sup> In a descriptive sense, it is the goal of chapters two and four to *illuminate* children as subjects both in the broad cultural narratives of the first-century Mediterranean world and in the specific literary narrative of Luke's gospel text. Chapters three and five seek to *critique* those assumed readings of Luke's narrative that both repress and oppress children in Luke's text by variously ignoring, occluding, or flattening their roles in the broader story. Finally, in chapter six I propose a *transformation* of the readers' understandings of both children as characters and Luke's gospel text on account of this reading. To do this requires careful definition both of my methodological approach.

### *Reading Within a Rhetorical Emancipatory Paradigm*

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's rhetorical emancipatory paradigm involves six steps: (1) bringing to consciousness the source of oppression; (2) analyzing the systems of domination responsible for oppression; (3) employing a hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to the biblical texts that are a product of this oppression; (4) (re)constructing the voices of characters oppressed by the dominant narrative; (5) assessing the value of the new reading with respect to the dignity

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<sup>92</sup> Duanne, 4.

of all wo/men (people); and (6) (re)imagining a different world in resistance to the harmful systems of domination.<sup>93</sup> Employing a somewhat fluid application of this paradigm, my project seeks to (re)member the place of young children as characters in the Lukan narrative, with an aim toward recovering Luke's narrative as a gospel that affirms the dignity and worth of its youthful audience.

To this end, this chapter has called into question adult-centric interpretations of Luke's text as party, whether intentionally or not, to ageist systems and hierarchies that serve to suppress the voices of youthful characters within the gospel. It has done so by employing a hermeneutic of suspicion towards interpreters of the scripture narratives, highlighting the adultist agendas with which many have approached Luke's text. In the words of Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer,

We need to recall that the biblical texts were not written by children, for children, or with children as prime concern. So we need to be wary how children are characterized in both the first and second Testaments. The limitation of the Bible as a particular product of its own time and place beckons present readers to acknowledge this fact and be aware of the serious task of critical reading and hermeneutical interaction with these texts today.<sup>94</sup>

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to laying out the methodology of such critical engagement in order to approach Luke's narrative in an academically responsible way, while retaining the interests of children at the forefront of my reading.

Additionally, my reading of Luke's text maintains Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to the Lukan author himself, acknowledging that despite attention to some children, when it is avoidable he generally leans towards leaving such references out. As a result,

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<sup>93</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 44-46.

<sup>94</sup> Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer, "The Beloved Child: The Presentation of Jesus as a Child in the Second Testament" in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 113.

Luke's gospel maintains vestiges of a community populated with many children, some of whom can be drawn out of the shadows through careful re-reading of the text, but many of whom Luke has, likely intentionally, suppressed. The repercussions of such suppression have included the exclusion and second-rate treatment of children within many contemporary churches, which fails to acknowledge children as a part of the church, even while those within such churches continue under the mantra that children are the future of the church.

The second and fourth chapters seek to bring to consciousness the hidden and forgotten roles of young children who have been all but silenced in Luke's narrative. This conscientization draws significantly on evidence for the active and semi-autonomous roles that children seem to have enjoyed in the first-century Mediterranean culture at large. While, concomitantly, the third and fifth chapters (re)construct the characters of young children in the narrative through literary analysis that draws on the social positions and realities likely presumed in Luke's characterization of children in the first-century Mediterranean world. It is the goal of these chapters to bring child characters out of the shadows of adultist presuppositions and to question adultist assumptions that assume physical maturity for all Luke's characters even when this is not named.

After weaving back and forth through the steps of Schüssler Fiorenza's paradigm, admittedly giving more time to the task of (re)construction than others, I turn in the sixth chapter to the final two steps. In this chapter, I (re)imagine Luke's portrait of the early Church as one which, while flawed, seeks to live into a new construction of family that is not dominated by hierarchies such as age. Moreover, I raise the question of how such a (re)imagined reading of Luke's early Church might influence constructions of and participation of children within Christian churches today. Such an assessment only holds value as long as it advances the dignity

and respect of children as disciples of Jesus, while continuing to honor the dignity and respect of all other disciples, regardless of any other distinctions. In order to ascertain that this is the case, the sixth chapter concludes with an assessment of the unique ways in which a childist reading advances the dignity, not only of children but of all disciples portrayed in Luke's narrative and beyond.

### *Conscientization and Critique of Luke's Gospel and its Received Tradition*

Luke's gospel was composed around the end of the first-century CE.<sup>95</sup> It is the first in what most scholars now agree to be a two-volume work including the *Acts of the Apostles*. The name Luke, after a traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; Phm 24; 2 Tim 4:11), was ascribed to the gospel's author by Irenaeus of Lyon around 180 CE, largely based on the "we" passages describing Paul's travel in Acts 16-28. More recent gospel criticism notes in these "we" passages the application of a common rhetorical device, thereby leaving the historical author of both the gospel and *Acts* unknown.

Likewise, there has been much debate as to whether the audience of this paired account is predominately Gentile or Jewish Christian. Given the relative congruity between both Gentiles and Jews in the first-century Mediterranean world, particularly around household arrangements and ethics among the majority subsistence-class, I have chosen not to engage in the nuances of this particular debate. Rather, what can be said is that Luke-Acts was written at the end of the first-century to a Mediterranean audience steeped in Roman culture and aware of, through—at minimum—their interest in Christianity, both Roman and Jewish social and ethical norms.

What we know about this context and its social world is derived from material evidence and written accounts. Certain material items, particularly those crafted to a smaller size or with

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<sup>95</sup> Schnelle, 243.

an evident use as playthings have been attributed to children. However, in contrast to the marks that prehistoric children have been seen to have made alongside their adult counterparts in French caves, no manuscripts in the voice of first-century children are known to exist. Historian Valerie French names this as a sign of patriarchy, noting: “The voices of but a few ancient women survived; ancient children are totally silent.”<sup>96</sup> The narratives we possess featuring child characters are thus, as is the case with Luke, always filtered through an adult, usually male, lens.

Moreover, since adult males dominate the discourse, they also control the content of what is written about. Generally, the direct concerns or daily lives of children do not make the list. Carol Harrison observes, “In the Roman Empire, the everyday life of women and children within a household or family can only be glimpsed, rather inadequately, through what is said on other subjects.”<sup>97</sup> The greatest exception to this is the body of work on the education of children in antiquity, but even here the concern is the adult parent or teacher’s designs for their child as achieved by education and not the child’s experience of education itself.

For this reason, Francis insists that the voices of first-century children have been lost. However, I contend that such voices are not entirely lost, but rather hidden and have the potential to be emancipated from the adultist frameworks within which they have laid dormant across the centuries. Such a retrieval requires engaging texts in which Luke clearly portrays child characters with a hermeneutic of suspicion, asking what adultist agendas both Luke and his interpreters had in mind in their treatment of each character and then (re)constructing these child characters in light of what we know both about the Lukan narrative and the life of children in Luke’s cultural milieu. In those texts in which Luke does not clearly portray children and in which interpreters

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<sup>96</sup> French, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Carol Harrison, “The Silent Majority: The Family in Patristic Thought,” in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 88.

have rarely (or never) attended to the possibility of child characters, it is likewise necessary to acknowledge the adultist bias of Luke and his interpreters.

Such an acknowledgment is particularly prudent in light of the pervasive presence of children in the first-century Mediterranean world.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, a childist reading begins conscious that the reason for such silence is likely motivated by a lack of concern for documenting the experiences of children by the dominant elite males in control of most writing. Silences about children in Luke's narrative ought therefore not to be taken as an indication of their absence from the situation, even from the assumed imaginations of the audience of Luke's literary work. Rather, the absence of children at the forefront of particular scenes in the narrative speaks more to the concerns of Luke as an author than to the situations of his first-century audience who would have filled the gaps in Luke's narrative with their own cultural presuppositions—including, chapter two will argue, the presupposition of the presence and participation of children.

#### *A Childist Lens for (Re)Construction and (Re)Imagination*

Given the presence of children in Luke's narrative, whether implicit or explicit, the next step in interpretation demands attention to how the reader understands these children. It is to this end, as a tool that informs my literary analysis, that I employ a concern for children and childhoods as a lens by which I read Luke's text. Such a lens does not reduce the basic approach, but rather shifts the focus and goal of such a reading. Duanne explains, "To include the child in any field of study is to realign the very structure of that field, changing the terms of inquiry and

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Population models as outlined in Chapter 2.

forcing a different set of questions.”<sup>99</sup> In my opinion, the questions that a child-centered lens asks are best framed by Julie Faith Parker in what she coins a “childist” interpretation, and I therefore adopt this terminology for my approach throughout this project. However, before attending to what is meant by childist criticism, it is important to trace the emergence of childist vocabulary in biblical and theological studies in relation to similar and overlapping movements.

## 1. The Child Theology Movement

Within the realm of religious and theological discourse there are a number of categories where interest in and the interests of children recur. These include: Theologies of Childhood, Children’s theology, Children’s Spirituality, Theologies for Children, Child Theology, and Religious Education. An entire chapter could be dedicated to the important work of each of these approaches, but in most cases this work has not directly impacted the field of biblical studies. Indeed, most of the above approaches are not even discrete disciplines but expressions of an interest in children—however that is conceived—within the broader discourses of Theology, Spirituality, and Religious Education. Child Theology, in contrast, is distinct in so far as it has defined itself as a particular movement, “building on the Bible,” with children at its core.<sup>100</sup>

In the past decade, this movement has sprung up—largely out of the United Kingdom, but represented across the globe—calling itself “The Child Theology Movement.” Marcia Bunge, a proponent of Child Theology, defines the task of this movement as one that:

Builds on theologies of childhood but with a broader task, looking at doctrine and practice as a whole;  
Re-examines fundamental doctrines and practices of the church using the ‘lens’ of the child;

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<sup>99</sup> Duanne, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Marcia Bunge, “What Child Theology Is and Is Not,” in *Toddling to the Kingdom*, ed. John Collier (London: The Child Theology Movement, 2009) 34.



Provides new insights into central themes of the Christian faith, e.g. how would we redefine the doctrine of the church if we took children seriously?<sup>101</sup>

The Child Theology Movement seeks to go beyond a particularized concern for the interests of children—though they acknowledge the importance of such a task. They seek to use the child—and in particular, what the Bible has to say to, for, and about children—as a lens through which they read and understand all theology.

This approach is similar to Schüssler Fiorenza’s insistence that feminism concerns the protection of the dignity and respect of all wo/men. Reading the Bible through the lens of concern for the place and dignity of women effectively promotes, through the valuing of both sexes, the dignity of all wo/men in the process. Likewise, reading the Bible through the lens of concern for the place and dignity of children promotes, through the valuing of all age groups, the dignity of all people in the process.

To understand it another way, Child Theology works under the premise that there is something uniquely good that concern for children offers to the theological conversation. I concur, and would add, that there is something uniquely good that concern for children offers to biblical interpretation; indeed, that there is something uniquely good that children, as read through Luke’s narrative, themselves contribute to the task of discipleship and the up building of the Church.

Haddon Willmer defines the threefold approach that he has taken to Child Theology as follows: “follow[ing] Jesus who *put a child in the middle of a theological argument!*”; reflecting “on what it means to *receive the child*”; and attending “to child suffering.”<sup>102</sup> With particular

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<sup>101</sup> Bunge, “What Child Theology Is and Is Not,” 33.

<sup>102</sup> Haddon Willmer, “What is Child Theology?” in *Toddling to the Kingdom*, ed. John Collier (London: The Child Theology Movement, 2009) 24.

regard to what it means to receive a child, Willmer acknowledges that the Movement deviates from many traditional interpretations of this mandate, understanding it to mean that adults

...become as children when they receive the child, real children, so that they live with and for the child, so that they walk at the pace of the child. They become like a child, without ceasing to be adult, when they let the child they receive be a child. As they do this, they provide what the child needs as part of its child-ness: reception.<sup>103</sup>

Child Theology promotes the interests of children by both taking them seriously as human actors with unique being and needs and by prompting adults to take seriously what it means to receive such children as children, acknowledging and attending to their needs. In addition, Child Theology promotes the interests of adults by expanding their world views to include the reception of children in all of their uniqueness. Child Theology promotes the interests of community when adults and children slow down together to walk at a pace of mutual understanding and concern.

This is the goal of my interpretive strategy—to slow down the process of interpretation in order to walk at “the pace of children.”<sup>104</sup> Miller-McLemore defines this pace as one that is concerned not with children as means to various adult ends, but rather, with “what children in themselves offer to the world, not because they need to, but because children are good gifts to the world.”<sup>105</sup> This means slowing down to take the personhood, needs, and vocation of children seriously. It means letting *them* set the pace, rather than constantly pulling them along by the elbow. In short, it means adult interpreters *paying attention* to children.

Such a goal, however, does not necessarily mean involving real children in the act of interpretation. Although it does not preclude this, I am convinced that it in fact first requires a

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<sup>103</sup> Willmer, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 152-174.

<sup>105</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 154.

hermeneutical shift on the part of the adult reader. It is on this point that childism differs from other emancipatory criticisms, such as feminism and other emancipatory paradigms.<sup>106</sup> In order to draw children out of the exegetical silence and bring adult interpreters to a place where we might be willing to “listen to God with children,”<sup>107</sup> a childist interpretation first approaches adults on their own terms through the methods of critical exegesis. Such an approach is not to prioritize the adult-centric acts of critical intellectualism over against hermeneutical methods more intrinsic to childhood. Rather, a childist interpretation acknowledges that the gap has grown so wide between these two approaches that in order to bring them together for their mutual benefit, it is necessary for adult interpreters to slow down and refocus our attentions. This is the call that childist criticism makes.

Admittedly, there is some danger of arrogance in me as an adult interpreter making this call on behalf of children. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has rightly flagged, charitable attempts by the oppressors to make heard the voices of the oppressed can, albeit well intentioned,

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<sup>106</sup> While most of these movements acknowledge the possibility of others who do not self-identify with the marginalized group to perform criticism using concern for the dignity and respect of the named group as a lens (for example, a heterosexual man doing feminist criticism), these movements are founded by and remain dominated by critics who self-identify with the named group (for example, women in the case of feminism). With childism, it is not only the case that some critics may not self-identify as children, but most if not all critics do not—although, we all once were ourselves children and many of us are parents to children. This reality requires exceptional diligence to definitions of children and childhoods, as well as to the practice of placing children at the center. However, as demonstrated by the performance of feminist criticism by men in some cases, it is not outside the realm of possibility. Moreover, given the uniquely vulnerable and developing state in which children are by nature of their youth, the intervention of adults to read through the lens of the child is necessary in order to give proper attention to this marginalized group in academic settings that continue to follow adult agendas that would be prohibitive to the participation of children much of the time. Moreover, even if such participation were not prohibitive, the inclusion of children in such academic work would require significant ethical consideration in order to assure that any children who choose to participate do so freely from their own will and for their own sake.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Gianna Gobbi, *Listening to God With Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children*, trans. and ed. Rebekah Rojcewicz (Loveland, OH: Treehaus, 1998).

risk leading to a new oppression of their own. Such was the case, at least in part, of past colonizers.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, I am convinced that the childist hermeneutic is worth this risk for two reasons. First, I do not in any part of this project attempt to speak either *to* or *for* children; rather, I am writing to *adults* to implore them to give space for children to speak for *themselves*.

Second, part of what is unique about children is that their dependency upon others, generally adults, is more prominent than is the degree to which adults depend upon one another. Christian ethicist John Wall acknowledges, “A child-centered ethical methodology must recognize that, however much children do have their own voices and agency, they are always to a higher degree than adults dependent on others for interpreting these into a transformed world. Not to recognize this is to obscure what is distinctive about childhood itself.<sup>109</sup> As such, a child-centered reading means to allow attention to the children in Luke’s text to shape the way that I read. And, in turn, to allow the way in which I read Luke’s text to shape the way in which I engage real children in light of my reading. Certainly, this can involve taking children seriously as readers of the Bible—and I think it should—but it does not and should not mean forcing children into an academic context of reading that may betray what is unique to their perspectives as children.

## 2. Childism

Even before the Child Theology Movement gained significant traction, however, John Wall had begun to apply the term “childism” to his work in practical theology. In order to

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-315.

<sup>109</sup> John Wall, “Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility,” in *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 251-252.

understand the use of this term with reference to the broader context of the academy, his description of past uses of the term is worth quoting at length. In his most recent article on childism and its potential influence, Wall distinguishes his use of the term *childism* from

...the only other two uses of the term that I am aware of. One is the literary theorist Peter Hunt's concept of a 'childist' criticism for children's literature, in which the critic invite[s] adults to read as children' by 'taking into account personal, sub-cultural, experiential, and psychological differences between children and adults.' Though I am sympathetic to this idea, it remains closer to second-wave childhood studies in that it elicits children's experiences but does not go further and seek to restructure norms and practices of reading for all literature. The other is the psychoanalyst Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's use of the term on a par with negative terms such as 'racism' and 'sexism' as a means of identifying the ways that societies justify antichild prejudice and oppression. While, again, this notion is useful, it is important to identify not only what victimizes children but also what empowers them.<sup>110</sup>

Despite potential confusion by Young-Bruehl's use of the term in parallel to other negative constructions of *-ism* words, Wall advocates continued use of the term *childism* in a positive, liberative sense. Although discussion has been raised about an alternative term that may not run such risk of confusion, to date no better alternatives have been proposed.<sup>111</sup>

Wall explains his own use of the term as follows: "By 'childism' I mean the effort not only to pay children greater attention but to respond more self-critically to children's particular experiences by transforming fundamental structures of understanding and practice for all."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Wall, "Childism," 71. Citing Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011) and Peter L. Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991) 191, 198.

<sup>111</sup> Discussion around this concern as it particularly relates to the analogous term "childist" was raised by Julie Faith Parker at the 2014 meeting of the Children in the Biblical World at the Society of Biblical Literature (San Diego, CA). Despite honest hesitation about potential confusion, no better suited term surfaced in this discussion. As such, Parker continues to use the term "childist" in her own work.

<sup>112</sup> Wall, "Childism," 68.

Again, the broad reaching concern both for children and for all people through the attribution of the proper respect and dignity to children is key. Wall understands childism, similarly to those in the Child Theology Movement, as a centering of the child (or children) as interpretive lens in order to reshape the way in which we subsequently read and understand the world.

Childism has the interests of children at its heart, first and foremost by treating them as *subjects*, rather than objects of study. Wall writes, “No interpreter can pretend to understand human experience without responding to the experiences of those who exercise relatively less control over the very interpretive enterprise itself. Only in this way might children be included in humanistic scholarship as not only objects but also subjects.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, while granting the agential nature of children as subjects, it remains important to hold this in tension with the uniquely dependent nature of young children, which forms part of what it means to be a child. Wall notes, “A peculiarity of the ethical situation of children, and the more so the younger the child, is that children can neither socialize nor liberate themselves.”<sup>114</sup>

With children as subjects in mind, my exegesis seeks to set aside metaphorical interpretations of child passage in favor of recognizing and developing child characters that are actually portrayed. Yet, childism does not stop there. It also is interested in the ways in which these interests transform adult ways of thinking about the world. Wall explains:

The question I ask here is not how ethics can be applied to children, for ethics is adult-centered to begin with. It is rather how a fuller understanding of children’s lived experiences in the world can transform basic ethical assumptions and norms, regardless of whether one is considering particular issues concerning children or not. Feminism has reconstructed ethical ideas, for both women and men, around new understandings of gender, agency, voice, power, narrative, care, and relationality. Childism should similarly

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<sup>113</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 72.

<sup>114</sup> Wall, “Ethics and Responsibility,” 251.

rearrange the ethical landscape around experience such as age, temporality, growth, difference, imagination, and creativity.<sup>115</sup>

Childism is a new way, or lens, for seeing the world.

Describing this lens in theological terms, Wall reinvents the conventional image of a hermeneutical circle, in which one's understanding of a text is informed by one's self-understanding and vice versa. This, he says, cannot work when adults perform child-centered (rather than self-centered) interpretations. However, Wall maintains that our own self-understandings are still necessarily at play. Therefore, he proposes the image of a "hermeneutical ellipse."<sup>116</sup> He explains, "An ellipse is a circle with two centers rather than just one, like the orbit of the earth around the sun. In this case, the second center is the relatively un-self-interpreting child."<sup>117</sup>

While Wall's general insight is provocative, it is important to stress the term "relatively" at the end of his conclusion. Children *are* capable of self-interpretation; however, they do not frequently engage in self-interpretation in the same way in which ethicists and theologians understand this act to occur in the academy. This is one of the many ways in which the insights of children can benefit adults. Wall expands on this potential in an earlier essay, noting the paradox by which, "Children disrupt and exceed the interpretations placed upon them by adults.

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<sup>115</sup> Wall, "Childism," 69.

<sup>116</sup> "Children participate in such a hermeneutical ellipse just as much as adults. From the moment of birth (perhaps even earlier), children begin both to absorb historically entrenched social norms *and* to respond to the differences in the experiences and understanding of others around them. Indeed, children may be faced with this methodological task even more sharply than adults, since, being newer to the world, they are called on to expand their own horizons radically. The point, however, is that social understanding depends not only on interpretive agency but also on the more complex capacity for reconstructing worlds in response to differences (Wall, "Childism," 72).

<sup>117</sup> Wall, "Ethics and Responsibility," 252.

But they also call for adults actively to shape and form the worlds they share with children, as well as children's worlds themselves."<sup>118</sup>

In short, attention to children demands that interpreters take seriously a truth that really applies across all our tasks—that is, human self-understanding is always informed at the same time by understanding of another, or others. Wall concludes, “Childism shows that any methodology for interpreting the other must be elliptical or double-centered in the sense of involving other-responsive self-transformation.”<sup>119</sup> As communal beings, humans develop their sense of self in light of others and their sense of others in light of themselves; as a result, the self is not a sufficient center for understanding the way in which we encounter the world. Childism brings this deficiency to light.

In practical terms, childism paradoxically narrows and broadens the lens of the scholar. By focusing one's reading through the lens of children, one's optic is narrowed; however, through that very lens, one's world-view broadens to understand, through children, the interdependency with which all people at some level interact. Wall continues,

Methodologically speaking, childism requires us, in short, to be endlessly creative. It demands acknowledgment of an other-self tension in human life that should become productive of new and previously unimagined ethical meaning....Just as actual children change everything in the lives of their parents (and hopefully societies), so also should responding to childhood change everything in the work of social ethics.<sup>120</sup> (253).

The unique realities of childhood frame the ways in which adult interpreters understand themselves, their relationships—particularly with children—and their texts (in the case of

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<sup>118</sup> Wall, “Ethics and Responsibility,” 253.

<sup>119</sup> Wall, “Ethics and Responsibility,” 253.

<sup>120</sup> Wall, “Ethics and Responsibility,” 253.



ethicists—the moral world). Childism thus demands a fresh reading of relationships and interactions previously assumed.

Such re-reading, as has already been alluded, benefits not only those children whom the interpreter immediately seeks to liberate, but all of society through a reframing of social norms. Wall likens the acknowledgment of this reach in childhood studies with what has come to be called the third-wave feminism. He describes third-wave feminism in which, “The goal should be to restructure basic social norms and power themselves in response to excluded female experiences. Work, politics, culture, academics, family, and sexuality should be fundamentally transformed in light of the differences and diversities of gender.”<sup>121</sup> Wall then goes on to apply this same logic to the expansion of childhood studies as he envisions it. He writes, “Along somewhat similar lines, childism would seek not only to understand children’s agency and empower children’s participation but also to ask how children’s different and diverse lived experiences call for structurally transformed scholarly and social norms.”<sup>122</sup>

Childism calls for a de-centering of adult experience, by reading these experiences and the texts which they have produced through the lens of children as a related, but necessarily other to such experience. As such, Wall concludes,

[C]hildism offers a more transformative method for responding to children’s experiences, both in scholarship and in societies. Rather than simply applying adult-constructed norms to children’s lives, thinking and action should engage in a self-critical hermeneutical ellipse in which children’s diverse differences are able to decenter historical assumptions and practices.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 70.

<sup>122</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 70.

<sup>123</sup> Wall, “Childism,” 82.

In the same way that Wall proposes that such a childist approach can rearrange the ethical landscape, childist critics, particularly in Hebrew Bible, have shown how it can do the same for the exegetical landscape—with implications for ethical interpretations of the texts.

### *Conclusion*

My work is indebted to all of these scholars who have sought to give voice to children in religious studies over the past twenty years. I am also indebted to the feminist and liberation critics, such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who have paved the way for emancipatory readings of the biblical texts. Because the particular field of child-centered interpretation, or childist criticism, is still developing, I am grateful to the particular methodologies set out by Julie Faith Parker and Laurel Koepf-Taylor, even as I am aware that they continue to nuance and develop these themselves.

As such, my work is a hybrid of all of this. Following Schüssler Fiorenza, I loosely employ a rhetorical emancipatory hermeneutic, aimed at giving voice to those child characters in Luke's text that adultist hierarchies have silenced. However, departing from Schüssler Fiorenza's interest in the historical women that lay behind her reading, I follow Parker in performing a more concretely literary reading of the text. I do this primarily as an acknowledgment of the difficulty to determine with any real certainty many meaningful details about the lived lives of children in the first Christian communities. Nevertheless, in order to understand the nuances with which child characters in Luke's text might have been constructed, both in how they are portrayed and read, I take up Koepf-Taylor's methods in so much as I turn to social scientific and material cultural evidence.

As a result, my approach does not mirror any one of the above-mentioned methodologies with precision. Rather, it seeks to learn from each previous undertaking as I take up a childist reading of my own. Specifically, upon situating the child characters of Luke's gospel account within a particular social time and place (chapter 2), my approach re-reads the entire narrative with an eye for those child characters that are both obvious and more discrete. Within such a reading, I establish their presence by means of linguistic and social scientific markers, then performing a literary critical reading of each character and his or her role as it relates to Luke's broader narrative and its theme of discipleship.

### **Children in Luke's Gospel: A Linguistic and Contextual Framework**

The last, or perhaps the first, step to engaging this childist reading of Luke's gospel is to establish clarity of terms. Too often, the term "child" is thrown around both in ancient and contemporary usage with the assumption that there is a shared understanding of what is meant. However, the contribution of Childhood Studies has made clear that such shared assumptions are rarely the case.

Chris Jenks writes: "Childhood is to be understood as a social construct, it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting."<sup>124</sup> Childhood is a social construct and as such is constructed differently both across and within different societies.

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<sup>124</sup> Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996) 3.

What it means to be a child in one place and time is not the same as what it means to be a child in another. What and who we refer to when we use terms like “child” and “childhood” vary across time and place. Indeed, the range of meanings intended by such terms even varies within a particular time and place based upon the context in which they are used. No matter how neatly the law may seek to define the line between children and adults, society rarely experiences it this way.

However, one must be careful not to leap from the conclusion that there is no singular distinction between children and adults to the conclusion that no distinction at all exists. Koepf-Taylor acknowledges, “As with biological sex, the physical differences [in maturity between children and adults] are certainly real. However, the categories cultures use to organize trends they observe in these differences are social constructions.”<sup>125</sup> For example, while reproductive maturity may be the primary defining point of adulthood in one culture, a certain level of abstract reasoning skills may be the defining point in another. The differences that one culture cites as distinguishing between a child and an adult are not always the same as those cited by another.<sup>126</sup>

Koepf-Taylor explains these shifting boundaries at length:

Even with an awareness of varying boundaries, divisions, and dimensions of childhood, the distinctions between children and adults are not always tidy. A teenager might be considered a child legally, but an adult sexually. A person who is neurologically impaired may have the body of an adult and the mind of a child. Conversely, someone with a condition that limits physical growth may have the body of a child but the mind of an adult. A young teenager with her own baby may act like a child herself or may be

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<sup>125</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 10.

<sup>126</sup> In practical terms, these differences mean that those outliers in a given culture’s definition of child are not always the same as the outliers in another culture. For example, as the United States shifted away from being a predominately agricultural society towards a more skill oriented work force, more individuals who would have previously been deemed competent “adults” began to be classified as possessing mental deficiencies—generally referred to with reference to the mental capacity of a child of a particular age.

the head of a household, depending on economic and cultural circumstances. While turning twenty-one becomes a legal milestone, a young adult may be financially dependent (perhaps as a college student) or married with children and supporting a household. Indeed, the same young person may be considered more of a child or an adult depending on a given situation or setting. How a society understands children says more about what is important to adults in a particular culture than it does about children themselves.<sup>127</sup>

As much as contemporary Western readers would prefer to define children as distinct from adults in a neat and sorted way, the reality is *childhood is messy*. Experiences of children vary across a number of intersections, and there is no magic age at which a child becomes an adult.

This linguistic framework could simply end here; however, for the sake of a common reading that may be broadly meaningful, it is necessary to draw (dotted) lines in the sand. In order to navigate a common ground, I therefore choose to enter into the muddle with an eye toward life transitions, vocabulary, and social concepts.

### *Life Transitions between Childhood and Adulthood*

Birthdays and age were not tracked with the same precision in antiquity as they are in the modern Western world. Even when they were tracked, they were not used to define life stages in the same way that they are today. Rather, age served as a guidepost to identifying the time at which people generally experienced major life transitions, or what Tim Parkin calls “so-called rites of passage, stages of the life course that relate not only to the individual but also to the family as a whole.”<sup>128</sup> In the Ancient Near East, Kristine Garroway observes, “Both textual and

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<sup>127</sup> Parker, 23-24.

<sup>128</sup> Tim Parkin, “Life Cycle,” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, ed. Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 103. “These stages occur as new members enter the household grouping, as existing members age and their roles change over time, and as existing members—whatever their age—leave the household to enter another group, perhaps to found their own family or as they leave life itself” (Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 103).

archaeological materials often refer to the minor by a social category: infant, toddler, young man, and so on, instead of giving a chronological age. For the ancient author, this choice may have been made for many different reasons, the chief of which seems to be that ancient societies did not emphasize chronological age.”<sup>129</sup> As such, even when ancient doctors or philosophers talk about developmental stages, they do so using age *ranges*, rather than definitive years.

Chronological age is not what primarily determines adulthood; rather, a person’s position relative to society determines whether they are considered a child or adult. Garroway explains, “stages of life were categorized not by chronological age in antiquity but by age categories, which themselves are cultural constructs.”<sup>130</sup> Related to but not in direct correspondence with stages of biological development, people experience different periods, or categories, of social experience.<sup>131</sup> These categories generally correspond to the way in which a person interacts with the rest of society. In antiquity, Park explains, “in the transition to adulthood, the emphasis of rites is frequently placed on the emerging new roles—social, political, and religious—of the individual, be it as a soldier, active citizen, spouse, and/or parent.”<sup>132</sup> As such, my framework for defining the boundaries of ancient childhood begins with a consideration of such categories as defined by physical maturity, marriage (and procreation), civic and/or religious responsibility, and work.

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<sup>129</sup> Kristine Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014) 18.

<sup>130</sup> Garroway, 16.

<sup>131</sup> While such categories are often called “stages”, but in ancient and modern terms I resist this terminology, because it implies a developmental “progress” whereby childhood is not experienced as a complete state of being in itself, but rather as an end toward the perfect stage of adulthood. In contrast, I understand each category or period in a person’s life as uniquely valuable and productive and therefore as an end in itself, even as each person transitions into different periods. For more on the traditional language stages, cf. Fowler and Erikson.

<sup>132</sup> Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 103.

## 1. Physical Maturity

In antiquity, adulthood, or at least the first stage of adulthood, was often linked to physical—specifically, sexual—maturity. Hebrew Bible scholar Hans Wolff distinguishes “three phases of life...from one another” and various sub-phases of childhood based on vocabulary describing physical characteristics and maturity.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Greek statesman Solon (c. 638 – c. 558 BCE) divided human life into symbolic seven-year intervals, dictated later by mental and moral advancement, but in the stages of childhood by physical development. Solon characterizes the first three stages (21 years) as respectively marking “growth of teeth,” “capacity to emit seed,” and “growth of beard.”<sup>134</sup>

Between the time of Solon and the second century CE, a variety of philosophers, lawyers, and doctors similarly systematized the human life cycle. Of these, the system devised by the Greek physician Hippocrates is the most famous. However, Parkin notes some inconsistencies in the various accounts of this system, such that “... while the basic seven ages remain the same, the year divisions vary. The first two stages are consistently described as ages birth to seven and seven to fourteen years...but the third stage, that of the youth, can extend up to the age of twenty-eight years.”<sup>135</sup> This haziness in defining the transition into adulthood likely reflects the same shift in Hippocrates’ classification as seen in Solon’s description of the latter years of life.

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<sup>133</sup> Hans Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 120: “...at least three phases of life are distinguished from one another: children (*yōnēq*, the sucking child, Deut. 32.25; *na’ar*, the boy, Ps. 148.12; *tap*, pattering, not capable of walking; Ezek. 9.6); young but fully grown men and grown-up girls (*bāhūr* and *bētūlā*, Deut. 32.25; Ezek. 9.6 and Ps. 148.12); and mature, elderly men and women (*zāqēn*, who wear a beard, Ezek. 9.6; Ps. 148.12; *’išēbā*, the grey-haired man, Deut. 32.25; *’iššā*, Ezek. 9.6).”

<sup>134</sup> Solon fragment 27 [West] (as quoted by Philo *de Opif. Mundi* 35.103-104), cited in Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 97.

<sup>135</sup> Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 98-99. Cf. Hippocrates *Hebdomades* 5 (as quoted in Philo *de Opif. Mundi* 36.105); Censorinus *die Die Natali (On Birthdays)* 14.3; Pollux *Onomasticon* 2.4; Scholiast on Hesiod *Words and Days* 447); J.F. Boissinade, *ANEKΛΟΤΑ: Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regiis*, Vol 2 (Paris: in Regio Typographeo, 1830) 455-456.

From adolescence until old age, philosophers observed shifts in the human cycle more visibly through social rather than physical categories. As such, the term νεανίσκος stretches from 21 to 41 years in its *attic* usage. Moreover, the overlapping use of the term with μαιρακίον makes a case for the elision of the two terms when the latter drops from common usage in *koine* manuscripts. If this is the case, the chronological boundaries of νεανίσκος, defined by Frederick Danker et al. as “a youth,” could stretch as far back as 10-14 years.<sup>136</sup>

Amid such fluctuation, though, it is little coincidence that the age fourteen remains relatively consistent as a developmental marker. Parkin notes, “It is worth remarking that the mathematical neatness of the number usefully coincides, approximately, with the age of puberty for males as described by medical and legal writers from ancient times.”<sup>137</sup> At the height of Roman law, between 100 BCE and 250 CE, children born into Roman citizenship were defined as “minors at law until they reached the legally defined age of puberty or majority, meaning twelve for females and ca. fourteen for males.”<sup>138</sup> By this standard childhood is thus defined as a measurable state of physical immaturity, codified at the age of puberty for the sake of simplicity and the law.

Nevertheless, even with allowances made for windows of development, as in the Hippocratic system of classification, there are drawbacks to defining childhood solely based upon physical growth and change. Garroay illustrates the social deficiency of “lumping all biologically immature persons together” in her critique of an anthropological study that seeks

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<sup>136</sup> BDAG, 667.

<sup>137</sup> Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 99.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas A. J. McGinn, “Roman Children and the Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Grubbs, Tim Parkin, & Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 342; cf. Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 104.



insight into ancient childhood through such classification.<sup>139</sup> She argues that while this study can “responsibly label bones with terms that correlate to specific chronological ages, it leaves out the social age factor—the acknowledgment that, while people may biologically move through chronological ages/stages in a reliable manner, socially, people may reach different stages at different ages.”<sup>140</sup> Ancient childhood, just as ancient adulthood, must be defined by a series of biological, psychological, and social categories.

To this end, life cycle classifications by Greek philosophers, rather than physicians, offer a more robust depiction of the boundaries of childhood in antiquity—both the physical and social ones. Valerie French summarizes these distinctions for Plato and Aristotle as such:

Plato and Aristotle describe five stages of childhood: (1) Babyhood – birth to two when the child is weaned and can talk; (2) 2 to 3-5, beginning to separate from their mothers or nurses and become more physically active; (3) 3 to 6-7, active and forming their own social networks with friends and games, which often replicate adult activities; (4) 6-7 to 12-14, enter school; (5) late teens – twenties, adolescence (17)<sup>141</sup>

In such a system, while the defining age of puberty does not entirely disappear, it becomes more obscured. Socially defining experiences, which may or may not coincide with a child’s physical changes, begin to bracket the definition of childhood. Consequently, entrance into school becomes more important than the ability to produce semen in determining an individual’s place in relation to childhood.

## 2. Marriage and Civil Service

Even more than school, however, a girl’s marital status was a defining social relationship in antiquity. Resisting the former, more biologically driven classification, Kristine Garroway, in

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<sup>139</sup> Garroway, 17.

<sup>140</sup> Garroway, 17.

<sup>141</sup> French, 17.

her study of children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household, uses the term “childhood” to “encompass the life of a person from the moment of his/her birth to the time of his/her marriage.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Parkin observes, “In every age, to different degrees, the transition to marriage, especially for females, typically indicated a decisive step from childhood to adulthood.”<sup>143</sup> Such an understanding resists a singular definition and thus allows for a richer portrait of ancient childhood that begins to take into consideration social experience.

As detailed in the preceding definitions of childhood (cf. Chapter 1), the transition from childhood to adulthood for girls of antiquity was primarily defined by their marital status. When a girl married, she left her childhood, along with her paternal family, behind and joined the household (οἶκος) of her husband. Likewise, despite some evidence from the Hebrew Bible that patriarchs such as Isaac and Rebekah may have married much earlier, by the time of the Roman Empire, most scholars suggest that there was significant cultural overlap between Jewish and Roman marital practice.<sup>144</sup> Hence, Shaye Cohen concludes, “The Jewish family in antiquity seems not to have been distinctive by the power of its Jewishness; rather, its structure, ideals, and dynamics seem to have been virtually identical with those of its ambient culture(s).”<sup>145</sup> Within Luke’s cultural context, marriage should thus be understood as an important step toward adulthood, but it should not be read as the sole or decisive one.

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<sup>142</sup> Garroway, 18.

<sup>143</sup> Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 104.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Margaret Williams, “The Jewish Family in Judaea from Pompey to Hadrian—the Limits of Romanization” in *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond*, edited by Michael George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 172: For Jews in the early Roman period, “their nuptial practices will already have been brought broadly into line with those of the Romans through the ‘disturbance’ to their marital customs in the Persian and Hellenistic periods,” attested by a shift in marital practice from Hebrew Bible to Intertestamental literature.”

<sup>145</sup> Shaye Cohen, “Introduction,” in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, edited by Shaye Cohen (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1993) 2.

Despite its social components, marriage in antiquity generally took the shape of a contractual arrangement. As such, using marriage alone to delineate the line between childhood and adulthood remains a legal expedient that does not take into consideration the full social and psychological and picture. The occurrence, albeit rare, of girls marrying well before reaching physical maturity illustrates this complexity. Under Roman law, the legal marriage age for girls was already very low, at the age of twelve.<sup>146</sup> Sarah Pomeroy explains that under this Augustan law, “The first marriage of most girls took place between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Since menarche typically occurred at thirteen or fourteen, prepubescent marriage took place.”<sup>147</sup> Moreover, in the case of marriages for political alliance, aristocratic families would not always wait even this long to betroth their daughters in marriage.<sup>148</sup>

The intersections of these various social markers is seen even more vividly in ancient descriptions of the transition to adulthood for a male child. Civic service, prior to marriage, is often cited as the ancient transition into adulthood for boys. Beryl Rawson describes this transition: “Boys’ arrival at the age of adult citizenship was marked by a ceremony in which they exchanged the garb of boyhood (the *toga praetexta*) for that of manhood (the *toga virilis*). There was no fixed age for this: families decided. The usual age was fifteen-sixteen. The age for beginning military service was seventeen-eighteen.”<sup>149</sup> Boys typically married after completing this service and thus at an older age than their wives. As such, a Roman boy would often take on

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<sup>146</sup> Harlow, “Family Relationships,” 17; Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 27.

<sup>147</sup> Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 164.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Janette McWilliam, “The Socialization of Roman Children,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 273: “T. Pomponius Atticus, good friend of Cicero, began to look for a husband for his daughter Attica when she was six (Cic. *Att.* 13.21a.4).” For more on young age at betrothal see also Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002) 59-60.

<sup>149</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 27-28.

certain characteristics and responsibilities of adulthood as a youth, while still not fully entering into his own in society until even decades later. Suzanne Dixon elaborates on this transition:

The male transition from boyhood to manhood, which takes longer and is more nebulous [than that of the female], tends for this reason and for reasons of cultural emphasis to be marked by specific, fairly public ritual, since it marks above all a change in the boy's relationship to the state. At the age of about fifteen a boy would undergo a ceremony at which he set aside the *bullā* and the tunic (*toga praetexta*) of his childhood and took on a man's dress (*toga virilis*)... The boy henceforth served his *tirocinium*, a period of military practice and relative freedom, certainly from the constraints of a pedagogue.<sup>150</sup>

For this reason, McGinn insists, "Minors should not be confused with young adults, meaning those past puberty/majority but younger (*minores*) than twenty-five, who enjoyed certain legal protections of their own."<sup>151</sup> Political obligations, social status, and legal protections did not always directly align.

The structure of the Roman household and the power afforded to the eldest male as *pater familias* also played into this liminality. On one end of the spectrum, orphaned boys might attain to the role of *pater familias* at an early age, before otherwise granted full legal and financial freedoms.<sup>152</sup> Beryl Rawson describes this liminal period experienced primarily by the elite "...a luxury, of course, but also surely a source of frustration to the young men who were physically adult and already well educated, more than half of them already *sui iuris* through the death of their fathers (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 138), but who were too young for public office and who normally would not expect to marry and establish conjugal families of their own for some years

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<sup>150</sup> Dixon, 101-102.

<sup>151</sup> McGinn, "Roman Children and the Law," 342 fn 3.

<sup>152</sup> "Children whose *paterfamilias* was dead were subject to supervision by a *tutor* ('guardian'). Boys were freed of this supervision when they reached the age of fourteen, but they did not achieve full financial autonomy until the age of twenty-five" (Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships," 28).

to come.”<sup>153</sup> On the other end, grown and even married men would continue in subservient roles under the patronage of their fathers as *pater familias*.

Moreover, like marriage, civic service could also be accorded to the very young—particularly the elite. For example, “At the sage of six, the child Numerius Popidius Celsinus was nominated onto the town council of Pompeii.”<sup>154</sup> Similarly, “Alongside one hundred adults members of the town council [of Canusium] are listed twenty-five *praetextati*, or those who wear the childhood toga.”<sup>155</sup> In short, there is no singular defining transition to adulthood for men or women, but rather a series of physical, legal, social and political transitions.

### 3. Work

While marriage and civic service play important roles in defining the social relationships of the elite in ancient society, the vast majority of people in antiquity—particularly those to whom Luke’s gospel is addressed—came from the subsistence class of fishing and agricultural workers and their slaves. For such people, marriage and civic responsibilities remained a part of their social network, but their daily lives were also defined by their work. Work influenced ancient constructions of childhood among different classes in different ways.

Economically, children in poverty were necessary to their family’s survival, whereas the costs associated with educating and socializing a wealthier child, albeit investments in the family’s future security, often presented immediate economic burden.<sup>156</sup> Lena Larsson Lovén and Agnet Strömberg note, “With the exception of the elite families, it seems plausible that work

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<sup>153</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 28.

<sup>154</sup> Laurence, 37.

<sup>155</sup> Laurence, 37-38.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Lena Larsson Lovén and Agnet Strömberg, “Economy,” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, ed. Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 46.

of all sorts must have constituted an important part of the everyday lives of all members of the family, regardless of age or gender.”<sup>157</sup> From such a likelihood, Beryl Rawson extrapolates an early end to childhood among poorer children.<sup>158</sup> However, such an extrapolation assumes a modern definition of childhood that excludes hard labor. In antiquity, work was not treated as a distraction or hindrance to a childhood; it was a means of socializing children. Horn and Martens explain, “Children’s work prepared them for life in their society. The parents and slave owners had obligations to their charges and in a reciprocal manner children had duties to fulfill for their parents and masters. No more or less than formal education, work also was intended to prepare the child for life.”<sup>159</sup> Among the subsistence classes nearly everyone—young and old—worked hard.<sup>160</sup>

Work serves as a category for defining experiences of childhood, then, not in terms of *whether* one worked, but rather in the terms of the kind of work in which a person engaged. In the first-century BCE, Varro describes children engaged primarily in agricultural work.<sup>161</sup> According to Lovén and Strömberg, “Other Roman writers express similar views: children were capable of helping with farm work, especially unskilled tasks that needed little or no training or

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<sup>157</sup> Larsson Lovén and Strömberg, 56.

<sup>158</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 28: “For “For those closer to the subsistence level of existence, childhood must have ended early: both boys and girls of quite young ages (less than ten) were associated with adults in the world of work and earning a living.”

<sup>159</sup> Horn and Martens, 27.

<sup>160</sup> Horn and Martens observe: “The majority of children in the Roman Empire were involved in work at a young age. Some of these children worked in their family’s trade or business, or on their plot of land. The income they helped to generate was necessary for their family’s livelihood. Most girls were engaged in the family home, where they worked alongside their mothers, preparing for similar tasks in their own homes some day. Some children, free and slave, would have gained apprenticeships to learn skilled crafts” 166-167. On child labor in the Roman family see also Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 103-110.

<sup>161</sup> Varro, *On Agriculture* 1.17.

could be undertaken from a very early age.”<sup>162</sup> As the economy advanced, adults’ jobs—particularly males’—began to vary, but children continued to be listed primarily among the unskilled workers. Jobs reserved for particularly young children included keeping charge of fowls, pruning and weeding, shepherding, herding small livestock, apprenticeships, and looking after younger children and infants.<sup>163</sup> We know from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* that certain household tasks, such as fetching water, were also commonly delegated to the young.<sup>164</sup> While such work was not always distinct from similar tasks performed by adults, especially the elderly, the description of these tasks leave open at least the possibility of understanding them within the domain of childhood.

Among slaves, such distinctions not only indicated ability and/or age but also influenced their monetary valuation. Distinctions were made between the values assigned to infants incapable of labor, children capable of lighter unskilled tasks, and adults from whom a slave owner can hope to extract the maximum amount of work. In this context, Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen defines infancy as “the inability to understand one’s role and the expectations that one’s family or master have of one,” adding, “The moment a child gains this ability it is no longer an *infans*. And so they were set to work.”<sup>165</sup> To this extent, an individual’s intellectual and physical acuity determined their ability to work and therefore relative value to the household.

It is interesting to note that the only clearly defined classification of ages in the Hebrew Bible operates according to similar standards. Leviticus 27:1-8 concerns the redemption price set for people whose lives have been dedicated to service of God in the temple. To this end the

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<sup>162</sup> Larsson Lovén and Strömberg, 56.

<sup>163</sup> Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen, “Slave and Lower-Class Roman Children,” in in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Grubbs, Tim Parkin, & Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 290, 296.

<sup>164</sup> *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 10:1-2.

<sup>165</sup> Sigismund-Nielsen, 290.

passage divides the human life cycle into four periods, with the first two spanning from one month to five years and five to twenty years of age respectively (v. 5-6). Joseph Fleishman notes, “The monetary values were set in accordance with the potential work capacity of the dedicated person,”<sup>166</sup> and thus rejects this passage as a useful measure of an age of accountability to the Torah law. In this rejection, he sees in the passage a greater emphasis on physical maturity and ability rather than social or moral accountability. However, the classification system proves more useful in drawing rough boundaries around the ages at which Roman Jews, familiar with this biblical provision, might also have constructed their understanding of childhood in relation to work.

Such a construction of childhood in relation to work capacity, moreover, is in line with Roman definitions of youth (particularly for males) that extends from puberty into the mid-to-late-twenties. Thus, in the overlapping contexts of family, work, and society a general picture begins to emerge within which childhood is loosely defined as that period within which infants first become aware of the social structures they have been born into to the moment in which they participate to the highest level of their ability in the structures of household, civics, and work. Chronologically, this spans from approximately one month of age to upwards of twenty years or more depending upon individuals and other life circumstances.

### *Words that Designate Children and Youth*

Within this construction of a first-century definition of childhood as distinct from adult experience, there remain many more nuanced distinctions within the broader framework. In order to access these distinctions within Luke’s gospel account, I follow Parker’s application of

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<sup>166</sup> Joseph Fleishman, “The Age of Legal Maturity in Biblical Law,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 21 (1992) 35.



linguistic theory to childist interpretation, concurring that “the vocabulary of a given culture reflects its realities.”<sup>167</sup> I therefore draw on the vocabulary used by the Lukan author to reflect the semantic field of childhood in order to narrow what is meant by this life phase in the Lukan account.

By comparison with the variety of experiences of childhood in antiquity outlined above, the number of terms used to reference children in the New Testament is relatively sparse.

However, this paucity is made up for in the range of meanings that the Lukan author assigns to each term. Parker notes,

A word’s ‘meaning potential’ encapsulates a range of interpretation. One word can be used in various ways, even by the same speaker or writer. The meaning of the same word can also change over time. A certain term can carry clear or subtle implications or be used in a nonliteral way. The writer may seek to bring out an ironic or metaphorical meaning in a particular context. Definition and context simultaneously shade the sense of a given passage.<sup>168</sup>

In the remainder of this section, I therefore provide a brief review of Luke’s use of each of the terms related to childhood in his account and suggest a semantic range of meaning that will be applied in my translation of these terms in the interpretation that follows. These terms include: βρέφος, παιδίον, παῖς, τέκνον, νεανίσκος, υἱός, θυγάτηρ, and μικρός.

1. βρέφος (Lk 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19)

This term appears eight times in the New Testament, six of which are in the Lukan corpus. It occurs an additional five times in the Septuagint (LXX). Liddell, Scott, and Jones

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<sup>167</sup> Parker, 41.

<sup>168</sup> Parker, 44.

defines it as “*babe in the womb; foetus; new-born babe.*”<sup>169</sup> It is used in ancient literature to describe both human and animal babies. Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich similarly associate the term with “a very small child” either inside or outside of the mother’s womb.<sup>170</sup>

Twice in Luke and once in LXX βρέφος is clearly used to refer to an unborn child (Lk 1:41, 44; Sir 19:11). Of the remaining ten references, eight situate βρέφος sometime in the first weeks after birth, especially indicated by the Maccabean references to circumcising τὰ βρέφη (1 Mac 1:61; 2 Mac 6:10; 3 Mac 5:49). Ibita and Bieringer note the specificity of this term in the birth narratives, observing, “Luke uses words in a precise, age-specific sense to present Jesus growing in age from newborn baby via an infant of eight days [βρέφος, Lk 2:16-21] to a twelve-year-old child [παιδίον / παῖς, Lk 2:40-43].”<sup>171</sup>

The remaining two occurrences of βρέφος in the New Testament are Luke 18:15 and 2 Timothy 3:15, where the context is less certain. In large part because of the deviation of Luke from Matthew and Mark in the vocabulary used to describe the children being brought to Jesus here, most mainstream translations have preserved the uniquely Lukan reference to βρέφοι as infants or babies. However, the tendency of Western modernity to ascribe “reason,” or the ability to know about the teachings of Scripture, to children only after they reach a certain age and developmental maturity has led to a more conservative approach to 2 Tim 3:15. Of the major scholarly translations (NRSV, NIV, NASB, NKJV, ESV), only the NIV translates ἀπὸ βρέφους as “from infancy” rather than “from childhood.”

In contrast to this adultist assumption, the clear sense of the word throughout biblical literature, and so I would argue also in Luke 18:15 and 2 Timothy 3:15, is that βρέφος refers to a

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<sup>169</sup> LSJ, 329.

<sup>170</sup> BDAG, 183.

<sup>171</sup> Ibita and Bieringer, “The Beloved Child,” 122.

very young infant, either still in or having just emerged from his or her mother's womb. As such, the βρέφοι are at the most dependent state of human existence, requiring their mothers to carry them (προσφέρω, Lk18:15) to Jesus. While it is significant that Jesus shows acceptance to even these most vulnerable children, it is also significant that such a high level of dependence is nowhere ascribed to παιδία, whom Jesus summons in the following verse, despite modern tendencies to conflate these words.

## 2. παιδίον, παῖς

Grammatically, παιδίον is a diminutive of παῖς, deriving from the substantive form of the adverb παιδιόθεν.<sup>172</sup> Taken separately, the two words have been used to refer to two discrete stages in a child's development. In such use, παιδίον refers more specifically to a "little child," whereas παῖς references a child in what Hippocrates labels as the second plane of development, from roughly seven to fourteen years old.<sup>173</sup> However, the lines between these distinctions are blurry and alternate depending upon the particular classification system being employed. The class of παιδίον is entirely lacking from the systems of both Plato and Claudius Ptolemy, which define παῖς as the stage immediately after βρέφος, ranging from the ages of 4-10 and 4-14 years respectively.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, as noted above, this concept becomes further complicated by the lack of direct correlation between chronology and ancient definitions of childhood as such.

More likely, for a common person in antiquity, including the Lukan author and audience(s), context reveals more about the meaning ascribed to each word than its use in contradistinction to the other. Forms of the two words are used extensively and often

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<sup>172</sup> LSJ, 1287.

<sup>173</sup> Hippocrates, *Hebdomades* 5 (as quoted in Philo, *de Opif. Mundi* 36.105), quoted in Parkin, "Life Cycle," 98.

<sup>174</sup> Parkin, "Life Cycle," 98-99.

interchangeably in Luke’s gospel account. At the youngest extreme, *παιδίον* overlaps with *βρέφος* to describe the infant John just after his birth and at his circumcision (Lk 1:59, 66, 76, 80) and again to address the broader group of children among whom the *βρέφοι* are a part in Luke 18:15-16.

Likewise, in Matthew’s gospel account, a form of *παῖς* is used to refer to all children under the age of two years whom Herod ordered to be killed (*τοὺς παῖδας*, Matt 2:16). This overlap is again seen at the age of twelve years, when Luke’s description of the child Jesus (*παιδίον*) growing in strength (Lk 2:40) is immediately followed by reference to the child Jesus (*παῖς*) remaining behind in the temple. Assuming a similar fluidity between the two terms, Luke Timothy Johnson has no problem suggesting that the child whom Jesus uplifts in 9:47 (*παιδίον*) may even have been the exorcised boy of 9:42 (*παῖς*).<sup>175</sup>

In any case, with reference to free-born people, both terms seem to refer to non-adult children, with *παιδίον* stretching at times into earlier stages of infancy that the term *παῖς* does not as readily describe. Translation is complicated, however, by the additional use of both words to refer to slaves or servants. Liddell, Scott, and Jones define *παῖς* “in relation to Descent, *child*, whether *son* or *daughter*; in relation to Age, *child*, *boy* or *girl*; in relation to Condition, *slave*, *servant*, *man* or *maid* (of all ages)—of slaves and personal attendants, *slave*, *servant*.”<sup>176</sup> Child slaves were common in antiquity, but the semantic use of these words for “child” has traditionally been assumed to extend to all slaves regardless of chronology.

In the LXX *παῖς* is used to translate both the Hebrew noun *עַבֵּד* meaning “young man” or “servant” and *יָלֵד* meaning “someone who is young” or in “a kinship relationship.”<sup>177</sup> This

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<sup>175</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 159.

<sup>176</sup> LSJ, 1289.

<sup>177</sup> Parker, 64.

overlap, however, has more to do with the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of paternalism than it does with the primary meaning of the word. The most common term for a slave in Greek antiquity is δοῦλος. This word occurs 334 times in the LXX, frequently translating the Hebrew noun עֶבֶד. It occurs 118 times in the New Testament as well. The occasional use of the term παῖς to refer to adult slaves therefore is not necessitated by a lack of appropriate vocabulary. Rather, it is reflective of the household structure whereby both children and slaves were subject to the rule of the eldest freeborn male in the house—the *pater familias*.<sup>178</sup> Appropriately, Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich describe this third use of the word in their lexicon as referring to “one who is committed in total obedience to another, *slave, servant*.”<sup>179</sup> Within the structure of the Roman household, however, such obedience would also have described children and women.

Contemporary translations often prefer a subdued translation of “servant” with reference to Jesus’ relationship to God. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich explain that they prefer “servant” when speaking “of Christ in his relation to God...because of the identification of the ‘servant of God’ of certain OT passages with the Messiah (Is 52:13 et al).”<sup>180</sup> Consequently, the entry on this last definition of παῖς in their lexicon is the longest of the three, taking up nearly a column and a half, discussing occurrences in biblical and early Christian literature, whereas the same entry in LSJ occupies only four lines of text—by far the shortest of the entries on παῖς.

Given the common use of παῖς to refer to a child in a more literal, rather than paternalistic, sense, it bears questioning whether too great a liberty has been taken in translating παῖς as “slave” or “servant” in English translations of the New Testament and early Christian

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<sup>178</sup> On this basis, Warren Carter argues, “The central dimension of ‘becoming as children’ is identified in [Matthew] 18.4 as ‘humbling oneself’... Jesus has constantly been presented as the Son who submits to, obeys (3.13-4.11), and is instructed by, God (11.27)” (*Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19-20* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] 96-97).

<sup>179</sup> BDAG, 750.

<sup>180</sup> BDAG, 750.

literature. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of the theological claim made by Bauer et. al., bringing these New Testament passages into line with Old Testament intertexts is insufficient reason for ignoring the plain meaning of the word. Indeed, the early declarations in each of the synoptic gospel accounts affirms that Jesus' relationship with God is also one of descent (Mat 4:3; Mk 1:1; Lk 1:35; Jn 1:34). So the angel declares to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

While the relation of subservience certainly applies, there is no reason to assume that the relation of descent is not intended when Luke describes God as raising up τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ (Acts 3:26).<sup>181</sup> This is not to say that the translation of παῖς as "slave" or "servant" is never appropriate, but rather that it should be made with care in order to avoid both adultist tendencies to elide children (both slave and free) from the biblical texts and paternalist tendencies to mitigate the atrocities of slavery that have been perpetuated throughout history, particularly in my North American context.

### 3. νεανίσκος, νεανίας, νεᾶνις

The term νεανίσκος occurs frequently in the LXX, but only ten times in the New Testament. Fitting with Luke's more frequent use of technical language of childhood, including βρέφος, half of the New Testament occurrences of νεανίσκος are in Luke-Acts. Luke, however,

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<sup>181</sup> The ministry of Jesus reference here, however, notably does not refer to God raising Jesus from the dead, but rather, God raising God's child, Jesus, up in human flesh in order to minister first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. While the traditional assumption has located this ministry in the adult life of Jesus, apocryphal sources, such as the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* suggest that at least some tradition(s) within antiquity understood Jesus to begin his ministry to the Jews as a child. When read with this openness to Jesus' role, there does not remain a single reference in Luke-Acts where the term παῖς is translated as "servant" that must necessarily refer to an adult servant.

does not seem to use the term in a technical sense. Rather, similar to its meaning in the LXX, Luke’s use of νεανίσκος seems to cover the broad range of later childhood, from the onset of puberty to adult.

In Hippocrates’ schema, the designation νεανίσκος refers to a male youth who is between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one.<sup>182</sup> It is derived from the term νεανίας, meaning “youth, young man.”<sup>183</sup> Generally, though not always, meaning a boy who has passed puberty, these terms represent the transition period between child and adult. Although there is a tendency in contemporary interpretation to see puberty as the line between children and adults, we have already seen that sexual maturity was only one of many facets related to this passage in antiquity.

As a νεανίσκος the male child continues to receive greater recognition in society—as, indeed, he has at each stage of his childhood up to this point—while at the same time retaining certain freedoms and protections not available to adults. Legally, this can also be seen with protections provided for youth, despite their permission to own and sell property:

Other legal acknowledgments of childhood and youth included the *Lex Plaetoria* (or *Laetoria*) of about 200 B.C., whereby a person over puberty but under twenty-five, if sued for a contracted debt, could claim an *exception* on the ground that his (and, later, her) youthful inexperience had been exploited by the other party...by the second century A.D. imperial rulings made it virtually compulsory for people between puberty and twenty-five years to have a *curator* present for most transactions.<sup>184</sup>

To this end, even taxonomies such as that of Diogenes Laertius, which classify a νεανίσκος on the latter end of the age range (as late as 40 years old), maintain that this stage is distinct from

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Lesley Dean-Jones: “According to *Fleshes* 13, a child becomes a *neaniskos* between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one” (“The Child Patient of the Hippocratics: Early Pediatrics?” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evan Grubbs and Tim Parkin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013] 110.).

<sup>183</sup> BDAG, 667.

<sup>184</sup> Dixon, 106-107.

that of [adult] maturity: “One remains a child (παῖς) for twenty years, then a youth (νεηνίσκος) for twenty more years, a mature person (νεηνίης) for another twenty years, and an older person (γέρων) for a final twenty years (8.10).”<sup>185</sup>

Likewise, the Hippocratics, in setting a more typical post-puberty age range, counts both a child (παῖς) and “young adult (*parthenoi, neaniskoi, meirakia*)” as “distinct from ‘those in their prime’ (*akmazontes*, a term designating individuals from about twenty-five to forty-five; e.g. *Prorrhetic* II.9).”<sup>186</sup> It is most fitting, therefore, to describe the νεανίσκος or νεανίας as inhabiting a liminal stage between early childhood and adulthood.

The tendency to withhold full adult standing for men until long past puberty,<sup>187</sup> can also be seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. “From Deuteronomy 1:39,” Fleishman contends, “it is possible to deduce that at this age [20 years] a child was considered to have reached full intellectual maturity... This verse...defines the spiritual-intellectual capacity of those who are under the age of twenty. According to this verse, those under the age of twenty were not punished for sinning because they ‘do not yet know good from bad.’”<sup>188</sup>

As such, these terms carry with them, more than a direct chronology, a sense of temperament and status—the state of being a youth. Bauer, Danker, and Gingrich describe the term νεανίσκος as conveying “a sense of a *youth* in character, i.e. either in a good sense,

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<sup>185</sup> Diogene Laertius, cited in Marvin W. Meyer, “The Youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*,” in *Semeia* (Jan 1990) 139.

<sup>186</sup> Dean-Jones, 110.

<sup>187</sup> Note the distinction here between male and female life stages. Because the full legal status of a voting citizen was rarely if ever conferred upon females in this time period, no direct comparison exists. Instead, girls moved from one dependent relationship (to their father) into another (with their husband), usually at the time of puberty—between 11 and 14 years old.

<sup>188</sup> Fleishman, 37. See also, Fleishman, 36: “The age of twenty as the age of adulthood finds expression in the fact that only people twenty years and older pay the half shekel, are counted in the census, and are defined as those going to the army. The Levites also begin work in the sanctuary at this age [at the youngest].” Cf. Ex 30:13-14; 38:26; Num 1:2-3, 18, 22; 4:3, 23; 8:24; 1 Chr 23:24, 27; 27:23; 2 Chr 25:5; Ezra 3:8.



*impetuous, active, or in a bad sense, hot-headed, willful, headstrong.*”<sup>189</sup> The female correlate, not present in Christian scripture, νεᾶνις, likewise refers to a “young woman,” including girls in their teenage years.<sup>190</sup> For this reason, I choose to employ the equally nebulous contemporary terminology of “youth” in translation.

#### 4. τέκνον, υἱός, θυγάτηρ

Often a distinction is drawn between τέκνον and παῖς whereby the former is interpreted as relating to descent and the latter as relating to chronology. In light of the complexities of defining childhood in antiquity, however, such a simplification is incomplete. Indeed, there are points in the New Testament where παῖς seems to point more towards descent and where τέκνον is best taken with reference to chronology.<sup>191</sup>

Liddell et. al. define τέκνον simply as “*child*; as a form of address from elders to their youngers, *my son, my child*; of animals, *young*; metaphorically [of flowers, birds, frogs, etc.]”<sup>192</sup> Although the extended definition in Bauer et. al. focuses more upon the nuances of descent, emphasizing the Hebraisms through which the genitive plural can reference the inhabitants of a city or people with a shared characteristic, they also affirm that the word at its core refers to “an offspring of human parents, *child*.”<sup>193</sup>

Luke typically uses τέκνον when referencing children in relation either to another person or persons or to a particular trait (e.g. “wisdom is vindicated by all her children” Lk 7:35). Such

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<sup>189</sup> LSJ, 1163.

<sup>190</sup> BDAG, 667.

<sup>191</sup> For example, Mary refers to David as a παιδὸς of God in Lk 1:29 and addresses the child Jesus as τέκνον in Lk 2:48. Particularly in the first case, the use of παιδὸς with reference to descent can often be obscured by the translation of “slave” or “servant.”

<sup>192</sup> LSJ, 1768.

<sup>193</sup> BDAG, 994-995.

use does not immediately assume that the child in question is either a young or adult person, but rather leaves this open to the context to determine. So, for example, when the Lukan narrator describes Elizabeth and Zechariah as childless, the reader rightly assumes that they have no descendants of any age—for “Elizabeth was barren” (Lk 1:7).

Similar to τέκνον, υἱός and θυγάτηρ primarily denote relationships. The noun υἱός refers to “a male who is in a kinship relationship either biologically or by legal action, *son, offspring, descendant*; a person related or closely associated as if by ties of sonship.”<sup>194</sup> So also, θυγάτηρ designates “a human female in relation of child to parent, *daughter*; someone treated as one’s daughter, *daughter*; female members of an ancestral group, political entity, or specific class of persons, *daughters*; something personified as female, *daughter*.”<sup>195</sup>

Also correlative to the discussion of τέκνον, these words can refer to a child of any age. So Elizabeth is prophesied to bear Zechariah a son (υἱόν) before John is even born (Lk 1:13), Mary gives birth to her firstborn son (υἱόν, Lk 2:7), and Jesus’ lineage is described at thirty-years-old (υἱός, Lk 3:23). Likewise, the noun θυγάτηρ is used to describe both a girl of only twelve-years-old (Lk 8:42) and Elizabeth and Anna in their old age (Lk 1:5; 2:36).

As such, the use of the terms alerts a childist reader to the potential for a non-adult child in the text. The age of the child must then be verified by context. It is the task of a childist reading not to let previous adultist assumptions slant the interpretation of context in such a way that the potential for reading a younger character in such instances is ignored.

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<sup>194</sup> BDAG, 1024-1027.

<sup>195</sup> BDAG, 460-461.

## 5. μικρός, νέος

For obvious reasons, the adjectives μικρός and νέος in their substantive forms also fall into the semantic category of terms used to describe children. With relation to size, Bauer et al. define μικρός as “pertaining to a relatively limited size, measure, or quantity, *small, short*—of stature; of age substantively *the little one, the child*.”<sup>196</sup> This term, when used with reference to children, emphasizes their limitations—their shortness or smallness. So τὸ μικρὸν is often taken in translations of Luke 17:2 with reference to those who are literally small, i.e. children.

Yet, given such an origin, it is not surprising that ancient usage also carries μικρός over as “pertaining to being of little import, *unimportant, insignificant*—of persons lacking in importance, influence, power, etc.; *small, insignificant*; The state of being small, *smallness*.”<sup>197</sup> Luke has such an emphasis on insignificance clearly in mind in 9:48, with the table-turning effect of making those considered by society to be insignificant the most significant of all. In other places in both Luke and Acts, the context is less clear, such that passages such as Acts 8:10a can be read either as “All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly,” or “All of them, from the smallest to the largest, listened to him eagerly,” with the latter translation calling more readily to mind the participation of children among the early followers of Jesus and the Church.

With relation to time, Bauer et al. define νέος as “pertaining to being in existence but a relatively short time, *new, fresh*...pertaining to being in the early stages of life, *young*—as an adjective; mostly comparatively; as a substantive; a person beginning to experience something, *novice*.”<sup>198</sup> Because this word is used in some of the chronological classification systems, Lidell

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<sup>196</sup> BDAG, 650-651.

<sup>197</sup> BDAG, 650-651.

<sup>198</sup> BDAG, 668-669.

et al. are even more specific, describing νέος as “*young, youthful* (of children, youths, and of men at least as old as 30); of all *young creatures*; Rarely of animals and plants; *suited to a youth, youthful; new, fresh*; Of events with notion of *unexpected, strange, untoward, evil*.”<sup>199</sup>

As such, when Luke talks about new wineskins, he obviously does not have human children in mind (5:37). On the other hand, the newness, or youth, of the wineskins may be akin to the youth to whom Jesus refers in Luke 15:12 or that of the comparably younger brother in Luke 15:12ff. Thus, this term, together with μικρός, serves as good potential signifiers for the presence of people who are not yet adults in the biblical text. Indeed, given the complex definition of childhood, the use of descriptive and/or comparative terms to reference people throughout the various stages of their lives is not only natural, but appropriate.

#### *Conclusion: Social Concepts of Children and Childhood in Luke (the Messy Middle)*

A particular word, age grouping, or single marker of identity cannot define childhood in antiquity. Rather, children and childhood are social concepts that occupy fluctuating and overlapping spaces in the mind and imagination of the Lukan author and his readers. This, however, does not mean that Ariès was correct to observe the absence of a concept of childhood; the realities of childhood, though vastly different in many other ways, are no more clearly defined in today’s world.

The murkiness of our definitions, however, does not preclude us from drawing some basic guidelines in what is meant by the terms child, children, childhood, and so forth, in the work that follows. In support of this task, Julie Faith Parker draws on the work of philosopher David Archard, whom she cites as distinguishing “between the *concept* of childhood

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<sup>199</sup> LSJ, 1169.

(recognizing children as different from adults) and the *conception* of childhood (in which those differences are specified and articulated).”<sup>200</sup> While we cannot articulate with precision the exact categories by and points at which children are different from adults, we can certainly conclude based upon their treatment in the biblical texts, evidence from antiquity, and our own observations, that children do, nonetheless, occupy a distinct category apart from adults.

To this end, we have reviewed both the life transitions and vocabulary that primarily distinguish children from adults in antiquity as experienced, particularly, in Luke’s gospel account. The plurality of classification systems for a child’s chronological development in antiquity testify to the lack of uniformity around any particular moment in a child’s attaining adulthood, even though some ages and moments stand out among others. The diversity of vocabulary further attests to the social dimensions at the forefront of this multifaceted transition.

A particular term or number of years, therefore, does not define a child in Luke’s gospel account; rather, a child is defined by his or her interactions in the world of the text. When an individual aligns primarily with the social and physical relationships having to do with ancient childhood, including sexual maturity, marital status, civil service, and work, then he or she ought to be read as a child. Luke uses vocabulary related to these relationships in order to signify this. The task of a childist reading is to take note of such vocabulary and to be conscious of the simultaneously simple presence and complex construction of children in Luke’s gospel account.

### **Conclusion: (Re)claiming a Subject-oriented Biblical Childhood**

The goal of such consciousness is to (re)claim a subject-oriented reading of children and childhood from an interpretive tradition that has, particularly in modernity, understood children

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<sup>200</sup> Parker, 23. Cf. David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1993) 23.

within the biblical texts primarily as objects to be emulated, rather than as actors in their own right. This is the work of the Childhood Studies, Child Theology, and the various childist readings of Scripture that have come out of these movements.

Too frequently in the contemporary world, both within the church and within the academy, the voices of children have been stifled. This occurs in many different (often well-meaning), forms ranging in my contemporary context from cry rooms to discounting or trivializing children's contributions to separate children's programs segregated by age. It occurs despite affirmations that children are the "future" of the church and laments about the absences of young families and teenagers in mainline denominations. The operating principle in not all but in a vast majority of such churches seems to follow the old proverb that children should be seen but not heard.

Such silence is not a contemporary, or even modern, phenomenon, however, and can be traced back to the first Christian churches (and earlier) through the biblical texts. In this project, I therefore explore Luke's teachings teaching on discipleship as emblematic of a broader ethic of responsibility. Such an ethic is, moreover, both timely and necessary in the contemporary Western world, as campaigns for biblical family values rage on in the political and religious spheres, while turning a blind eye to the real concerns of the growing number of homeless, abused, and neglected children in their own communities.

In short, I seek to challenge the assumption that vulnerable children were indeed left behind by the first Christians and suggest instead that the combination of the vulnerability and value of the young children in Luke's "New Family" presents an alternative vision for relational living for all Christians.

## CHAPTER 2

### YOUNG CHILDREN IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

*“In light of the Roman tradition of describing society as a ‘father-son’ relationship, it is striking that the most popular term to describe interrelationships among Christians was ‘brother.’”*  
– Eva Marie Lassen<sup>201</sup>

#### Introduction

In the first-century Mediterranean world, the household was at the center of most children’s lives whether they were slaves or free. Without the security that their household afforded, however limited in some cases it may have been, these vulnerable people were not able to grow into adults. Their lives and existence were centered around and depended upon their place in their household, which was characterized by hierarchical power relationships.<sup>202</sup>

The early Christian communities described in Luke-Acts carry over this language of household, portraying God as the head of the new Christian household replacing the Roman *pater familias*. The Lukan theme of inclusion of the marginalized, however, paints a new Christian family no longer bound by exclusive ties (cf. Lk 14:26), but one that extends a wide welcome and in fact reverses the meaning of what it means to be at the “head,” such that Luke’s Jesus instructs his disciples, “the least among all of you is the greatest” (Lk 9:48b).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Eva Marie Lassen, “The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997) 105.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Halvor Moxnes, “What is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997) 2-3: “Since ancient language did not have a word that is equivalent to the modern ‘(nuclear) family’, it is necessary when studying early Christian texts about ‘family’ to use various perspectives: household, kinship, marriage, inter-relations between members.”

<sup>203</sup> This is in contrast to both Pauline and Petrine understandings of the Christian household, wherein a human hierarchy continues, frequently with Paul painting himself in a parental role (cf. Moxnes, 36).

Due to this break from the status quo and from the conventional Roman household, in combination with the strong demands of discipleship that pull away from familial obligations, A. James Murphy concludes that the Church as portrayed by the synoptic authors is hostile to family life and the interests of children. In these texts, he highlights the reality that children, particularly those very young and consequently dependent upon the provisions and security of their household, are presented “with challenges of household and disruption and alienation as a consequence of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.”<sup>204</sup> Certainly such challenges existed for every member of the households impacted by Jesus’ ministry and would have been especially felt by those in the most dependent positions of the household (e.g. young children, the disabled, widows, and slaves) when and if key providers for the well-being of the household (e.g. the *pater familias* or mothers of children under the age of five) joined Jesus’ itinerant followers.<sup>205</sup>

Such difficulties, including the fact of judgment itself, are too often glossed over by those in the Christian church who wish to paint a rosy picture of Jesus’ reception of the children and need to be addressed. To the list of potential dangers for children in the Jesus movement that

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<sup>204</sup> Murphy, 34.

<sup>205</sup> Here it is important to note the work of the socio-cultural work of Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, in “Fathers and Householders in the Jesus Movement: The Perspective of the Gospel of Luke,” in *Biblical Interpretation* (January 2003). Their thesis is that, in fact, Jesus’ itinerant followers would have been composed almost entirely of members of the intermediate generation—adult children of the *pater familias* who have children of their own. While I dispute their dismissal of the youngest generation from among these followers, their conclusions about the stability of the older generation are compelling and call into question the degree to which the functioning household itself, and thus its remaining non-adult children, would have been disrupted by the departure of certain members of the intermediate generation, as long as the *pater familias* and sufficient workers remained to care for it. Even the effect of young mothers leaving their families should be tempered, depending upon the class and social situation of the family, with the practice of slave women nursing and rearing the very young (cf. Beryl Rawson, “Children in the Roman *Familia*,” in *The Family in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson [New York: Cornell, 1986] 191; Keith R. Bradley, “Wet-nursing at Rome: a Study in Social Relations,” in *The Family in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson [New York: Cornell, 1986] 201-229).



Murphy enumerates, I add later in this chapter the consideration of the picture of inclusive judgment that the Lukan narrative paints. However, an over emphasis on such hardships does not paint the full picture of the effect of Jesus' call for discipleship on children either.

In a more tempered depiction, John Barclay describes the early Christian movement as “ambiguous in its attitude to family life” at best.<sup>206</sup> This ambiguity can be seen by the juxtaposition of Jesus' admonition that: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (14:26) with his later calling for the little children to come to him in Luke 18:15-17. Positing that these verses should not be read as mutually exclusive, but rather as two parts of the same whole, I argue that child disciples should not be read in opposition to the difficult life of discipleship, but rather, as a part of it.

Membership in God's household, as described by the Lukan author, is challenging and demanding—it demands sacrifice and commitment. Nevertheless, Luke's depiction of God's household calls for all of its members—presumably regardless of status, gender, ethnicity, or age—to hold all things in common (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35).<sup>207</sup> In the process, this new household actually reverses the structure of the first-century Mediterranean household itself. In particular,

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<sup>206</sup> John M.G. Barclay, “The Family as the Bearer of Religion in Judaism and Early Christianity,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997) 63.

<sup>207</sup> Despite prudent historical-critical questions about the feasibility of the Acts community of common good, or even the Lukan author's intent to convey such a community as a standard, from a literary perspective, such an inclusive and encompassing community remains the ideal. For more on indications within Luke-Acts that such a community was not the assumed norm, cf. Doyne Dawson, “The Ghosts of Utopia,” in *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* (New York: Oxford Press, 1992) 263: “Following from evidence of home ownership in Luke 6, “Luke imagined the first Christians supporting themselves by their usual occupations, with the well-to-do occasionally selling landed property to provide a fund for the needy. He imagined them just like the more exemplary Christian congregations of his own time. He never imagined them practicing literal communism, and he thought the age of apostolic mendicancy had already ended.”

in this chapter I demonstrate the inclusion of non-adult children<sup>208</sup> among the children of God's household and its consequent effect on the household as a whole. I do so by exploring the experience of the young child (τὸ βρέφος, τὸ παιδίον) as one of God's children (τὰ τέκνα θεοῦ) who has received grace as described in Lukan narratives of welcome, nurture, and healing.

Although cultural circumstances of the Lukan author, his redactors, and interpreters leave an adultist imprint according to which no children are mentioned as such by name, their experiences of inclusion despite such exclusion can be culled from the shadows through a re-examination of those narratives that mention nameless children both in groups and as individuals and narratives that implicitly include children within larger social groupings. Each group of text is examined first in terms of the experience of welcome and then in terms of the experience of grace and healing in order to trace the theme of inclusion of children that runs throughout the Lukan narrative.

### **Welcome and Inclusion in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine and Surrounding Cultures**

That a child would have been included among those following Jesus in Roman occupied Palestine should not be surprising given the often understated but pervasive presence of young children in Jewish and Greco-Roman societies of the first-century. Although these early followers were Jewish, the paucity of attestations to the lives of children in the first-century make it necessary to look beyond specific ethnic groups to a broader understanding of the cultural milieu. Surveying the written and material witness, Reidar Aasgaard concludes that “ethnic and cultural differences for children in antiquity were small: Greek, Roman, and Jewish

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<sup>208</sup> Cf. Chapter 1 on Backgrounds to a Childist Reading for an in-depth discussion of the language for childhood and markers of childhood in Luke and its surrounding cultures. In what follows, references to children assume non-adult children as defined in this discussion of the Concepts of Children and Childhood in Luke unless otherwise noted.

children had to cope with the same basic conditions.”<sup>209</sup>

There is little doubt that childhood was a difficult time in antiquity, both because of a greater susceptibility to disease and because of a lower, subservient status; however, recent research has shown that children were nevertheless valued within the sentimentalities and infrastructures of their time. This value, as will be seen, extended into the welcoming and celebration of infants, the accepted presence of children in the public sphere, the attendance of children at communal celebrations and commemorations, and the presence and participation of children in religious rituals.

#### *Welcome and Celebration of Infants in the Greco-Roman World*

Even from infancy, non-adult children were understood to be a part of society in antiquity. Such inclusion was marked in different ways among the classes, including their presentation at specified ages in both Roman and Jewish religious ceremonies. At level of the household, his acceptance began at the moment of birth, when “The newborn child, once pronounced fit to live, probably by the midwife, would then be placed on the ground for the *pater familias* to raise up ritually as his indication that he accepted his paternity of the child and wished to rear it.”<sup>210</sup> Such ritual both acknowledges paternity and, more importantly, acknowledges the role and status of the child *as child*, including his or her place in the family with the expectation that the family will provide and care for it.

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<sup>209</sup> Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009) 94. Cf. also Ross Kraemer, “Typical and Atypical Jewish Family Dynamics: The Cases of Babatha and Bernice,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: an interdisciplinary dialogue*, ed. David Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmann’s, 2003) 131: “Evidence from two Jewish women living within about a century of Jesus suggests that this evidence is generally, if not entirely, consistent with the overall evidence for non-Jewish families in the same period.”

<sup>210</sup> Dixon, 101.

Another example of early inclusion at the societal level was the legal registry of free Roman born children into an official registry 30-days after the child's birth.<sup>211</sup> Although these infants were not understood as full citizens at this age, their social stratification would have been no different than the stratification between adult sons and fathers, freed men and slaves, men and women, foreign visitors, etc. Stratification itself was a part of life in first-century Palestine.

Moreover, children were not only present and included in the fabric of ancient social and public life they were welcomed into it. From birth, the child, while often viewed as not yet complete, was greeted with joy and merriment. McWilliam observes, "The birth of a Roman child was celebrated both within the *domus* and among the wider community."<sup>212</sup> In the Roman household, upon which the later Christian household was modeled (at least in form), was an occasion for revelry, despite the looming reality of high infant mortality rates.<sup>213</sup> Seneca even includes such an occasion among his narration of events commonly thought to bring joy (Letters 59.2). Such celebrations included the public acknowledgment of the child—and his or her official entry into the *familia* in both Greek and Roman families. This ceremony, called *lustratio* in Latin, took place when a baby was eight-days-old (nine days for girls).<sup>214</sup>

Similarly, Jewish babies were welcomed not only into their individual families, but into the family of God—the covenant community—through the circumcision of baby boys on the eighth day (Gen 17:10-14; cf. also Lev 12:3). Indeed, procreation was the primary aim of the ancient marriage. As a result, children were welcomed into the ancient families into which they were born from birth.

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<sup>211</sup> Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 111.

<sup>212</sup> McWilliam, 267.

<sup>213</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 106-108.

<sup>214</sup> McWilliam, 268.

### *Presence of Children in the Public and Religious Sphere*

By virtue of necessity, as these young children grew they did so within the public sphere.<sup>215</sup> Children spent their days in the very houses, markets, synagogues, riversides, and villages where Jesus' ministry took place, with little to no differentiation between adult and child oriented space. Such public presence of children was not simply tolerated, but was welcomed and encouraged as a part of daily life. Numerous ancient documents and funerary monuments testify to the affection felt by parents in antiquity for their children—even when such affection does not always match contemporary western sensibilities about parental love.<sup>216</sup>

Children were cared for and cherished by their parents; however, at the same time, parents—both Greco-Roman and Jewish—maintained a strict view of the place of children in the household, their obligations to obedience, and expectations of participation in the ongoing wellbeing of both their home and society. Consequently, the view of children in the first-century world was complicated. Carter explains, “Though occupying a subordinate position in the household, and though regarded as a threat to the social order unless properly trained, the child is also an object of affection and value.”<sup>217</sup> Preserved letters and funerary inscriptions attest to the affection that Romans held for their children and the integral role that children played in their households and broader society even as they remained at times underrepresented in public documents and commentaries and discipline and household hierarchy remained the law of the

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<sup>215</sup> Even the home itself was not a private sphere in the same way we would consider it according to modern Western sensibilities. For the lower classes, homes were small and crowded and nearly all activities were conducted outdoors and in common in a communal setting. For upper classes, the home was expected to be a place to receive callers, conduct business, and socialize (cf. Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 269).

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Lena Larsson Lovén, “Children and Childhood in Roman Commemorative Art,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 302-321.

<sup>217</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 108.

day.

The public presence of children in the ancient world is seen particularly with regard to their home life, work, public celebrations, and religious rituals. In Luke's gospel, households and home structures of various sizes are indicated by descriptions of both intimate family conflicts (indicative of the more typical small size of a single conjugal family) and intricate receptions and banquets (indicative of much wealthy landowners and estates, likely reflecting a multi-generational, extended family). However, the textual evidence matched to common home structures of the time lead Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce to convincingly conclude that, in general, "The parables give examples of very big houses. The middle-size and small houses appear only in the stories of hospitality concerning Jesus and his disciples," while qualifying, "In some of these stories, however, we meet big houses as well (see the case of Levi and Zacchaeus)."<sup>218</sup> It is important to note that in households of all shapes and sizes, children played an important and integral role. This can be seen with particular attention to child slaves and *delicia* in the larger Roman households. However, for the purposes of understanding the background of Luke's narrative, a closer look at the roles of children in these middle and small-size households is most appropriate.

With several notable exceptions, such as Levi and Zacchaeus above, it is generally assumed that most of Jesus' followers came from lower class, largely subsistence, families. Such families would have lived in modest homes in the country, or possibly apartment blocks in larger towns, generally with very little private space. Mary Harlow notes that "in the smaller dwellings or apartment blocks of larger towns it is hard to locate a space that would fit the modern sense of family life—for instance, rooms that might allow for privacy. Here the space must have been

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<sup>218</sup> Destro and Pesce, 227-228.

multipurpose and served as sleeping, working, eating, and general living quarters.”<sup>219</sup> Crowded living spaces and shared daily tasks necessitated that adults and children lived and worked closely side-by-side. Much of children’s (and, indeed, adult’s) day-to-day activities in these households would thus have been conducted outdoors in the public sphere of either the city or the fields.

Children, sometimes from as young as five-years-old, were present and active participants in the agricultural work of the first-century. Varro’s writings on *Agriculture* illustrate the close relationship between children and adults in such contexts: “All fields are worked by human beings, whether slaves or free men or both; they are worked by free men either when these people work their own land, as many poor people do with the help of their children, or when they are hired laborers...” (Varro, *Agriculture* 1, 17.2).

Young children in Jesus’ day were not shielded from the realities of life. Indeed, children—particularly in the lower classes—participated as much as they were able in the work of the parents and their household, and as they grew, their responsibilities grew with them. As a result, Beryl Rawson describes the socialization of children as such:

Children were constantly exposed to the public spaces of their hometowns. If they were already working for a living, their occupation and often their residence were located in and above shops, and there were many errands to be run through the streets. Slave children came and went with their masters or ran errands or did the shopping. And there was much time spent as spectators or participants in public festivals, celebrations, processions, and performances.<sup>220</sup>

Due to their lower social status, there is less written about the presence of children (as well as poor people) in the cities and villages—the Christian gospels being no exception—however, the

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<sup>219</sup> Harlow, “Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood,” 323.

<sup>220</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 275.

evidence that does exist suggests that not only were they present, but, in fact, children were active in the public and social worlds in which they lived.

One source of evidence for the presence and participation of young children in family and public life are funerary monuments. Lena Larsson Lovén notes, “For more than three hundred years, from the late Republic to the later third century CE, Roman children appear as regular subjects in various commemorative contexts.”<sup>221</sup> Although initially such depictions only showed children within their family groups and thus could be understood to depict children “not as individuals or children per se but as symbols of the advancements of the parents and future hope for the family,” by the first-century CE that was changing.<sup>222</sup> Larsson Lovén explains, “In the first-century CE funerary altars appeared as a new form of commemoration... [on which] children are depicted as individuals in their own right rather than as members of family groups.”<sup>223</sup> Often depicted with toys and other instruments of childhood, these altars point to the growing recognition in the first-century of children as independent agents active and present in public life in their own unique ways.

In connection with this acknowledgment of the individuality and contributions of young children, it is not surprising that one facet of public life where significant evidence of children does exist is that of state and ritual celebrations. Often children were included in such celebrations specifically because of their young age and special capacities associated with youth. At the state level, “Emperors continued to allow their sons to ride in the chariot or on race

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<sup>221</sup> Larsson Lovén, 316.

<sup>222</sup> Larsson Lovén, 317.

<sup>223</sup> Larsson Lovén, 317.



horses,” thus “permitting children of the imperial family...to participate and become part of the history of Roman achievement.”<sup>224</sup>

Nor was such pomp reserved for the royal families. Janette McWilliam explains, “Many children of various ages and backgrounds would have been spectators in the triumphal *pompa* with their parents, relatives, or carers.”<sup>225</sup> When something major was going on or a public figure was visiting their city or village, children would be expected to be there. Indeed, this expectation likely grew not only out of the closeness of public space that necessitated the presence of children, but also out of the connection to posterity that children carried and thus a desire on the part of ancient families for their children to experience and be able to speak about important figures and events.

In the religious sphere, children both participated in ordinary religious life and were called upon to perform special services in both Roman and Jewish rituals. As evidence of the participation of children in first-century Jewish synagogues, Wayne Meeks cites Josephus’ record of “Roman authorities in Sardis granting the right for ‘Jewish citizens living in our city’ to ‘come together and have a communal life and adjudicate suits among themselves, and that a place be given them in which they may gather together with their wives and children and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices to God.’”<sup>226</sup>

Such inclusion should not be surprising given the biblical mandate for Jews to educate their children in the scriptures. Indeed, in this instance, Jewish culture may deviate slightly from

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<sup>224</sup> McWilliam, 280: The young age at which children participated in such events is illustrated by “Commodus, aged five, and Marchus Annius Verus, aged four, [who] joined Marcus Aurelius in 166 CE in this Parthian triumph” (280).

<sup>225</sup> McWilliam, 280.

<sup>226</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 34.

their Greco-Roman neighbors in its strong emphasis on not only the inclusion of, but also the intrinsic value of young children. Bonnie Miller-McLemore explains,

Jewish society strictly prohibited exposure and infanticide. Children...not only represented the promise, sign, and guarantee of the covenant; they were also participants in it, to be included in religious observances, educated in the covenant, and routinely brought into and formed by the rich practices and beliefs of love of God and neighbor. The commandments to teach the love of God ‘to your children and your children’s children’ steadfastly, diligently—‘when you are home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise’ (Deut. 6:2, 7)—stands at the very heart of Jewish law.<sup>227</sup>

Just as Roman citizens were concerned with socializing their children to celebrate and participate in the Roman government, Jewish parents were concerned with socializing their children to celebrate and give service to the God of Israel.

Participation in the life of Israel naturally meant attention to religious education and attendance at religious events for children. Jews were unique in the intrinsic valuation of children as signs of God’s covenant; however, the socialization of children into their parents’ religion extended across antiquity. McWilliam notes that Roman children both attended and participated in religious observances.<sup>228</sup> Carter explains the unique value of children in such roles:

Children are thought to be effective in intercessory roles for several reasons. Because of their weakness and marginal status, children are ‘dear to the gods’ and merit favor and protection. The absence of sexual activity or awareness is also a factor... Hence here...the child’s present power and significance are valued and recognized precisely because the child is not an adult.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003) 99.

<sup>228</sup> McWilliam, 228.

<sup>229</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 112.

As participants in religious rituals, children were thus acknowledged and welcomed into an intergenerational community that both recognized and valued their unique place within it. This place was marked both by their present and future capacities, as youth who would yet become adults.

As such, Rawson observes, “Children’s participation in [ritual and neighborhood] life, as performers and general celebrators, provided both socializing and socialization.”<sup>230</sup> While the unique abilities that children contributed were drawn from their youth, another factor in their parents’ desire to expose them to such rituals was drawn from their preparation to become adults. The presence of children at public, and particularly, religious events in antiquity was thus not only assumed, but likely encouraged or even mandated.

Parents who wanted to raise their children according to their own values and view of the world—a major goal of parenting in antiquity—naturally wanted their children to witness to and participate in the public events that shaped their values. For Roman parents this would have included the baths, races, and victory parades. For Jewish parents, it would have included temple festivals and learning in the synagogues. For nascent followers of Jesus, I suggest that this would have naturally extended to the teachings and travels of Jesus.

Indeed, in the Jewish family, because of their inclusion in the covenant, children “were regarded as an essential part of God’s blessing.”<sup>231</sup> Miller-McLemore explains,

This appears paradigmatically in the story of the gift of Isaac to a barren and aging Abraham and Sarah. Isaac assures God’s covenant with Israel (Gen.17.17; 18.10-15). Scenes of delight over the birth of children are repeated in Hannah’s song of thanksgiving at Samuel’s birth (1 Sam. 2.1-10) and then echoed in the Magnificat,

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<sup>230</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 275.

<sup>231</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Jesus Loves the Little Children?” 10.

Mary's words of praise of God on Jesus' conception in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1.46-55).<sup>232</sup>

Overall, children in the first-century, from whom Jewish children were no exception, continued to maintain a marginal status in society and to were expected to give abject obedience to the head of their household (the Roman *paterfamilias*). Nevertheless, to say with John Dominic Crossan that "To be a child was to be a nobody," is overstating the case.<sup>233</sup> Carter offers a more nuanced assessment:

We are thus able to trace through the first-century a process of changing perceptions about children. There is a growing emphasis on affection between parents and children, an emerging respect for and understanding of the development of the child in education, a concern for the wellbeing of children, and an increased recognition of their importance through the special roles they play in religious observances.<sup>234</sup>

To be a child in first-century Palestine was a difficult and marginalized existence to be sure. However, to be a child was also to be woven into the very fabric of society, included in both the daily and celebratory going-ons of public, and to be an essential and valued part of both your family and your community.

To be a Jewish child, in particular, was to be a part of the covenant community and thus the extended family of God known as the Children of Israel. In short, such children, while not necessarily coddled or cosseted, were certainly welcomed and included in their families, households, communities, and society at large. Luke's narrative describes such an experience of welcome and inclusion for the young child within both the broader Jewish community of which Jesus was a part and the specific community of those following Jesus.

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<sup>232</sup> Miller-McLemore, "Jesus Loves the Little Children?" 10.

<sup>233</sup> Crossan, 269.

<sup>234</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 112-113.

## Welcome and Inclusion in Luke 9:47-50 and 18:15-17

The welcome and inclusion of young children among Jesus' followers can be seen most vividly in Luke 9:47-50 and 18:15-17, in which Jesus explicitly exhorts his disciples respectively to show welcome to little children (τὰ παῖδια) and infants (τοὶ βρέφοι). In these exhortations the character of Jesus shows more than a sympathetic soft spot for cuddly children, as popular culture often paints these encounters. Rather, in these texts, Luke is clarifying the equal place of children among adult disciples in the Kingdom of God. While most explicitly stated in these texts, the full inclusion of the young child is assumed throughout Luke's narrative from the angel's prophecy about John in 1:11-17 (esp. 1:17) to Jesus' predictions of the end times (cf. 7:31-35 and 21:34-35) and finally as a part of the community of disciples to whom Jesus grants understanding and blessing before he ascends into heaven (24:45-53).

### *Luke 9:47-50*

Luke first explicitly deals with the place of little children in God's Kingdom in 9:47-50. In response to an argument among the disciples about who is greatest among them, Jesus brings a little child (παῖδιον) to his side and exhorts those who were arguing: "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest" (9:48). This is significant first because it establishes the location of a concrete non-adult child among Jesus' followers and second because it plainly instructs those who are arguing to welcome both the literal child and those who, like her,<sup>235</sup> are

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<sup>235</sup> The pronoun "her" is consciously selected here in order to emphasize the personhood—male or female—of the child as a real individual in the disciples' midst. Grammatically Jesus refers to a specific real child, the term for which happens to take a neuter pronoun in the Greek language. The personhood of this child is consequently diminished by English translations that render the neuter pronoun as "it," a translation which perhaps aid in the ready turn to metaphorical readings

considered “the least *among*” the disciples (9:48, emphasis added).

In response to a presumably adult disagreement, these intimations combine to speak powerfully to the presence of young children among Jesus’ followers. While such a presence is not independently recorded in the narrative, most likely due to the low place of children within the social structure of society at that time, texts such as this one shine a light on the shadows of children in the background of the Lukan narrative and reveal their persistent presence, which was likely assumed throughout by Luke’s first-century audience (as it would have been in society at large).

Luke 9:48 confirms the presence of at least one non-adult child among the community of Jesus’ followers, while at the same time implying a more extensive presence of children in their midst. This encounter with a real child is narrated in all three of the synoptics; however, it is Luke’s account that makes most evident the presence of the young child as a real individual previously present among Jesus’ disciples.

Luke Timothy Johnson notes, “The demonstrative is deliberate. It is not any child, or ‘all children,’ as though this were a moral lesson.”<sup>236</sup> Indeed, even while Johnson moves quickly to generalize this child to “any one, however, insignificant, sent out on a mission,” he maintains that it is necessary to understand Luke’s account on a multiplicity of levels—including the level of the literal on which this individual child takes center stage.<sup>237</sup> In contrast, Mark quickly distances the audience from the real child in her individuality by exhorting the disciples to welcome “one such child” (Mk 9:37), and Matthew, while keeping the real child in focus at first, turns this child even more readily into a metaphoric example by exhorting the disciples to take

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that move too quickly from the person of the child to the traits of children that adults who wish to be great in God’s Kingdom might seek to emulate.

<sup>236</sup> Johnson, 159.

<sup>237</sup> Johnson, 159.

“the lowly position of this child” (Matt 18:4). Luke’s specifically reference to “this child” (τοῦτο τὸ παιδίον) as the object of welcome compared to these more metaphoric treatments shows forth even more clearly the real person behind the narrative account. Only after establishing this literal layer of the story does Luke subsequently generalize from the real child to the greatness and implicit welcome of all children in the discipleship community as “the least among all of you” who are to be seen and treated as the greatest (Lk 9:48).

This place of this child among the discipleship community in Luke comes into focus most clearly when compared to the more ambiguous place that this child is given in Matthew and Mark. In Matthew’s account in which Jesus “calls” and “places” the child among his disciples (Matt 18:2-3). In Mark’s account, the group with whom Jesus is speaking is specifically limited to the Twelve<sup>238</sup> (Mk 9:35) among whom he places the child (Mk 9:36). Significantly, Luke diverges from both of these by describing the instigating conversation among a broader community of Jesus’ disciples (9:43, 46)<sup>239</sup> from whom Jesus takes a child (implicitly already

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<sup>238</sup> Although the rapid and abbreviated nature of Mark’s gospel leaves room the possibility that there are moments when the Twelve are addressed, but a larger discipleship community may be presumed to be listening in without directly mentioning them.

<sup>239</sup> In contrast to Mark and Matthew, where the term disciple is applied to the Twelve and apostle is reserved for a point after Jesus’ resurrection, in Luke, as early as 6:13 the narrator clearly designates the difference between the Twelve, whom Jesus calls apostles, and the larger group from which they were called out of and with which they continue to interact—the disciples. This more expansive use is especially evident in 14:26-33; 19:37; and Jesus’ teaching directed to the disciples in Luke 9:18-27 which Luke 24:6-8 confirms that the women in Luke 8.1—3, who were not a part of the Twelve apostles, were privy to. More accurately, in Luke the term “disciples” is used to refer to any grouping of more than one of Jesus’ followers. In general, the core group of Jesus’ disciples are called “the Twelve” or “apostles,” while both members (including the twelve) and the entirety of the larger, more fluid group of people who accompany Jesus in his ministry are referred to as “disciples.” Thus, I concur with Green that in Lk 9:1-50, “The fluidity of ‘disciples’ for Luke is marked here... Even though the twelve come in for special development [at points, including 9:47-50], then, we are reminded that they are representative of a larger group who will also be involved in the instruction and formation this narrative unit anticipates” (Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997] 354).

present among this community) and places the child “by *his* side” (Lk 9:47).<sup>240</sup> Since Luke sees no need for Jesus to call to the child in this instance (as he does to the children and their caregivers in Lk 18:16) it can be inferred that this child is already among those to whom Jesus is addressing himself—his disciples.

This is further confirmed by the location in their midst in which the little child is placed. For Mark and Matthew, the primary emphasis is on Jesus placing this child (perhaps an outsider or sort of spectacle object) *in the middle* of the disciples (ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν); however, for Luke, Jesus places the child at his own side and emphasizes instead the child’s preexistent place within the broader community of disciples already established by making of this child an example of the least *among all* of the disciples (ἐν πᾶσιν ὑμῶν). By this gesture, Jesus places this child in community with him—signaling his solidarity with her on her own terms.<sup>241</sup> Bovon even goes so far as to suggest that “this proximity to Jesus has a particular meaning, since it expresses a choice and a privilege, just as being a Christian does in itself (cf. 10:21-22).”<sup>242</sup> This child, and by extension other children, are already understood to be a part of the Kingdom—valued children of God.

This child’s inclusion in the community is thus presumed—the new revelation in the passage is that this representative of the “least” among them is actually to be treated as the greatest and thus welcomed enthusiastically. On the meaning of “welcome” (δέχεσθαι) in v. 48,

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<sup>240</sup> While some have argued that this divergence indicates a distancing of Luke’s Jesus from the child by omitting the more intimate actions of “placing in the midst” or taking “into his arms,” I concur with François Bovon that “The reason for this is not a rejection of Jesus’ expression of emotion, but rather that Luke is describing a child who can stand, not an infant who must be carried (as in Mark)” (François Bovon, *Luke 1*, trans. Christine M. Thomas [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002] 392).

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Betsworth, 123-124; James L. Bailey, “Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13-16,” in *Word and World* 15:1 (Winter 1995) 63.

<sup>242</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 394.



Bovon elaborates, “Δέχεσθαι means here a caring ‘acceptance,’ perhaps even an enduring ‘welcome,’ because both Jesus and God want to be ‘welcomed.’”<sup>243</sup> To welcome this child—and any child—is more than a simple act of human compassion, but rather, is a broader gesture towards this child’s acceptance and inclusion *in Christ’s name*.

Bovon highlights the significance of this phrase, “‘in my name,’ which was already in Luke’s source at Mark 9:37, [and] is frequently encountered in the Third Gospel” as connected to Luke’s literary style and “his theology of relationship.”<sup>244</sup> Jesus’ followers stand in relation to one another on account of their common familial identity established not in the line of a traditional *pater familias*, but rather in the name of Jesus, God’s son. By the same token, Johnson traces the use of this term throughout Luke’s narrative, concluding, “In biblical parlance, the ‘name’ (*onoma*) defines identity. The name with which Christians are associated in their mission is that of Jesus (9:48-49; 10:17; Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 30; 8:12, 16; 9:27, 28; 10:43, 48; 16:18; 19:5; 22:16; 26:9) and it is for this same name that they will experience suffering (21:8, 12, 17; Acts 4:17-18; 5:28, 40; 9:14, 16).”<sup>245</sup> Thus, to receive a child in Jesus’ name means to recognize that child’s relationship with and identification through Jesus as a follower of Jesus and a part of God’s Kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming.

It is important to note that this final statement of the Lukan Jesus regarding who is the greatest—settling the initial dispute—unlike in the Markan and Matthean parallels, is exclusive. Jesus is not here concerned about who is the greatest in society at large, but rather, is referring to only those in the immediate group of his followers (as per the initial dispute). That the young child signaled out at his side is to be understood among this group is clear both by her initial

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<sup>243</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, fn 45, 395.

<sup>244</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 395.

<sup>245</sup> Johnson, 107.

demonstrative purpose, the specific exhortation to welcome her, and her implicit place among “the least” to whom Jesus refers at the end of his exhortation. Moving away from this one specific, concrete child to a general sense of those considered “least” in this social group, moreover, opens the grounds for a reasonable assumption that other non-adult children would also fit into this category. The exhortation is addressed in the plural, and there is no other reasonable explanation given for why this one child would be considered an exception to the group dynamics as a whole nor expression of surprise on the part of the other disciples at her presence.

*Luke 18:15-17*

Second, Jesus builds on this expression of the welcome and inclusion of young children in Luke 9:47-50 by explicitly including and welcoming young children, including infants, into his midst in 18:15-17. On this most interpreters of the synoptics are agreed: at this narrative moment, and, indeed, in God’s future kingdom, children are welcome. Too frequently, this important point is overshadowed by the predominately metaphorical treatment of the passage in contemporary scholarship.<sup>246</sup> However, an ambiguity in the Greek syntax has allowed for two

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<sup>246</sup> One significant exception to this practice was the interpretation spearheaded in the mid-twentieth century by scholars such as Joachim Jeremias and Oscar Cullmann. These scholars suggested that Jesus’ insistence that one must enter the Kingdom of God “as a little child” is an argument for the place, and indeed, priority of infant baptism. Although the connection between this text and the rite of baptism had been made in liturgical practice since the Reformation, these men brought it to scholarly attention, employing historical critical methods that allowed them to envision an (albeit faint) baptismal vestige. Their claims, however, were too ambitious in scope and have largely been dismissed. Given the preponderance of evidence for adult conversion and believer’s baptism in both the early Church synoptic traditions respectively, it is unlikely that such a literal reading is in line with the gospel writer’s (or Jesus’) original intent. (Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (trans. David Cairns; London: SCM Press, 1960) 54-55, (cf. 48-55); Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (trans. J.K.S. Reid; London: SCM Press, 1950), 78 (cf. 71-80); Cf. David Wright, *Out, In, Out: Jesus’ Blessing of*

divergent understandings of to whom (or to what) the metaphor of the child refers.

Frederick Schilling explains,

The word *paidion* (child) is, of course, singular as is the subject of the verb and as is the object. It could be subject in apposition to the subject of the verb ‘whoever receives’, or object in apposition to *tain basileian*. This could throw the comparative *hos paidion* (‘as/like a child’) to the subject of the verb, ‘whoever’ (third person singular) or to the object, the noun, ‘kingdom’. The two meanings would then be ‘as though he were a child’, or ‘as though the Kingdom were a child’.<sup>247</sup>

Grammatically, the comparison “as a child” can be applied to either the subject(s) of Jesus’ address—the disciples—or to the object of their receipt—the Kingdom of God. Which of these two translations scholars choose dramatically influences the attributes of childhood to which they contend the metaphor refers. In the first case of a child as a metaphor for Jesus’ disciples, or more generally discipleship, interpreters generally emphasize the humility and other (often active) idyllic qualities of childhood. Conversely, in the latter case of a child as a metaphor for God’s Kingdom, the emphasis tends towards the more passive qualities of children such as their smallness, social status, and potentiality—qualities that have more to do with how the disciples might treat them as objects, rather than how they themselves behave as disciples and subjects.

The most common academic interpretation of Luke 18:15-17 understands the little child as a metaphor for discipleship.<sup>248</sup> While such an interpretation has a long history in interpretive tradition, it has become particularly enticing in Western scholarship in recent times alongside growing idealizations of children in Western culture. Since the Renaissance and within the last

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*the Children and Infant Baptism in Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies* edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 193.)

<sup>247</sup> Frederick A. Schilling, “What Means the Saying about Receiving the Kingdom of God as a Little Child” in *Expository Times* 77:2 (Nov 1965) 56.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Weber; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (New York: Doubleday, 1983); Nolland; Gundry; Carroll; and Horn and Martens.

century in particular, the contribution of children to the maintenance of the household in Western European and North American countries has receded. This has resulted in a need to preserve the value of children within their households by placing an increasing value on the intrinsic worth of children regardless of their contributions.<sup>249</sup> Thus, Ronald Clark observes, “Children today are seen as innocent, humble, trusting, and pure.”<sup>250</sup> As the value of children within a household has become less apparent externally, Western culture has sought to transfer this value to such internal qualities such as innocence and morality that the adult population, clearly subjects of the Fall, can be seen to benefit from.

An alternate reading of the Greek text allows for the possibility that the object of the metaphor is not the one who is to receive God’s Kingdom (the disciple), but rather the Kingdom itself. Clark explains that when the noun *παιδίον* is read in the accusative rather than nominative case, it becomes

...the object of *dexetai* (‘receive’), as is *basileian* (‘kingdom’). *Hos paidion* would then be an attributive phrase of the preceding noun. This translation would then read, ‘the one who does not receive the kingdom of God as [one would receive] a child will surely not enter into it.’ *Hos* compares the kingdom to a child rather than the subject, *hos an* (‘whoever’).<sup>251</sup>

Following this line of reasoning, Clark and others have proposed a reading of Luke 18:15-17 in which the little child serves as a metaphor for God’s Kingdom.<sup>252</sup> As when children are read as a

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<sup>249</sup> The notion of children as valuable in themselves is not an innovation of Western culture or of Christianity, but has its roots in the Hebrew Bible itself. What has changed in recent times, however, is the accent that is placed on this value over and against the relative drain that a child would be on the average Western household otherwise.

<sup>250</sup> Clark, 240.

<sup>251</sup> Clark, 236.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Bradner; Schilling; Daniel Patte, “Jesus’ Pronouncement about Entering the Kingdom Like a Child: A Structural Exegesis” in *Semeia* 29 (1983); Clark; and Horn and Martens.

metaphor for discipleship, however, the question must still be asked, what does Jesus' teaching reveal about God's Kingdom through the metaphor of the child?

To answer this question it remains necessary for scholars to unpack the meaning of "the child" in Jesus' metaphor. As in the previous instance, a variety of different approaches have been used to go about this task, often drawing on similar tools and traditions. However, by treating a child as the object to be received, rather than the subject who receives the Kingdom, these inquiries have yielded slightly nuanced results. Instead of emphasizing the moral character of the child as an example to follow, those who translate *ὁς παιδίον* in the accusative case tend to emphasize a child's low standing and helplessness.

Such a turn away from the agency of the child toward the way in which she is received is particularly appropriate in Luke's account, where the children initially received by Jesus are described as *βρεφῆ* ('infants') rather than the more generic *παιδίους* ('children'). Daniel Patte observes that translating the child of v. 17 in relation to the Kingdom "would fit the description of the children as 'babies' who, as infants, are not in a position to perform acts such as 'receiving the Kingdom,' but are indeed received (as in Matt. 18:5)."<sup>253</sup> Whatever the age of this child, however, when she is placed in relation to the Kingdom the concern shifts from one of her action to the way in which she is acted upon.

In contrast, by foregrounding actual children and families, as demonstrated by the research into the 1<sup>st</sup> century context(s) of childhood(s) in the Greco-Roman world that each of their works convey, Horn and Martens, Gundry, and Carroll combat the systems of adult domination that have plagued previous interpretations of Luke 18:15-17 and its parallels, as well

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<sup>253</sup> Patte, 34.

as New Testament scholarship more broadly. Cornelia Horn and John Martens dispel such common stereotypes of children when they write:

There is something about children and their place in the kingdom that is simply not reducible to innocence, vulnerability, humility, lowliness, lack of prestige, simplicity, purity, nearness to God, openness to Christ, or any other attribute one may suggest. It is all of this and more, for their place in the kingdom is by virtue of their being simply children of God.<sup>254</sup>

There is no need to read an additional rationale into Jesus' valuing of children as the above metaphorical readings assume. The simplest reading, in this case, is the clearest—in this text and throughout Luke's gospel, children are simply valued *as children*.

Such a reading is consistent with first-century Jewish beliefs about the place of children within God's Kingdom as indicated above in the language of covenant. While exclusivist claims were present in both first-century Jewish and Christian expressions of God's Kingdom, the question of the day was not whether children were included, but rather, *which* children were included in the Kingdom. Bovon notes, "Another Jewish text is worth mentioning: there was a dispute between Rabbi Gamaliel II and Rabbi Joshua: Gamaliel forbade foreign children who were born in Israel to enter to the kingdom of God, whereas Joshua granted entry to them."<sup>255</sup>

While much scholarly inquiry has been devoted to determining what qualities of children recommend them for inclusion in God's Kingdom, the simplest answer remains that absent any particular quality, children have simply always been and will always be a part of the household of God. Moreover, lest any human authority attempt to dictate the exclusion of children (or anyone else) from God's Kingdom,

The maxim [in v. 16 not to hinder the children] attributed to Jesus redefines the notion of limits. The negative imperative means that

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<sup>254</sup> Horn and Martens, 259.

<sup>255</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, trans. Donald S. Deer (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2013) fn 40, 559.

no human authority can or must regulate access to Christ or God. If there are to be any limits to the community, they will be neither exterior nor formal. They will depend on the One who calls each person—here, using a living metaphor, who invites the ‘children.’<sup>256</sup>

God is in control. Children are included in the Kingdom not because the disciples choose to invite or allow them to be included, nor even because they have traditionally been included—though they have. Rather, in v. 16, the character of Jesus makes clear that it is God who will decide who is a part of God’s Kingdom. And God, through Jesus’ call, chooses children.

Thus, rather than focusing on what about children makes them worthy of a place in God’s Kingdom, Judith Gundry turns the tables to consider instead why God chooses to include children in the Kingdom despite their apparent unworthiness. She observes, it is “not any particular quality of the child, but ‘the child’s littleness, immaturity and need of assistance, though commonly disparaged, [that] keep the way open for the fatherly love of God.’”<sup>257</sup> God includes small children in God’s family because such children need God’s care and protection.

In this respect, God’s household functions in much the same way as the first-century Greco-Roman household—held together by a common kinship tie, each person has their place, not on account of their particular virtues, but rather, on their common need and dependence upon one another. John Carroll puts it eloquently in his essay on Luke in the same volume as Gundry’s work cited above:

If you want to know what God’s reign is like, how God’s household is constituted, then you need look no further than these children! Indeed, any who wish to have a place in God’s realm should look to these vulnerable, low-status children as the model to be emulated. One enters God’s realm by embracing it without pretension to status or power.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 558.

<sup>257</sup> Gundry, 152.

<sup>258</sup> Carroll, 190.

Children, and adults too for that matter, are a part of God’s Kingdom because God wants them there.

That a place in God’s Kingdom cannot be earned by the possession or emulation of childlike virtues or any other positivistic act is only further highlighted by Luke’s use of βρέφοι (“infants”)<sup>259</sup> whom the audience would have understood as unable to positively earn their place in God’s Kingdom on their own. Robert Tannehill explains,

If Jesus, in Luke, regards these infants as important, it is not because of anything they can do. They are too young to do much at all. It is also unlikely that the infants are highlighted because of appealing qualities they might have (e.g., their innocence or openness, views that probably reflect modern sentimentality). Rather they are introduced because of their lowly status. They are powerless and have no right to claim attention in the public world dominated by adult males.<sup>260</sup>

Infants are capable of doing very little for themselves. Luke’s replacement of the more general term παιδίον (“small child”) used in the other synoptics thus indicates the lack of human involvement in determining one’s place in God’s Kingdom. Johnson concludes, “The kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is entirely about the power of God at work to heal and liberate and

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<sup>259</sup> For use of this term in Luke in correlation with its dictionary form to mean real, non-adult infants under the age of 2 years old, see also: Lk 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; Acts 7:19. Bovon notes that “The question has been raised as to whether the term ‘newborn children’ (βρέφη) might not have been a title used for themselves by a group of Christians, for example, some itinerant prophets. According to that theory, the ‘disciples’ (μαθηταί) stood for ministers of the Great Church, or of the majority community, anxious to maintain their authority and their privileges” (*Luke 2*, 557). While an interesting theory, and one worth exploring on the level of what it would have meant for adult Christians to place the dependent—or, as I will argue in my conclusion, *interdependent*—label of child upon themselves, it remains at this point solely conjecture. Therefore, in the interest of uncovering the shadows of real children both from behind such possible labels and more immediately, Luke’s text as it stands, I read v. 15 to refer to actual, non-adult infants. Further, given the use of the verb προσέφερον and the context of the rest of the passage, I am inclined to agree with Bovon’s conclusion that “This would not appear to be the hermeneutical level on which the Gospel writer operated” (*Luke 2*, 557).

<sup>260</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996), 267.



empower, not about humans accomplishing things for themselves.”<sup>261</sup> The inclusion of children is but one shining example of this. Such an innate inclusion of children is seen throughout Luke’s narrative when one looks behind the shadows of the adult characters given center stage.

Even more, the Lukan author goes further than a mere toleration or even acknowledgment of the place of children in God’s Kingdom by signaling their explicit welcome through Jesus’ unambiguous call (προσκαλέσατο) that they come (ἔρχεσθαι) to him (Lk 18:14). As noted above, Jesus’ call overrides the power of the disciples (or even the children and their parents) to decide who is welcome in his presence and, correspondingly, God’s Kingdom. That determination rests solely on Jesus, who clearly and definitively chooses to call these children to himself (προσκαλέομαι, v. 16)—into the divine presence. Bovon explains, “By calling the children to him, Jesus demonstrated to his listeners God’s method of making the welcoming of infants with open arms a priority. He explained what approach to adopt in order to ‘enter’ the kingdom of God. The apothegm says: God welcomes children.”<sup>262</sup> There can be no mistaking that Jesus’ call represents a positive response to these infants and children.

With Jesus’ summons in v. 16, the focus of attention turns from the adults who dominate the action of v. 15—both those bringing their children and those who attempting to prevent them—to the gathered children themselves. Bovon notes, “The *auta* makes clear that it is the children and not the parents or disciples that he [Jesus] calls to himself.”<sup>263</sup> It would have been easy, given initial the attribution of action to the parents bringing their children, to continue this line and depict Jesus as calling the parents to bring their children to him, just as, indeed, Jesus instructs those disciples attempting to prevent these children as regards how they are to act in

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<sup>261</sup> Johnson, 281.

<sup>262</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 559.

<sup>263</sup> Johnson, 276.

relation to the same children. However, instead, Jesus' focus is entirely on the gathered children. Luke's Jesus not only assents to the place of children in God's Kingdom, but actively welcomes them as human agents, capable of coming or allowing themselves to be brought to his presence by their own power.<sup>264</sup> With his invitation, Jesus both welcomes and empowers these small children, even the infants, as recipients of his grace, members of God's Kingdom, and children in the household of God.

The significance of Jesus' welcome of these children whom he calls to himself can be particularly seen in light of the first-century context of hospitality. Hospitality was a central societal expectation in antiquity, which was generally extended to those of one's own cultural group or kin, but could occasionally be extended to strangers as well. Destro and Pesce describe this expectation:

In the time of Jesus there was a widespread cultural mechanism for providing hospitality in houses. It was normal for travelers to find hospitality (in the houses) along the way, despite the existence of taverns or inns (cf. 2:7; 10:34) or perhaps also synagogues with inns (Levine 1981; White 1996; Destro and Pesce 2000:73-74). Thus custom was not just Judean or characteristic of the Land of Israel, but was typical of the contemporary Roman world.<sup>265</sup>

Hospitality was generally conceived of as welcoming another individual into one's home—a

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<sup>264</sup> This goes further than Bovon who, while he reads the text as ultimately referring to the place of children within God's Kingdom, because he fails to understand children as a part of Luke's discipleship community from the start, reads Jesus' address to the disciples as a teaching solely intended for adults. As a consequence, Bovon regrets to note that in this passage "Luke himself runs the risk of neglecting children, whose worth he brings out in other respects" failing to direct Jesus' teaching to the children and instead treating the children as "moving examples" (*Luke 2*, 559). Given my assessment of children within the discipleship community, alluded to already above and explained in depth in chapter three, I avoid this conundrum and suggest that while Luke, in line with the cultural values of the first-century, fails to highlight the invisible place of children in the discipleship community, neither does he exclude this possibility. Thus, Lk 18:15-17 remains a consistent example from which readers can reclaim the presence of children within and among the first followers of Jesus.

<sup>265</sup> Destro and Pesce, 228.

cultural expectation on which Jesus and his apostles relied. However, for Jesus who claims no home (Lk 9:58), hospitality is symbolically extended in the presence of his very person. Inviting another person or group of people to oneself thus becomes an extension of hospitality.

In this way, Jesus not only permits children to enter his presence in a parallel form to that with which he prohibits the adult disciples from preventing them, but Jesus, in fact, extends to them the warmth of hospitality. Green explains,

“Receiving little children” is tantamount to granting them hospitality, performing for them actions (washing of feet, kiss of greeting, and anointing of head—7:44-46) normally reserved for those of equal or higher status. That is, Jesus is asking his disciples to embrace a topsy-turvy system of values and to extend respectful service to that social group most often overlooked.<sup>266</sup>

By extending hospitality to children and inviting them to approach him, Jesus welcomes them not only into an eschatological Kingdom to come, but also into an immediate experience of God’s Kingdom personified by his acceptance and blessing of them in the flesh.

This is significant because the children whom Jesus welcomes, particularly the infants cannot be expected to return Jesus’ hospitality with any sort of reciprocal response—an hallmark that Jesus makes central to welcome in the Kingdom of God (cf. Luke 14:15-24).<sup>267</sup> The welcome that God extends to children through Jesus is not simply a rhetorical or eschatological sense of belonging, but rather a physical and embodied inclusion experienced within and thereby reframing their cultural frame of reference.

Combined Luke 9:47-50 and 18:15-17 powerfully verbalize what has otherwise been implicit throughout Luke’s narrative—children are included and welcome among Jesus’

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<sup>266</sup> Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 651.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Destro and Pesce, 229.

followers as a part of the proclaimed Kingdom of God.<sup>268</sup> This has been demonstrated through attention to the immediate of presence of children among Jesus' followers, Jesus' intentional actions and invitations to bring children close to him, and the maxims that include specific, real children as representatives of the Kingdom of God.

While such maxims are often interpreted metaphorically with an emphasis on how the concept of child might serve as a model for how adults are to achieve status in the Kingdom of God, 9:47-50 and 18:15-17 make it abundantly clear that Jesus' concern is not with human achievements or status. Rather, Jesus is concerned with the relationship that God establishes with both children and adults first through the Abrahamic covenant and now also through the Kingdom and new household of God that Jesus proclaims. In this household, while they may not always be prominently seen, children were and are expected to remain welcomed and valued participants.

### **Welcome and Inclusion as Alluded to Throughout Luke's Narrative**

The welcome and inclusion of children as valued participants in God's Kingdom is not always as readily apparent throughout Luke's gospel account as it is in Luke 9:47-50 and 18:15-17 or some of the healing narratives to be discussed in the next chapter; however, when one peels back the layers of first-century adult-centered narrative and twenty first-century adultist assumptions, the presence and welcome of children within the community of Jesus' followers as Luke describes it begins to emerge with new clarity. Luke's Gospel begins with a heavy emphasis on the inclusion of children in God's Kingdom, signaled by the expectation and

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<sup>268</sup> Indeed, following Luke's inclusive definition of discipleship, children can and should be read as disciples themselves. I have touched on this point briefly above, but will return to it at length as the topic of chapter three.

celebration of John and Jesus' births, and through their infancies, a glimpse into the ritual welcome and inclusion of all infants in the covenantal community through circumcision, purification, and Passover celebration. As Luke shifts into his description of the adult ministries of John and Jesus, young children become less visible, but no less present in the account.

The continued welcome and inclusion of children becomes apparent when one reads Luke's gospel again with an awareness of the already established presence of children in first-century homes, religious spaces, and marketplaces, the invisible presence of children throughout Luke's description of Jesus' teaching, healing, and judgment. In addition, the full inclusion of children in the experience of Jesus' ministry comes to light when one adds to these common epicenters of Jesus' ministry the experience of children at public celebrations connected and often central to Jesus' teaching and ministry, such as funerals, weddings, trials and executions, and again, the Passover Meal.

### *Welcome and Celebration of Infants as Experienced in Luke 1-2*

To begin with, the first two chapters—commonly referred to as the prologue—of Luke's narrative put the spotlight on the inclusion of children within the Jewish covenant community as seen specifically through the births and infancies of John and Jesus. The Psalter expresses well the value that Jewish families placed in the birth of children: "Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Ps 127:3). Like the ambient cultures that surrounded them, first-century Jewish families expected and celebrated the birth of children within a marriage relationship.

For this reason, Zechariah, like Hannah and many others before him, prays for the birth of a child (1:13-14) and Elizabeth celebrates "what the Lord has done for me when he looked

favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people” (1:25). Before they knew the special purpose to which their son John was destined, Zechariah and Elizabeth longed for a child. When they learned of Elizabeth’s pregnancy they welcomed and celebrated their child as a long awaited blessing. Likewise, the angel describes this announcement as “good news” and when Elizabeth’s “neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her...they rejoiced with her” (1:19, 58). This joy at the baby’s birth comes solely from the arrival of their child, apart from any special status, as demonstrated by the fact that the community is portrayed as completely unaware of the special expectations placed on John.

This is illustrated by Zechariah’s inability to speak in order to explain the angelic message he received inability prior to John’s naming and by the initial objections of the neighbors and relatives to the name chosen for the infant (cf. 1:22, 59-63). This narrative, with the primary purpose of showing fulfilled prophecy and the divine nature of John and Jesus’ birth, thus reveals the shadows of a ethos of welcome and inclusion for infants that was woven into the culture into which John and Jesus were born.

This ethos of welcome and inclusion of children, particularly infants, continues in the first two chapters of Luke’s narrative with the accounts of the naming and circumcisions of both John and Jesus. Here the inclusion of children within the Jewish community through the Abrahamic covenant takes on flesh in the artfully related examples of these two infants. At this point in the narrative miraculous interventions and angelic announcements have made it clear to the reader that God has something special in store for John and Jesus; however, the fact of their circumcisions are described, by contrast, as a matter of course (1:59; 2:21). Johnson offers a typical explanation of these events, noting that in these verses “Luke shows the parents of John

and Jesus as observant of Torah.”<sup>269</sup> Thus, we again receive, through the narrative of these special infants, a glimpse into the inclusion and treatment of ordinary infants in the first-century Jewish families of which Jesus and his disciples were a part and which were a large focus of their ministry. Not only were male infants included into the covenant at eight days old through circumcision, it was also an event deemed important enough that the members of the community attend.

Turning the spotlight away from John, Luke continues to describe Mary and Joseph’s observance of Torah in chapter 2 with reference to their travels to the both for performance a rite of purification and for annual Passover observances. Immediately after mention of Jesus’ circumcision, Luke describes a trip to the temple with an infant Jesus “to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’)” (2:22-23). There is some confusion about which Torah law Luke refers to here (the purification of mothers after childbirth or the ritual dedication of the first born).

Luke’s interpretation of the tradition here likely reflects a conflation of the two obligations; however, in either case, the clear inclusion of infants in the covenantal and religious life in the community is brought to the fore. Indeed, Jesus later calls for his followers to receive (δέξεται, 18:17) the Kingdom of God as a little child—which is to say, with the same welcome that Simeon extended to the infant Jesus when he received him (ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ, 2:28) into his arms.<sup>270</sup> The welcome of the infant Jesus at the temple thus both indicates his welcome *as an infant* and foreshadows the later welcome he will extend to infants (βρέφοι, 18:15) himself.

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<sup>269</sup> Johnson, 45.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 559, fn 43.

Whatever the purpose of his visit, then, it is clear the infant Jesus at approximately only one month of age is clearly welcomed and accepted in the temple environment.<sup>271</sup>

Luke continues and extends this welcome in his description of the family's annual visit "to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover" (2:41). In the highlighted account, Jesus is twelve years of age, described as still a "child" (παῖδιον, v. 40, 48), expected to show obedience to his earthly parents (v. 51), and continuing to grow in years and wisdom as expected of a child (v. 52). Bovon elaborates, "Unlike a girl, a twelve-year-old boy is not completely grown, but is indeed at least a παῖς. Whoever places Jesus here at the stage of adulthood misses precisely the point: even as a child, Jesus possesses the wisdom of the great ones."<sup>272</sup> Bovon is accurate in assessing the likely intention of the Lukan author; however, when examined with an aim toward locating the place of children in the text, the shadows of a likely unintentional, but even more basic point begin to peak through. That a child, even of twelve, takes part in the Passover celebrations, is welcomed in the temple, and listened to long enough in order for the teachers to notice his remarkable understanding (v. 47) speaks to the typical inclusion and acceptance of children in Jewish religious, particularly temple, life.

Children were present at and accepted in the temple. Robert Tannehill confirms, "Apart from the fact that Jesus deserted his parents, the scene in verse 46 would not be surprising, for

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<sup>271</sup> For Jesus' age cf. Leviticus 12:2-4. This presents a potential conflict between this episode and the regulation that "a child was able to appear at the Temple for only one purpose, namely to sing with the Levites (*m. Arachin*)" (Horn and Martens, 28). Although at other points I draw upon the Talmud and Mishnah to contextualize the earlier oral Jewish traditions that they reflect, given the direct conflict, I favor the plain sense reading of Luke's text here both because of historical grounding—the Mishnah reflects later developments in Judaism than what can be assumed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century temple—and literary unity—Luke's narrative makes it clear that children are accepted in the Temple.

<sup>272</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 111.



the young were expected to learn from the elders and recognized teachers.”<sup>273</sup> Such religious teachers, of course, would have been found in the temple and synagogues. Thus, while children may not have generally been expected to have had a high level of understanding, as indicated by the teachers’ amazement at what Jesus knew, children were nevertheless both welcomed among the teachers in the temple even listened to such that the boy Jesus’ voice was heard and thus recognized as extraordinary in the first place.

What is more, Luke’s narrative never implies that such inclusion should be thought of as unique to children twelve years or older either. Older commentaries, such as Joseph Fitzmyer’s, based upon later Mishnaic traditions set down far after Luke’s gospel, focus on the twelfth year as a coming of age for Jesus. From this it is possible to infer that this may have been Jesus’ first pilgrimage—living into his covenantal role as Jewish adult male. However, even Fitzmyer recognizes that since “there was no obligation for women or children to participate in this pilgrim feast (see *M. Hagiga* 1:1) The fact that Luke depicts both Mary and Jesus accompanying Joseph to Jerusalem is part of the Temple piety that pervades the infancy narrative in general.”<sup>274</sup>

Law did not require the pilgrimage of women and children to Jerusalem for the Passover, however, it did not forbid it either. Hagith Sivan leaves room for more ambiguity in such age associations, concluding simply, “When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, Jewish children were initiated into Temple cult and ideology during one of the annual pilgrimage festivities.”<sup>275</sup> Given the connection that Sivan later draws between such initiation and the later initiation of children into post-Temple Judaism through synagogue participation, it is likely that he assumes a much

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<sup>273</sup> Tannehill, 75.

<sup>274</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 440.

<sup>275</sup> Hagith Sivan, “Pictorial *Paideia*: Children in the Synagogue” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 532.

younger age of first exposure. For Jewish children, participation in the Temple ritual was a part of what it meant to be socialized in their culture.

The close company that young children kept with their nurses and mothers as their primary caregivers may also have necessitated such early inclusion at the Temple. Courtyards reserved solely for women architecturally attest the common participation of women in Temple life. The participation of women in the Passover pilgrimage is further indicated by the “women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him [Jesus]” (23:27) and the presence of “the women who had followed him from Galilee” (23:49) at Jesus’ crucifixion, which occurred during the Passover festival. The presence of both women and children in Jerusalem for festal celebrations can also be inferred, despite Peter’s patriarchal address to the Jewish pilgrims in Acts 2:5-36, by his citation of Joel’s prophecy that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions... Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). And, indeed, by Peter’s baptismal assurance, “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39).

While it is not clear what age range Jesus means to specify, when one takes a broader understanding of Jesus’ disciples to include small children, Jesus’ reproach to his disciples while in Jerusalem that “the greatest among you must become like the youngest” can also be read to confirm the presence of children in Jerusalem for the Passover (Lk 22:26). Indeed, Fitzmyer’s justification of Mary’s presence in light of Temple piety seems to suggest a continual participation of Mary and the child Jesus in temple festivals. This is highlighted by the infant Jesus’ presence at his mother’s purification in the temple when he is only a month of age, despite the fact that this ritual was not even directly required by the law. That their presence does not

draw any special note only serves to highlight the likelihood that, albeit not required, the presence of women and children during festal pilgrimages was not uncommon.

Removed from assumptions drawn from later regulations and tradition, the casual narration of the annual pilgrimage as Luke presents it assumes that the boy Jesus would have been present with his parents on their previous Passover pilgrimages to Jerusalem as well. Nothing in the narrative sets this pilgrimage up as unique, giving no indication that this year was to be understood as special or Jesus' first pilgrimage.<sup>276</sup> This can be inferred from the distributive use of *κατα* and the corresponding iterative force of *ἐπορεύοντο* v. 41 that point towards this family journey as a routine action.

That the Passover celebration itself is a family affair is apparent from the Torah appointment of the festivals for all the people of Israel (Lev 23:37-38) as well as later traditions of observance. Fitzmyer explains that the feast of Passover “was the feast when the Passover lamb, slain in the late hours of 14 Nisan (i.e. in the afternoon), was roasted and eaten in a family circle at sundown.”<sup>277</sup> Women and children who did not complete the Jerusalem pilgrimage were thus still expected to celebrate the feast. The book of Exodus records, “That was for the LORD a night of vigil, to bring [the people of Israel] out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the LORD by *all the Israelites* throughout their generations” (12:42, emphasis added). The Passover is prescribed as a celebration for all the circumcised—“the whole congregation of Israel”—to eat together in their homes (Ex 12:43-50).

While familial piety may have thus dictated who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it is clear both that the Passover was a family event in which children were included and that the temple piety of Jesus' family, established earlier in Luke's account, would have dictated the

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. Betsworth, 108.

<sup>277</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 439.

regular participation of Jesus in the temple pilgrimage. Given the unremarkable nature with which Luke narrates such piety, it is not a great leap to further assume that Jesus would have been accompanied by other children in this trip. Indeed, such an assumption is confirmed by the need for Joseph and Mary to search for Jesus among the traveling group, within which, given his status as a child, it would not have been unusual for him to have been separated from his parents, walking with his peers instead (Lk 2:44).<sup>278</sup>

In a typical adult-centric pattern, Luke 2:41 narrates only the journey of Jesus' parents to Jerusalem and were the boy not mentioned in v. 43, it would make both grammatical and logical sense to understand the subject of the verb Ἀναβαινόντων (“they went up”) as referring solely to Jesus' parents. Bovon expounds: “from the beginning Luke neatly keeps parents and child separate: until v. 43b, only Mary and Joseph are active. Of course, Jesus has traveled with them, but he attracts attention as an individual only through his desire to stay in Jerusalem.”<sup>279</sup> In line with the overlooked and ubiquitous presence of children in the first-century world, the presence of a child on the pilgrimage only becomes worth noting when that child deviates from the expected obedient norm. The norm, then, to be assumed, is that children of various ages, while not required to do so, would have been among the men and women traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover, if for no other reason than that for those for whom it was possible, the Passover was a celebration intended to be observed as a family, and indeed, if their mothers made the journey very small children in particular would have needed to remain in their care.

Hence, within the first two chapters of his narrative, Luke sets up an ethos around children that assumes their presence and participation both in the daily life of their families and,

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<sup>278</sup> Fitzmyer explains, “The noun *synodia* is found only here in the NT; it is used by Epictetus (*Dissertationes* 4.1,91), Josephus (*J.W.* 2.21,1; *Ant.* 6.12,1), and Strabo (*Geography* 4.6, 6) of a group of people traveling together” (*Luke I-IX*, 441).

<sup>279</sup> Bovon, *Luke I*, 111.

in particular, in the religious observances of the Jewish community. Male infants are circumcised at eight-days-old and are thus welcomed into the covenant community. This community is together expected to observe Torah laws and festivals as the whole people of Israel—children and adults. The acceptance of children in such observances, even within the Jerusalem temple itself, are highlighted in the two vignettes that Luke tells, first of Jesus' journey with his family to the temple at one-month-old for Mary's purification (and perhaps his own dedication) and second of the family's annual pilgrimage to the Jerusalem temple, including the child Jesus in every fabric of this event. While the authorial focus is on the novelty of Jesus' reception in these stories—by Anna and Simeon as an infant and by the teachers and elders at the age of twelve—the narrative set up invokes an expectation of a general acceptance of and participation of all children in such rituals as well.

#### *Invisible Presence of Children Throughout Jesus' Adult Ministry*

Entering into the broader body of Luke's narrative, such celebration of children quickly shifts into the inclusion of children as recipients of the adult ministry of Jesus. This reading requires greater inferences than in the first two chapters in which one infers the presence and activity of ordinary children from the descriptions of the extraordinary childhoods of John and Jesus who were biologically still children. Retrieving the shadows of children present throughout Luke's narrative in the remainder of the gospel account requires greater attention to not simply the vocabulary of biological immaturity, but rather to the activities and contexts in which first-century children lived their lives. When one reads Luke's gospel again with an awareness of the already established presence of children in first-century homes, religious spaces, and

marketplaces, the invisible presence of children throughout Luke's description of Jesus' ministry comes to light.

### 1. Children in the Home (οἶκος)

First, the ubiquitous presence of children in the household itself points to their attendance at and consequent reception of the teaching and acts of power that Jesus performed in local houses. Through Jesus' instructions to the apostles whom he sends out ahead of him, as well as through Jesus' practical actions, the Lukan author makes clear that the home (οἶκος) is a primary locus for Jesus' ministry within the narrative.<sup>280</sup> The word οἶκος can be used to refer to both a dwelling structure and those who dwell in it—a household or family. When using it in a locative sense, however, the Lukan author clearly intends the latter. As already established, first-century—particularly peasant—homes consisted of very tight living corridors. It would have been impossible to exclude children from these venues, even if they were expected (as they surely were) to primarily serve and be silent when a guest was invited into the house.

Luke's gospel alludes to the close presence of children in Galilean homes through the first example Jesus gives regarding perseverance of prayer: "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not

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<sup>280</sup> Cf. Destro and Pesce, 226: "Jesus (a) is often welcomed with a banquet prepared especially for him (5:27-29; 11:37-52; 14:1; 24:30); (b) teaches (5:17; 8:20; perhaps in 10:38 because it cannot be excluded that Jesus teaches not only to Mary but also to a public present that is not mentioned); and presents his teachings in meal settings (in 11:37-52; likewise in 14:5-24 where he teaches after dealing with the issue of Sabbath healing, 14:1-3); (c) heals (5:24; 8:51-56; 14:4). Jesus therefore uses houses for a variety of functions." Although they do not focus on this, it is significant to note that with the possible exception of banquets (at which children would not likely have been guests, but still likely would have been present in service positions), each of the categories that Destro and Pesce cite involve at least one child-centered narrative (cf. Ch. 3 for Mary as a child character).

bother me; the door has already been locked, *and my children are with me in bed*; I cannot get up and give you anything” (Lk 11:5-7, emphasis added). Children were not only an expected presence in the home, but in contrast to many contemporary Western homes also lived in the same spaces (even sleeping in the same beds!) as adults.

Drawing on archaeological data, Reidar Aasgaard describes a typical village home (*tabernae*) in 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century:

The two to four story houses built of brick or stone, with wooden, usually flat roofs, often with a staircase on the outside giving easy access also for children to the roof. This type of housing accommodated a considerable portion of the population, especially outside the big cities... On the ground floor, the *tabernae* would often have workshops, shops, or taverns. On the first floor there would be a room for the family in charge of the business below, primary a place for sleep. Very occasionally, there would be more rooms, or one or two more stories with lodgings for tenants and others.<sup>281</sup>

Given the close quarters of these living arrangements, children would have been among those who heard and witnessed Jesus’ ministry from within the home. With regard to Jesus’ teaching in particular, the arenas in which this would have been conducted would have almost certainly included children who were used to hearing stories performed by a variety of tellers.

Based on a study of such story-telling practices in the ancient world, with particular reference to ancient Rome and early Christianity, Aasgaard concludes, “For children the central arena for [storytelling] would be the household” in which they would be accustomed to hearing tales both tailored more specifically toward them and those which, while directed to an adult audience, would have applications for the “intellectual, social, religious, and cultural schooling” of the children in the household as well.<sup>282</sup> As locations for this practice of storytelling, Aasgaard

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<sup>281</sup> Aasgaard, 56.

<sup>282</sup> Aasgaard, 196.

cites “occasions such as family dinners and hours of leisure,” “children’s bedtime,” and even “at places of work.”<sup>283</sup> In all of these activities, the boundaries between adult and child space would have overlapped—even with regard to slave children—creating what Aasgaard describes as “multi-age settings, in which stories would float back and forth.”<sup>284</sup> Thus, Jesus’ teachings, while primarily directed to the adults in the household, would have also been expected to reach and connect with children in their own ways and through their unique means of perceiving and understanding.

Even when they are not explicitly mentioned, the presence of children can be assumed in much of the ministry that Jesus and his apostles conduct within the home (ὄικοϛ). To begin with, on Jesus’ first venture outside of his hometown of Nazareth (where it would have been expected that he stayed in his family home) to Capernaum, Luke gives attention to the detail of where Jesus stays after teaching in the synagogue—at Simon’s house (4:38). While the people of Capernaum may have first been made aware of Jesus’ presence through his teaching and healing at the synagogue, it is to Simon’s house that “all those who had any who were sick” bring their friends and family to be healed (Lk 4:40).

In a similar manner, when Jesus sends apostles out to proclaim the message of God’s Kingdom he assumes that their ministry will also be located in the context of a family dwelling, or house (οἶκοϛ). This occurs first with the sending of the Gerasene demoniac, whom Jesus instructs, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you” (8:39) and later on a broader scale with Jesus’ sending of first the Twelve and then the Seventy (9:1-6; 10:1-20). To the twelve, Jesus commands, “Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there” (9:4) and to the seventy he elaborates, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this

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<sup>283</sup> Aasgaard, 196.

<sup>284</sup> Aasgaard, 196.



house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you” (10:5-6). Such a greeting would not have been directed solely at the adult householder, but rather, at the entirety of the household—including its non-adult children.<sup>285</sup> This would have held particularly true for small children who would have been assumed to be in the care of their mothers and female domestic servants within the household and/or expected to perform simple household tasks depending upon their place in and the status of the household.<sup>286</sup> Thus, children would have been at the very nucleus of Jesus’ ministry and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as it spread across Galilee, Judea, and even the Gerasene countryside.

Luke describes this ministry, as experienced in the house (οἶκος), to have consisted primarily of healing and teaching. In his first recorded visit to another’s house, Jesus first heals Simon’s mother-in-law of a fever, followed by a plethora of healings as the people of Capernaum bring their sick and demon-possessed to Jesus at Simon’s home (4:39-41). Given cultural norms for families and households in the first-century Mediterranean world, Luke’s audience would have likely assumed the presence of children in this and other homes. Indeed, the social and practical value of children combined with high infant mortality rates in antiquity led “Families [to produce] many children in the hopes that some would survive” such that “the young...were the largest segment of the population” and “greatly outnumbered the elderly.”<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Cf. Destro and Pesce, 227: “The disciples shall say ‘Peace to this οἶκος,’ in other words to the group of people who live in the οἰκία.” Although they don’t specifically deal with the presence of non-adult children, such would be assumed in their three-generation model of the typical household.

<sup>286</sup> On the care of Jewish and Greco-Roman free children in the household up to the age of seven, cf. Horn and Martens, 24; On the typical work of Roman slave children in or near the household, cf. Nielsen, 288.

<sup>287</sup> Amram Tropper, “Children and Childhood in Light of the Demographics of the Jewish Family in Late Antiquity,” in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 37:3 (2006) 342.

Thus, it is a likely inference that children, either from Simon's marriage or his extended family, would have resided in his home and witnessed this healing. Moreover, even if Simon's house conspicuously lacked children, the fact that Luke emphasizes that *all* who had *any* sick came to Jesus suggests that children, considered particularly vulnerable because of the propensities for childhood illness (contributing to the high infant mortality rates mentioned above) would have been among the totality of the sick described in this verse. Lacking any clear indication of their absence, the Lukan author thus seems to have assumed the presence of children—and likely in great multitude—among many of the first people whom Jesus healed, taught, and from whom he cast out demons in Capernaum.

Nor are Jesus' healings in Capernaum an isolated event. As residents and guests of the houses that Jesus visits, children continue to show up behind the adult centered narrative that Luke weaves up through the very end of the narrative. Most obviously, the theme of Jesus' ongoing ministry based out of the home (οἶκος) resurfaces at the homes of Martha and Mary (10:38-42), Zacchaeus (19:1-10), and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:29-31). In each instance, although these narratives are commonly read with the assumption that the residents of these homes are limited to the named individuals in the account, this would have been exceedingly unlikely given the economy of first-century Palestine.

In contrast, Santiago Guijarro draws upon literary, historical, and sociological evidence from first-century Galilee to suggest that depending upon social status and wealth, a typical household would be classified as large, multiple, nucleated, and scattered.<sup>288</sup> The larger households, to which Guijarro expects, based upon Luke's description, at least five of the twelve

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<sup>288</sup> Santiago Guijarro, "The Family in First-century Galilee," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997) 58.

apostles would have belonged, would have consisted of a greater number of relatives, potentially with closer socio-economic ties.<sup>289</sup> However, in all instances, “family was the basic reference of the individual and channel through which he or she was inserted into society.”<sup>290</sup>

As such, even smaller homes, providing dwelling for either a nucleated household, consisting of a conjugal couple and their offspring, or a scattered household, consisting of a looser grouping of relatives often due to the loss of the nuclear family from death (fathers, being much older at the time of marriage, frequently left widows and children) or divorce, would have provided shelter for a handful of people, likely of varying ages. Hence, the presence of children would have been assumed to continue to be norm. Moreover, there are narrative clues that suggest Mary herself may be a child in this episode, including: the designation of the home as belonging to a woman (γυνή) Martha (10:38); mentioning Mary only as her sister, with no indication of ownership or maturity; and Mary’s seated stance before Jesus, calling to mind the boy Jesus in the temple seated among the elders (Lk 2:46),<sup>291</sup>

In addition, to these direct references to Jesus’ ministry within the home, or household (οἶκος), it is likely that Jesus’ healing of a paralytic man, lowered down by friends through a roof occurred in a home as well (5:18-19). Since Luke does not specify the kind of dwelling Jesus was teaching in when this man and his friends approached, it is possible that the locale might have been a synagogue or other public gathering place. However, given the centrality of homes in Jesus’ ministry, the preponderance of open-air public gatherings (even for synagogues) in first-century villages, and the typical structure of multiple storied homes with access to the roof from the outside, it is likely that here as at Simon’s house in Ch. 4, a multitude of people have

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<sup>289</sup> Guijarro, 63.

<sup>290</sup> Guijarro, 62.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Chapter 4 on Discipleship for an in depth elaboration of this thesis.

sought Jesus out at the home in which he has made his base of ministry in this city. Assuming this to be the case, we can again appreciate the opportunity for children both from the household itself and the surrounding cities and countryside to witness and participate in Jesus' ministry as it takes place.

## 2. Children in the Temple and Synagogues

Second, attention must be given to the place of children in religious gathering places, such as the Temple and synagogues that Jesus visited. Although the house served as the home base of Jesus' ministry, Luke's gospel contains the most abundant references to Jesus teaching and healing in religious gathering places – the Jerusalem Temple and community synagogues. Jesus' presence at the Temple “among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” when he was twelve years old (Lk 2:46) has already been noted above. Given the teachers' acceptance of the boy Jesus in this capacity and the welcome of children in the temple, it is likely that there may have been other children among this group—listening to the teachers together with Jesus, albeit not asking questions or offering answers that conveyed the same understanding about which the people were amazed (2:47).

After this youthful experience at the temple, although Jesus' family's tradition of an annual pilgrimage would suggest that Jesus visited the temple many more times in the intervening years, Luke jumps ahead to describe Jesus' interactions in the temple during the last days of his life and ministry. Luke first places the adult Jesus in the Temple again after entering Jerusalem for the Passover festival in an aggressive scene in which “he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things” (19:45). Once more, we can assume—especially in these exterior courtyards of the temple—that children would have witnessed these

events. Indeed, given the role of children helping their parents in the marketplaces, it is possible that children may even have been among those who were driven out.

After this, Luke reports that Jesus was “teaching the people in the temple” (Lk 20:1) and again, “Every day he was teaching in the temple...And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple” (Lk 21:37-38). It is significant here that the word used for “people” is λαός, which Frederick Danker defines as “people, in a general sense; the mass of a community as distinguished from interest groups; a body of people with common cultural bonds and to a specific territory” and, in more specific use, “people of God.”<sup>292</sup> Luke’s choice of words make no patriarchal allusion to a male only gathering, for example, of “brothers,” but instead, emphasizes in hyperbole the presence of the “all” the populace (πᾶς ὁ λαός) at the temple—a social and cultural grouping that would certainly have included children. This is a theme that continues in Acts, where the Lukan author describes the early Christians (many of whom converted by the household, thus including children) to have “spent much time together in the temple” (Acts 2:46). Luke depicts the Temple and its courtyards as a communal place of gathering—one that had no reason to exclude children, but rather, would have welcomed them out of necessity and as a means of socialization in the Temple cult.

Nor does Luke assume that this mass of people just happens to be milling about at the temple such that they overhear Jesus’ teaching. Instead, the action of the sentence is placed with the people themselves—all of whom are said to get up early in the morning to listen to Jesus. Although Luke does not intend to signal any particular member of this populace out, a reader with an eye for the remnants of children in Luke’s telling might begin to picture a small boy or girl enthusiastically rising before the break of dawn to complete his or her morning chores—

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<sup>292</sup> BDAG, 586.

perhaps fetching water for the family—in order to hurry, just a little bit behind the grown-ups who have left already in order to hear what new words this strange teacher, Jesus, might have to share that day. In the courtyards of the Temple, therefore, children of first-century Jerusalem—and those who joined their parents in the Passover pilgrimage there—begin to emerge from the shadows of Luke’s adult-centered narrative as eager and active participants, not only exposed to Jesus and his teachings, but just as the adults of their city, actively seeking him out.

A similar transformation occurs when one interrogates Jesus’ teaching ministry in the synagogues. Luke tells us that it was Jesus’ custom to go to the synagogue of whatever town or village he was in on the Sabbath day (Lk 4:15). This is confirmed throughout the narrative as Jesus is found teaching and healing in synagogues throughout Galilee and Judea (cf. Lk 4:31-37; 4:43-44; 6:6; 13:10; and possibly 5:17-19). The life of the Jewish community was centered around the synagogue. Lee Levine explains:

...the synagogue encapsulated Jewish communal life within its walls—the political, liturgical, social, educational, judicial, and spiritual. It is this inclusiveness that made the first-century synagogue a pivotal institution in Jewish life that played a major role in enabling communities throughout the world to express their Jewishness, preserve their Jewish identity and community cohesion, and eventually negotiate the trauma and challenges created by the Temple’s destruction in 70 C.E.<sup>293</sup>

As such, the whole of the Jewish community—adults and children—were included and welcomed in the synagogue for its various functions and services.

Josephus confirms this communal aspect of the synagogue in his record of the decree of the Sardinians:

Whereas those Jews who are fellow citizens, and live with us in this city, have ever had great benefits heaped upon them by the

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<sup>293</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 172-173. Cf. also Levine, 144, 169.

people, and have come now into the senate, and desired of the people, that upon the restitution of their law and their liberty, by the senate and the people of Rome, they may assemble together, according to their ancient legal custom, and that we will not bring any suit against them about it; and that a place may be given them where they may have their congregations, *with their wives and children*, and may offer, as did their forefathers, their prayers and sacrifices to God. Now the senate and people have decreed to permit them to assemble together on the days formerly appointed, and to act according to their own laws; and that such a place be set apart for them by the praetors, for the building and inhabiting the same, as they shall esteem fit for that purpose; and that those that take care of the provision for the city, shall take care that such sorts of food as they esteem fit for their eating may be imported into the city (emphasis added).<sup>294</sup>

The local synagogues, particularly after the destruction of the Second Temple, and even before then for those in the Diaspora or unable to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, served a central role in the maintenance of Jewish identity and culture.<sup>295</sup> Sivan explains,

A book (the Bible), a congregation, and an assembly house (the synagogue) provide a primary scheme that frames Jewish childhood in antiquity... Together they account for the social experience and acculturation of children into a society governed by communal prayers, festivities, synagogal gatherings, and rules harking back to Scripture.<sup>296</sup>

Sivan, primarily interested in the role of synagogues in children's lives, does not directly mention the concomitant religious and cultural socialization that occurred within the home. Nevertheless, the household, as the means by which children were brought to the synagogue (as

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<sup>294</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.24, transl. William Whiston.

<sup>295</sup> This takes an interesting shape in post-second Temple Judaism, in which several synagogues have been discovered that depart from the austere appearance described above, in which "Within the sanctified space of the synagogue, children were cast as visual archetypes of obedience to parental and divine precepts, reinforcing an orthodoxy anchored in the commonality of language and liturgy. Synagogal pictures of foundational moments featuring children reflect a dialectical relationship with an environment in which Greco-Roman educational practices aspired to groom the young... Sounds, images and Scripture engulfed the young within a protective envelope of family and community that came regularly together in the synagogue" (Sivan, 552-553).

<sup>296</sup> Sivan, 533.

opposed to a Roman temple, for example, had they been raised in a Roman household) remains central to this experience. Children learned what it meant to be Jewish through their affiliation with their Jewish household, and this meant attending the Synagogue. Hence, Sivan continues, “As centers of sociability, these synagogues played a role that was far from trivial in determining Jewish identity from infancy via adolescence to adulthood.”<sup>297</sup> Because culture is shared across generations and parents desired to socialize their children into their culture, children were introduced to and incorporated into the life of the synagogue from a very young age.

Part of this socialization occurred through, though it was not limited to, the educational role of the synagogue. The synagogue was the primary place to which Jewish children were brought to learn the Law of God, and, in all likelihood, accounted for the majority (if any) literacy education that a common Jewish child would receive as well. “One late rabbinic tradition speaks of 480 synagogues in pre-70 Jerusalem, each of which had a primary school and an advanced school.”<sup>298</sup> Although this number is likely formalized and exaggerated, the fact that Jewish children, especially boys, were educated in the Torah is well attested—often with the expectation that both parents would attend synagogue with their children.<sup>299</sup>

A variety of sources from the first three centuries of the Common Era attest to the religious education of children in the synagogues and its relative availability to the masses.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Sivan, 533.

<sup>298</sup> Levine, 144. Cf. Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 11 (pp. 54-55), cited in Levine, 384: “[Regarding] a small town in Israel, they [the townspeople] built for themselves a synagogue and academy and hired a sage and instructors for their children. When a nearby town saw [this], it [also] built a synagogue and academy, and likewise hired teachers for their children.” Cf. also Horn and Martens, 34: “A Jewish boy from seven to fourteen also might receive religious education at the local synagogue, whether this was a daily activity, or, more likely, one reserved for the Sabbath.”

<sup>299</sup> Levine, 289, citing Gafni: “...in speaking of mothers who bring their children to study [in the synagogue], it is the Bavil which notes that their husbands were studying in the academy at the same time.” Cf. also Levine, 377-378.

<sup>300</sup> Horn and Martens, 28.



Horn and Martens note, “Paul himself seems to indicate the teaching function of the synagogues, and perhaps Jewish schools in general, when he sarcastically speaks of their role as ‘teacher of infants’ (*didaskalon nepion*) (Rom 2:20).”<sup>301</sup> In short, children were embedded in the communal framework of the synagogue.

Moreover, children were not simply expected to attend the synagogue or to receive a specialized separate instruction apart from the adults. Children were expected to pay attention and participate in the Sabbath services. Philo recounts, regarding the Sabbath: “For that day has been set apart to be kept holy and on it they [all the Israelites] abstain from all other work and proceed to sacred spots which they call synagogues [*συναγωγαῖ*]. There, arranged in rows according to their ages, the younger below the elder, they sit decorously as befits the occasion with attentive ears.”<sup>302</sup> In each of these synagogues that Jesus visited and proclaimed the message of God’s kingdom, often performing healing signs of God’s reign, Jewish children would have been there, receiving and internalizing his words and actions along with their adult counterparts. Indeed, as members of the covenant community and the people of God, they not only witnessed but also participated in the synagogue service.

A second century account speaks to this when it “notes that the synagogue community of Tarbant dismissed one R. Simeon when the latter proved unwilling to comply with their requests: ‘The villagers said to him: ‘Pause between your words [either when reading the Torah or rendering the *targum*], so that we may relate this to our children.’”<sup>303</sup> Likewise, Tractate Soferim relates:

If he [the reader of Lamentations on Tish’a b’Av] knows how to translate it, this is preferred, and if not, he gives it to someone who

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<sup>301</sup> Horn and Martens, 137.

<sup>302</sup> Philo, *Every Good Man is Free* 8I.

<sup>303</sup> Levine, 383.

knows how to translate it well, and he translates so that the rest of the people [i.e., the men] and women and children will understand...And that is the reason it was said, 'He who recites the blessing must raise his voice for the benefit of his sons, his wife, and his daughters.'<sup>304</sup>

The presence of children in the synagogues was not enough—their understanding was sought and expected. Levine further signals an alternate translation of this same text in which the request was made “so that they [i.e. our children] may recite this material to us.”<sup>305</sup>

This attention to children in the life of the synagogue likely had to do with both the status of children in the covenant community and the commands of the Torah to educate them in the Law. Josephus prescribes, “Again the Law...orders that they [i.e., the children] shall be taught to read and shall learn both the laws and the deeds of their forefathers, in order that they may imitate the latter, and, being grounded in the former, may neither transgress nor have any excuse for being ignorant of them.”<sup>306</sup> Given the perennial presence of children in the synagogues, that a similar expectation that such children be given opportunity to understand the happenings of the synagogues would have also existed in the first-century during Jesus’ lifetime seems a likely conjecture. Children played an active role in the life of the synagogue.

Such activity even extended to verbal participation in the service. “Regarding the question as to who should respond ‘Amen’ in synagogues where all the men were priests and therefore recited the priestly blessing, it was decided that it should be answered by the women and children present.”<sup>307</sup> Although the formal practice of communal prayer in the synagogues was not fully established at the beginning of the first-century, the rapid movement into such

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<sup>304</sup> Levine, 502. Tractate Soferim 18.5 (pp. 316-17)

<sup>305</sup> Levine, 383, fn 9.

<sup>306</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.204, cited in Levine, 145.

<sup>307</sup> Levine, 502; Cf. Ginzberg, *Commentary*, IV, 279 and Levine, 527.

practice by all in attendance again indicates the deep-rooted place of children of all ages in the community synagogue.

More formally, this could be seen in the participation of Jewish boys in the central part of the service—the reading of the Torah. The Mishnah records that “a child could read from the Torah or the prophets at the synagogue service.”<sup>308</sup> When Jesus reads from Isaiah in Luke 4:16-20, therefore, it is likely this is not the first time that the people of his hometown have heard him read in the synagogue. This may have been a regular activity of his as a child—the young person they knew to be “Joseph’s son” (v. 22).

What is unusual, of course, comes later in Jesus’ proclamation that this prophecy of reversal is now fulfilled—a theme will be revisited in chapter five. In the meantime, for the purposes of bringing the role of children in the synagogues out of the shadows, it is worthwhile to pause on this first recognition and to recognize in it a broader awareness and acceptance of the participation of ordinary children in the life of the synagogue. With this image in mind, we can begin to re-vision the synagogues in which Jesus preached not as stale gatherings of old men and religious leaders, but as bustling centers of life and activity within the communities he visited—populated by the faithful of all ages, with youth serving at the *bima*, reading from the scrolls, and even the smallest children gathered to hear the words of the teachers.

### 3. Children Among the Crowds and in the Public Sphere

Third, children can be seen in the streets, outdoor marketplaces, and other public venues in which the proclamation of God’s Kingdom was spread by the testimony of John, his disciples, and Jesus’ own acts of healing and preaching. The public presence of children in first-century

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<sup>308</sup> *m. Megillah* 4:5-6, cited in Horn and Martens, 28.

cities and villages has already been elaborated above. In light of archaeological and literary evidence, McWilliam summarizes, “Children were very much a part of public life in Rome and in their local towns and communities. They attended the baths [and] experienced life in and around the forum and other public buildings.”<sup>309</sup> Children were present in the towns, at the docks, and in the markets both in the accompaniment of the parents and on their own. They performed such actions as observing, working, and even playing in this public space.<sup>310</sup>

Although the portrait of children’s life in the first-century certainly indicate, “Children here may have had less time to play and spent more time generally helping the household survive,” based on the presence of toys in various arenas, Mary Harlow concludes, “In all these [public and private] spaces, and on streets and in fields, children presumably played.”<sup>311</sup> Both at work and at play, children in first-century Palestine were present everywhere.

Luke’s gospel confirms the known presence of children in the marketplace, recounting Jesus’s lament, “To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep’” (7:31-32). Veiled in biting critique of the current generation’s (ironically, not excluding children themselves) failure to respond to the ministrations of either John the Baptist or Jesus, this lament inadvertently shines a light into a lived activity of real children as Luke and his intended audience would have known them.

Children could be found amusing themselves, and perhaps others, in the public marketplaces, either “with parents nearby selling their wares or with the children being alone,

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<sup>309</sup> McWilliam, 278.

<sup>310</sup> Horn and Martens, 169-173, 195.

<sup>311</sup> Harlow, “Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood,” 323.

calling out to their friends.”<sup>312</sup> Such a picture is not intended to supply an idyllic image of children’s lives as careless and free in the first-century, or of any particular sentimentalization of the children who performed such activities, but rather, to present a realistic picture of the visibility children would have had in the public sphere in Jesus’ society.<sup>313</sup> In fact, returning again to the demographic estimates, children may have even dominated certain public spaces.

In first-century Palestine, as in other societies with a high infant mortality rates and increased vulnerability for sickness and death during early childhood, a greater number of births were necessary in order to sustain and grow an adult population. As a result, person for person, there were many more children among the crowds of people whom Jesus met than we might typically encounter in a public crowd today. Demographer Tim Parkin estimates that “in an ancient society roughly one-third of the population would have been under the age of fifteen years at any one time; the comparable figure today in the developed world is more like 19%.”<sup>314</sup>

Although adults may not have written or spoken about children so much, on account of their sheer numbers, they could not have avoided recognizing their presence. Amram Tropper writes,

Although the magnitude of the children’s population did not necessarily translate into a higher public visibility for children, the sheer numbers of young people must have influenced society in various ways. Children in urban areas probably enjoyed large peer groups consisting of many potential friends while adults would have been forced to constantly consider the needs of the younger

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<sup>312</sup> Horn and Martens, 170; Cf. Carroll, 191.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. William Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (Cumbria, UK: Pater Noster, 1996) 50-51: “Jesus was...a realist about human nature; he was equally realistic about the nature of children...he knew how children, in their play, act out roles in which they exercise power over others...There was...no sentimentality in Jesus’ view of children.”

<sup>314</sup> Tim Parkin, “The Demographics of Infancy and Early Childhood in the Ancient World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evan Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 41.

generation as well as the challenges they might pose to the traditional order.<sup>315</sup>

Children were, in short, a silent, yet constant presence. Parkin elaborates on the implications of this increased presence by drawing on the reflections of social historian and demographer Peter Laslett, about whom Parkin writes, although he describes a later era,

...his words bring to my mind, *inter alia*, scenes from Roman sarcophagi or even the Ara Pacis (cf. Dixon 1992: 177, plate 16; Huskinson 1996: 140, plate 4.4; see also Larsson Lovén in this volume): ‘In the pre-industrial world there were children everywhere; playing in the village street and fields when they were very small, hanging around the farmyards and getting in the way, until they had grown enough to be given child-sized jobs to do...; forever clinging to the skirts of women in the house and wherever they went and above all crowding round the cottage fires... The perpetual distraction of childish noise and talk must have affected everyone almost all the time.’<sup>316</sup>

Taking a step back from the adult-centric view of Jesus’ ministry, influenced by authorial bias discussed in the first chapter, a vision of an ancient world teeming with children thus begins to emerge.

Moreover, these children were not simply playing games and relying on their parents for their every need, as we may imagine many contemporary children and youth today. Rather, they were a part of every aspect of society—concomitantly passive receivers at the margins of adult status and volition and active participants, forming their own alliances and abilities. Their parents provided them the necessary means and training to work according to their skill, loosely supervised their games within the space of the community, and accepted their presence as necessary and active members of the farms and towns in which they lived.

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<sup>315</sup> Tropper, 330.

<sup>316</sup> Parkin, “Demographics,” 42.

Children did not simply loiter in the public sphere, their presence carried meaning. From a child's perspective, such meaning may have been perceived more indirectly—in terms of their relationships and activities themselves. From an adult perspective, however, parents, employers, and slave owners all had clear expectations about what the children under their charge would accomplish—ranging from helping with simple tasks at the market, learning a craft by apprenticeship, running errands, providing a service, and/or receiving socialization into their role and place in society.

One of the most ready, though distasteful, examples of this is the case of child prostitution. Reflecting on the practice of child prostitution, Werner Krenkel notes, “Slave boys were sent out to attract customers, especially in harbor towns where they swarmed the dock like flies (Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian [Poenulus]* 688-691): they roamed cities (Seneca the Younger, *Dialogues* 1.5.3) and infested baths (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.40).”<sup>317</sup> Such slaves, present to serve the clear aims of their masters, were at the same time interacting with, learning from, and in their own ways changing the environment and community with which they came into contact. Children, even slave children, were not merely passive receivers of society, but active and members (albeit marginally) of it.

As Krenkel's description so vividly paints, children were everywhere. The sheer demographic numbers discussed above make certain of this. More innocuously than the presence of child prostitution, Horn and Martens confirm this ubiquitous presence with multiple examples featuring children running errands for their parents or other people in Christian apocryphal texts. In the *Acts of Paul (and Thecla)*, Paul sent one of Onesiphorus's boys to buy food for the group. In *Acts of John* and *Acts of Peter*, youths come and announce events to the respective

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<sup>317</sup> Werner Krenkel, cited in Horn and Martens, 169-170.

apostles.”<sup>318</sup> Children were an assumed part of the public life in the first-century Mediterranean world. Even from the margins, unable to participate in the Roman senate or join certain associations, children were both influenced by and themselves influenced the communities in which they lived. In short, children—slave and free, at work and at play—permeated the towns and spaces in which Jesus moved and preached as (limited) agential individuals included in them.

Consequently, when the Lukan author refers to Jesus teaching as “the crowd was pressing in on him” (Lk 5:1) or “with a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon” (6:17), it is justifiable to assume that there were children thronged among them. John’s interpretation of the synoptic feeding narratives (cf. Lk 9:101-7) brings this assumption to light, when he recounts the acquisition of the loaves from “a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish” (Jn 6:9). Here, as in the Lukan reference to children in the marketplace, the emphasis is placed not on the child, but on how this child and his ordinary activities might provide an opportunity for the extraordinary revelation of God’s Kingdom. However, John’s passing reference to this child, together with Matthew’s clarification to the Markan and Lukan accounts that “The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matt 14:21) clearly indicates a culturally assumed presence of children in such crowds.<sup>319</sup> This combined witness leaves little doubt to the fact that a Lukan audience and the Lukan author himself, coming from a similar point of cultural reference, would have assumed—if not counted—the presence of children among the crowds both in the feeding account, and if there, elsewhere when the multitudes flock to and surround Jesus as he heals and teaches.

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<sup>318</sup> Horn and Martens, 181.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Horn & Martens, 264.



In light of this unspoken presence, one can and should read again varied accounts of Jesus' activity in the public sphere as varied in a new light—recognizing the dynamic composition of each crowd as including, indeed, teeming with children of all ages.<sup>320</sup> Although often the “crowds” are defined simply as such, the significance of those places in which Luke refers in exaggerated measure to “all the people” or “all the surrounding country” (i.e. 3:21; 4:14; 7:29; etc.) as moments where the shadows of children begin to peak through should not be dismissed too lightly.

Indeed, in 7:23, Jesus sends John's disciples with the message, “And blessed is *anyone* who takes no offense at me” (emphasis added), and given the blessings that Jesus bestows on the infants and small children being brought into his presence less than one chapter later, there is no reason to believe that such blessing—as with the blessings bestowed upon the crowds at various other points in Jesus' preaching (notably the beatitudes, again as a replication of the blessing given to children in 8:15-17)—is not intended for children as well as adults. In this context, when Jesus concludes his critique of the present generation, begun with a reference to the play of young children (παιδιοῦς) in 7:32, with the aphorism of 7:35: “Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all its children” (πάντων τῶν τέκνων) the “all” preceding τῶν τέκνων as a non age-specific term for children, or descendants, takes on particular meaning in pointing to *all* the children of wisdom included in the generation to whom Jesus is preaching and ministering—whatever their age.

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<sup>320</sup> Cf. Units as varied as Lk 3:3-21 5:1-3,15; 6:17-7:1; 7:1-10, 11-17, 18-35; 8:1-21, 26-39, 40-56; 9:6, 10-17, 37-43; 11:14-28, 29-36; 12:1-13:9; 13:22-45; 14:25-15:32; 18:35-42; 19:1-27, 36-44; 22:47-23:49; 24:9-11, 13-35, and potentially others. In each of these, children are never named, but can easily be assumed. The agency of the swineherds in 8:34-36 deserves particular consideration in light of the parallels with the young son who is similarly employed feeding pigs in Jesus' parable (15:11-32) discussed below.

Luke's intertextual use of the prophet Jonah<sup>321</sup> provides another opportunity to glimpse the hidden children behind an otherwise adult-centered presentation of the crowds. In Luke 11:29-32, Jesus says, again to the crowds, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Lk 11:29-30).

While interpreters might argue for ambiguity in Jesus' intended audience (adult or otherwise) with regard to such proclamations, the author of Jonah leaves no room for ambiguity in the definition of the people with whom Luke's Jesus compares his audience with. After Jonah brings the word of God to the people of Nineveh, the book continues:

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<sup>321</sup> Here it is necessary to offer a word about intertextuality and how I understand Luke's use of this rhetorical device. Intertextuality is a term that was coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, and as such, it would be anachronistic to say that the Lukan author intentionally employs "intertextuality". At the same time, the ancient text (along with other texts of its time period) employs references to other texts with a presumed knowledge that such references possess the ability to deepen the experience of the reader by calling this common background to mind. In the broadest sense of the term, Michel Foucault describes the interrelationship of every text with all those texts that have come before it: "The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network" (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1974) 23. Everything that is written can and does call to mind within individual readers that which they have read or experienced as text before. While I philosophically agree with Foucault's description of the broad sense of interrelation between texts of all kinds, for the purposes of the narrative analysis that I apply to Luke's text, when used within this dissertation, I mean by "intertext" and "intertextuality" the narrower category of pre-existent literary documents either implied, referenced, or directly quoted by the author. In particular, I draw attention to narratives within the Hebrew Bible as intertexts intentionally used by the Lukan author throughout the gospel account as a common document that would have been familiar to much of his ancient audience and continues to be familiar to a large section of his contemporary audience today. Understanding of these texts enables a deepened understanding of Luke's narrative and in some cases presents the reader with feasible options by which to fill the gaps in the gospel narrative itself, with particular attention to how this relates to one's understanding of children within each text. For a more in depth discussion of the use of intertextuality within gospel criticism, cf. Jean Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, the Present, and the Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) 121-136.

And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small (קטנים), put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish” (Jonah 3:5-9).

With even the animals included in the fast, there is little question as to whether or not every resident of Nineveh, from the oldest to the youngest, also partook.

The Hebrew root word קטן that the NRSV translates as “small” literally means “small” or “insignificant.” Typically in the Hebrew Bible this term applies to those who are insignificant in terms of social status, often the poor or socially marginalized. However, the term also appears occasionally with reference to youth, used frequently to “indicate the youngest child in the family or comparative smallness” and “can suggest a child by modifying age-ambiguous nouns.”<sup>322</sup> Together with its antonym גדול, as it is presented in Jonah 3:5 is frequently translated “young and old.” No serious interpreter of Jonah suggests that it is only those short in stature who participate in the king’s fast, but rather, reads in these verses the intended inclusivity, which expresses a complete participation of the entire city of Nineveh—from the lowliest to the most important. The LXX translation, ἀπὸ μεγάλου αὐτῶν ἕως μικροῦ αὐτῶν (“from the greatest of them to the smallest of them”), confirms this. The root word μικρόν here being the same word used in Luke 9:45, again in comparison with the greatest, but here with a clear reference to small children (cf. Lk 17:2; Acts 8:10; 26:22).

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<sup>322</sup> Parker, 52.

Although these social categories are generally applied solely to adults, there is no reason to assume that they did not include children as well. Moreover, the use of a term that can be translated with reference to children, combined with the indication of *complete* participation of the whole city, suggests the inclusion of children within these categories. This is especially the case since we have previously established of all ancient cities, which would include Nineveh, that they were teeming with children.

According to this text, children, therefore, regardless of their volition, would have been included in God's judgment—the destruction of the city—just as they participate in the King's fast and repentance and so are included also in God's grace.<sup>323</sup> With reference to Luke's use of this text a similar inclusivity across ages ought also to be assumed.

Applying the wrath of God's judgment to small children feels less comfortable than dwelling on the little children who Jesus calls to himself (Lk 18:15-17) or even allowing for the seemingly innocuous presence of children among the crowds. Nevertheless, this step is just as necessary in removing the characters of children—in their full personhoods—from the shadows of Luke's account and recognizing their *full* inclusion in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

Here the intertexts serve as a helpful bridge. The children of Nineveh were included in the fullness of God's activity among them: receiving judgment, enacting repentance, and ultimately experiencing grace through the forgiveness God offers. It is within this experience of

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<sup>323</sup> It is worth struggling with the concept of small children, especially infants “fasting” here. Given the dependence of children on the household as a provision of security and food, it may not be fair to describe what would likely have been, for them, a deprivation of food by order of the head of the household and executed by its women and servants as a conscious religious activity. This deserves particular caution in light of present day situations of child abuse and neglect perpetrated in the name of religion. At the same time, however, it is worth questioning the degree to which the entire city—under a parallel order of the patriarchal king—was truly able to exercise volition in this fast. Consequently, the example of Nineveh remains for me an example (albeit a troubled one) of the interdependent experiences of both adults and children together in relation to the judgment and grace of an almighty God.

God that Jesus encourages those to whom he is preaching—adults and children—to find themselves. There remains hope that they may yet repent from their wrongdoings and be included in God’s grace. In somewhat less optimistic portrayals, however, Luke’s Jesus goes onto compare the “days of the Son of Man”—the coming judgment—to “the days of Noah” (17:26) and “the days of Lot” (17:27-30). In each of these instances, (all but) complete destruction leaves no question that the non-adult children of these towns and countrysides were included in the divine judgment and destruction.

In the case of Noah, Jesus describes how “the flood came and destroyed all of them” (Lk 17:27). The hope filled part of the narrative, which we usually tell to our children, tends to center around the compassion that God shows for Noah and his family: “Then the Lord said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household [LXX: οἶκος], for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation” (Gen 7:1). Although not specifically mentioned one way or another, the description of Noah’s household here suggests that any grandchildren (his sons are already adults, as inferred by the presence of their wives) would also have entered the ark at the same time as “Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives” (Gen 7:7). Indeed, the mention of Ham as the father of Canaan (Gen 9:18) and the assumed presence of Canaan given Noah’s curse (Gen 9:24-27) following the events that transpire immediately following the family disembarking the ark suggest that at least one non-adult child, Canaan, accompanied Noah and his family onto the ark. The failure to mention him in the formulaic description of their loading and unloading likely has more to do with a lack of cultural concern for explicitly naming such non-adult children until, as in the case of Canaan, it becomes pertinent to the story—much as is continued in the synoptic gospel accounts. In any case, while the children (either born or unborn) of Noah’s nuclear family are thus included in the experience of God’s grace on the ark, the

majority of children of all ages who had come to populate the earth in the days of the Nephilim (cf. Gen 6:1-4) are clearly included in what God judges to be “the wickedness of humankind” (Gen 6:5), God’s consequent regret “that he had made humankind on the earth” (Gen 6:6), and God’s ultimate decision: “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them” (Gen 6:7). Here, as later in the case of Nineveh, the full inclusion of every living thing on the earth leaves little room to doubt that young children number among them.

Hence, young children died as a part of God’s inclusive judgment of humanity when God “blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth,” such that “Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark” (Gen 7:23). Such extreme inclusivity leaves little room to object that children are thus also included in the judgment about which Jesus prophesies in the coming days of the Son of Man. Indeed, few interpreters would suggest that this is not the case.<sup>324</sup> Instead, they simply fail to comment on the fate of children in God’s judgment one-way or the other.

With regard to Lot’s story, Jesus calls to mind the destruction of Sodom (and Gomorrah), similarly comparing the potential to be included in either God’s grace or God’s judgment on the coming day of the Son of Man to God’s provisions for Lot (cf. Lk 17:28-31). In Genesis 19, the age of Lot’s daughters is unnamed. The fact that they “have not known a man” (Gen 19:8) combined with a traditionally early marriage age for females could imply that these girls have

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<sup>324</sup> A notable exception to this is proponents of a rapture theology. Such scholars typically acknowledge that the Bible is unspecific on this point, but based upon a belief in God’s grace, argue for an age of accountability at which point a child is able to accept Christ, and before which, small children—whether of believers or unbelievers—would be included among the raptured in God’s judgment.

not yet reached adulthood. Indeed, the omission of the designation בתולה, a term generally associated with young women who have reached puberty, in describing Lot's daughters might suggest a younger age.<sup>325</sup> If the girls had not yet reached puberty when the Lord rescued them from the destruction of Sodom (cf. 19:15-16) then this would be a clear example of God's mercy extended to Lot's (non-adult) children—indeed, God extends this mercy to the girls despite their human father's earlier willingness to sacrifice them in favor of the wellbeing of his two biologically mature guests (cf. Gen 19:7-8).

Even if the Lot's daughters are of marriageable age, however, the invitation of the Lot's visitors to bring to safety all who are in Lot's household remains an inclusive one—"Then the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place'" (Gen 19:12). While not specifically highlighted within the narrative, the children of Lot's household are definitively included in the mercy extended him. In appropriate juxtaposition, then, God's judgment on the inhabitants of Sodom, the men of whom—both "young and old," "small and great" (Gen 19:4, 11)—instigate the initial offense, are summarily consumed in destruction.<sup>326</sup> "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah

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<sup>325</sup> Although the translation of this term has been the cause of some controversy due to its connection with prophecies about Jesus' birth from a "virgin" have caused some translators to continue to render it thusly. Peggy Day argues "that a בתולה may have had sex since the explanatory qualifier 'did not know a man' accompanies the designation of בתולה in Gen 24:16 and Judg 21:12 (see also Gen 19:8; Judg 11:39). Day further posits that a בתולה has reached puberty but has yet to become a mother" (Peggy L. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], cited in Parker, 58.)<sup>325</sup> Cf. Parker, 58 for a discussion of the merits of translating the term as a young woman of marriageable age. A counter argument against a pre-pubescent age, however, could be made based upon the subsequent pregnancies of both daughters, although a precise timeline of their stay in the cave is not given (cf. Gen 19:30-38).

<sup>326</sup> It should be noted, however, that while there is more age ambiguity with regard to the daughters, and the overall meaning of the narrative indicates the total destruction of all the inhabitants, those who came to Lot's door may more likely have been assumed to have already

sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and *all the inhabitants* of the cities, and what grew on the ground” (Gen 19:24-25, emphasis added). As in Nineveh and in the days of Noah, the destruction of every living thing—including all that grew on the ground—make it plain that the non-adult children of these cities were not spared. Children—even the youngest and the smallest—in the days of Lot are portrayed as capable of committing sin, receiving God’s mercy, and suffering God’s wrath. In every aspect of the covenantal life, children are included. As with the former intertext in Jesus’ prophecy, so here children ought to be taken as part and parcel of the judgment Jesus pronounces.

Not surprisingly, the Lukan Jesus’ later warnings about eschatological judgment do not exclude children either. When Jesus weeps for Jerusalem in Luke 19:44, he laments that the city’s enemies “will crush you to the ground, you and your children [τέκνα] within you.” This sentiment reflects the tenor of total annihilation in the previous Scripture references, with the more general term for children here serving as inclusive of both adult and non-adult children (descendants) of Jerusalem. Jesus’ warning in Luke 21:35 that the Day of the Lord “will come upon *all who live* on the face of the whole earth” (emphasis added) likewise echoes the inclusivity of the intertextual judgment accounts already brought to mind. No one, not even young children, is excluded from God’s judgment on the earth.

The two judgment statements that Jesus addresses specifically to mothers further highlight the complete inclusivity of God’s judgment with regard to the young. Prior to his summation about the judgment of all those who live on the face of the earth, Jesus proclaims in the same teaching, “Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those

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reached puberty. The LXX renders 19:4: ἀπὸ νεανίσκοθ ἕως πρεσβυτέρου ἅπας, with νεανίσκος in Philo’s hierarchy of ages indicating a “young man” who has already reached puberty. This all makes narrative sense given the insinuations of gang rape that this scene implies.



days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk 21:23-24).

Likewise, in his last words of Jesus’ for the women of Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion, Luke brings the plight of non-adult children into surprisingly sharp sight (this given Luke’s shadowy depiction of their presence throughout the bulk of the rest of the gospel account). Luke narrates as Jesus was carrying his cross toward his execution,

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ (23:27-29)

Here, despite the use of the age ambiguous term τὰ τέκνα (“children” or “descendants”), the intended inclusion of infants and young children is clear given the imagery of barren wombs and empty breasts.

These verses have often been interpreted as proof-texts for early Christian asceticism. However, when read in the context of Jesus’ consistently inclusive judgment announcements, they reflect the broader inclusion of non-adult children in the complete experience of divine mercy—including prerequisite divine judgment from which to contrast. In this way, these texts stand out as yet another affirmation of a tradition within the Jewish Scriptures that supports the full inclusion of all of God’s children, whatever their age, in God’s eschatological future.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Note, such a tradition stands as one among many within the Hebrew Bible as a text that was written over hundreds of years and by many hands. Without the appropriate background or research into the theme of children in the Hebrew Bible as a whole, my intention here is not to make a sweeping generalization, but rather to note a theme that stands out within the specific texts quoted by Luke, as the Lukan author has presented them.

Ultimately, the canonical gospel accounts were almost certainly intended principally for adults, and thus composed with adults in mind.<sup>328</sup> Yet in spite of this, the crowds who thronged around Jesus were just as certainly populated by a large number of children. Consequently, it would be naïve to assume that Jesus' ministry did not impact these children as well.<sup>329</sup> Children lived in the households from which Jesus and his apostles centered their ministry. They attended the synagogues and traveled to the Temple where they heard Jesus proclaim the advent of God's Kingdom. Children, even when not explicitly named, were among those healed, forgiven, taught, and critiqued by Jesus as he moved from town to town and throughout the countryside. When we allow children to emerge from the shadows in which Luke and the other synoptic writers, along with their readers and interpreters, have banished them for centuries, we begin to see a vital and complex picture of the young people with whom Jesus' associated throughout his life.

### Conclusion

The inclusion and welcome of children in Jesus' circles and among those to whom he ministered is concomitantly unremarkable and monumental. Despite attempts by some Christians to highlight Jesus' welcome of children (particularly in Lk 18:15-17 and its synoptic parallels) as a distinctly Christian act of inclusion, the welcome of children in Jesus' circles is unremarkable in the sense that written and archaeological evidence point rather to a general acceptance of and celebration of children in the first-century institutions of family and society.

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<sup>328</sup> Cf. Reidar Aasgaard for a compelling argument on the intended audience of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* as being young children.

<sup>329</sup> Indeed, Murphy affirms this point, noting the potential negative impacts given the "precarious presence of children" in his book by the same name, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels*. While I concur that Murphy is right to highlight the obvious impact of Jesus' whole ministry (not just the two blessing scenes) on children, for reasons elaborated elsewhere (see Ch.3), I challenge his conclusion that this impact would have been any more negative for children effected by Jesus' ministry than for adults.

Nevertheless, recognition of this acceptance among Jesus' first followers and within later Christian circles remains monumental given the virtual invisibility of children in both the gospel accounts and cultural memory of the first-century Greco-Roman world at large. It is this invisibility, particularly in the canonical texts, which I would posit has limited the full inclusion and participation of young children in certain contemporary Christian religious activity.

Such invisibility, however, is the result not of a cultural distaste or even ambivalence toward children, either by the first-century Greco-Roman world or Jesus' followers. Rather, this invisibility is the symptom of a cultural valuing of the adult experience as primary, resulting in a general passing over of children as independent subjects in narrative treatments.<sup>330</sup> In other words, children were an interwoven part of the fabric and life of society in the first-century Greco-Roman world—pagan, Jewish, and Christian—however, due to the social practices of the time, authors rarely thought to mention them.

In the first-century Mediterranean world in which Luke's text was composed, the presence of children was assumed and generally ignored. As time passed, children's presence in the gospel narratives consequently proceeded from the marginalized shadows in which they already dwelt into the silence and invisibility to which they are subject in many Christian reading communities today. Through the preceding investigation into the background of children in these cultures and Luke's gospel account—both specifically named and voicelessly inferred—my aim has been to (re)claim a voice and vision for children both in Luke's narrative and those who continue to be impacted by it today. In the following chapters, the place of children will be subsequently (re)claimed through attention to the constructions of childhood and voices of children hidden in the narrative on account of adult dominance and time

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<sup>330</sup> This conclusion relies upon the past 25 years of childhood studies in opposition to Philippe Ariès' thesis that childhood was invented during the Renaissance (Cf. Ch 1).

## CHAPTER 3

### YOUNG CHILDREN IN JESUS' MINISTRY

*“Jesus’ welcome to the children does not surprise the audience, since children have been presented as recipients of divine presence, protection and mercy.”*  
- Warren Carter<sup>331</sup>

#### Introduction

That young children were present among those with and to whom Jesus ministered in first-century Palestine has been demonstrated above with regard to the near continual inferences of their presence alongside oft-cited specific texts (Lk 9:47-50; 18:15-17). The full welcome and inclusion of such children by Jesus, however, is perhaps more unmistakably seen in those moments in which Luke recounts the specific healing or reconciliation of a child.<sup>332</sup>

Thus, Warren Carter contends that by the time Matthew (and so too with Luke) reaches the account of Jesus welcoming children, the audience already expects an inclusive and welcoming response from Jesus. Through Jesus’ provision of healing and description of acceptance, Luke models the inclusion and welcome of children at several key points throughout Jesus’ ministry, leading up to the ultimate statement of the place of children in the Kingdom made in Luke 18:15-17 and discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5.

This chapter seeks to lay the groundwork for such inclusion by exploring each of the scenes in which Jesus extends the restorative power of the Kingdom, either through healing or reconciliation, to specific children who cross his path. In such, we will turn to Jesus’ healing of a

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<sup>331</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 97.

<sup>332</sup> In what follows I specifically avoid the typical labels given to these characters (Widow’s son, Jairus’ daughter, son, and prodigal son respectively) as resistance to the adult-centric narrative in which their stories are preserved. By naming these children on their own terms, even when proper names are not given, I seek to emphasize the personhood of the children in these accounts as specific characters and not merely in relation to the adult characters given primacy of place in Luke’s narrative.

young slave (7:1-10), raising of a youth at Nain (7:11-17), raising a girl in Galilee (8:40-56), expulsion of a demon from a boy (9:37-45), and parabolic use of two brothers to describe God's forgiveness (15:11-32) in turn.<sup>333</sup>

A contemporary audience may be surprised to note the presence of several of these texts in relation to Jesus' ministry to children. Here Horn and Martens' insightful assessment of difficulties that modern translations present in retrieving child narratives from the ancient texts is key. They note that there exists within biblical scholarship a "methodological problem that in translations of ancient texts children may at times be concealed by inattentive renditions of a given phrase or expression into the target language."<sup>334</sup> Consequently the exact age of the children in some of these texts is unclear, again, owing to the cultural invisibility of children established above, and may in some cases even be obscured or misrepresented by overly definitive translations. Nevertheless, taken together, these children's general experience of

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<sup>333</sup> It should be noted that this list differs from a similar list that Horn and Martens provide of the frequent portray of Jesus as having healed children in the synoptic tradition more broadly. In their list they focus solely on healings as opposed to the above broader definition of the receipt of God's grace (thus excluding parabolic representations, such as the latter listed here). They further focus on those healing accounts that occur in Mark's gospel account, listing: "the paralytic child (2:1-10; Mt 9:1-8; Lk 5:17-26; cf. Jn 5:1-9); Jairus' daughter (5:21-43; Mt 9:18-26; Lk 8:40-56); the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (7:24-30; Mt 15:21-28); and the epileptic child (9:14-29; Mt 17:14-21; Lk 9:37-43)" (92). This Markan focus omits the possibility of the youth at Nain, recorded only in Luke, and adds the account of the Syro-Phoenician's daughter, not present in Luke's account. The accounts of Jairus' daughter and the epileptic (demon possessed) boy recur in both lists. This leaves the question of the individual whom Horn and Martens call "the paralytic child." I agree with their general premise that there exists, within biblical scholarship, a problem with translation (cf. fn 108 below). In fact, I rely on the truth of this statement in what follows with regard to my analysis of both the youth at Nain and the wealthy heir. However, with regard to Lk 5:17-26, my focus on a literary reading of Luke's gospel account necessitates the exclusion of the healing of the paralytic as a possible child narrative due to Luke's unique use of the term *ἀνθρώπος* in both his description of the paralyzed person and Jesus' address to him (5:18, 20). Cf. also *Households and Discipleship*, 98 for a similar list from the Matthean account in which Jesus "shows concern and mercy in healing children (9.2; 17.14-20; cf. 8.6, 8, 13) and in supplying them with food (14.21; 15.38)."

<sup>334</sup> Horn & Martens, 93.

healing and acceptance at the hand of Jesus comes through as a testimony to the inclusion of young and adolescent children—those who are not yet adults—in Luke’s description of Jesus’ earthly ministry of restoration.

### **Jesus Heals a Young Slave (7:1-10)**

#### *The Slave as Child*

As aforementioned,<sup>335</sup> the word *παῖς* is used with reference to both a child, especially a young child, and a slave in ancient literature. Context, largely, is what determines the difference. In the case of Luke 7:7, *παῖς* has been consistently rendered in English translations as either “servant” or “slave” on account of the narrator’s previous description of the ill person as the centurion’s “slave” (*δοῦλος*) in 7:2 and again in 7:10. As a result, at the literary level, the status of the person in question within the centurion’s household is unquestionably as a slave.<sup>336</sup> However, as we have already seen through attention to the copious presence of children in the public sphere, one does not necessarily exclude the other.

In the first-century world, many children were subject to slavery, either as a result of having been found as infants after their parents exposed them at birth, being sold due to family

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<sup>335</sup> Cf. Chapter 1, “Introduction.”

<sup>336</sup> Note that at the level of tradition, Horn and Martens call this into question, suggesting in light of similarities between Lk 7:1-10 and its Matthean parallel (Matt 8:5-13) with the healing of a royal official’s child in John 4:46-54 that “Perhaps the slave was a child, and that detail was lost in the synoptic authors, except for the use of *pais* (Mt 8:6, 8; Lk 7:7)” (264). While such a conclusion could simply refer to the age of the slave, if one accepts a connection between the three accounts, it may also reflect a possibility that in a separate tradition (from which John draws), the ill person was understood not as a slave at all, but rather as the child of the official. So also Fitzmyer understands *παῖς* as “servant boy” in light of a form critical tradition in which he relates this scene to both John’s account and, following Bultmann, as a possible variant of the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman’s child (Mark 7:24-31; Matt 15:21-28) absent in Luke (Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 648).

debt, or being born into this station in their master's house.<sup>337</sup> As such, the ill person's status as a slave does not exclude the possibility that this slave is also a child. Rather, the question, from a childist perspective, is whether there is anything in the text to indicate that this slave could or should be read as a child, and thus an example of Jesus' healing ministry (and the centurion's empathetic concern) being extended beyond adults.

To answer this, it is helpful to consider the use of the term *παῖς* across the Lukan corpus. In the gospel itself, the term is only used in reference to servants twice—first here and later in Luke 15:26, in plural, with reference to a group of slaves preparing the festivities at the return of the lost brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. In either case there is little direct indication of the age of the slave(s). The closest indication comes in the parable, in which the *παῖδων* are described as being near the house—a position generally reserved for child and female slaves, while older men worked in the fields. That such a position also likely applied to the centurion's slave when he was well may be inferred by his close relationship with his master, indicated by the narrator's description of the slave as “a slave whom he [the centurion] highly valued” (*ἔντιμος*, Lk 7:2).

This word, used in the New Testament only by Luke, carries the connotation of value in terms of honor and preciousness (cf. Lk 14:8).<sup>338</sup> It refers not so much to the slave's monetary value as to the slave's prized position in the household of the centurion. Since it is unlikely, given his occupation and status, that the centurion himself would have engaged in the more manual outdoor work assigned to grown men, the slave's position of value may indicate that he worked more closely within the house itself—positions generally held, among males, by children.

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<sup>337</sup> Cf. Sigismund-Nielsen, 287-293.

<sup>338</sup> This is further emphasized with the textual variant *τίμος* in MS D.

This favored status and the centurion's extraordinary efforts in seeking help for his ailing slave suggest that this individual was more than just a servant in the centurion's household, but likely qualified as a quasi-family member about whom the centurion cared on more than a solely pragmatic level. After all, the expense itself of maintaining a slave who is described as "close to death" would necessitate some level of concern beyond just how useful the slave is to the centurion.

Nor was this type of relationship uncommon in the Roman world. Slaves who were born into the household were called *vernae*, and there is evidence that they may have been treated better than a typical slave. In particular, Sigismund-Nielsen observes, "Young *vernae* are frequently commemorated affectionately as 'dear small children.'" <sup>339</sup> If the centurion's slave held such a position in his household, his affection and value for the slave begins to make sense in the larger context, including the efforts that he would go through in order to secure Jesus' healing on account of this young slave.

Moreover, the high value that the centurion holds for this slave, causing him even to reduce his honor in order to seek healing from Jesus, a Jewish Galilean, suggests that this was a child of particular value to the centurion, perhaps even in the Roman category of a *delicia*. Sigismund-Nielsen explains, "The word *delicium* can be used as a term of relationship about a young child, frequently of slave status...a relationship of quasi-familial character." <sup>340</sup> Thus, the centurion's affection for this slave may indicate the slave's role in the household and even

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<sup>339</sup> Sigismund-Nielsen, 294.

<sup>340</sup> Sigismund-Nielsen, 298. While this term has been connected by some historians with relationships of a sexual nature, recent scholarship has begun to call such a direct relationship between the known use of child slaves as sexual playthings and the relationship indicated by the term *delicia* into question (cf. Sigismund-Nielsen, 298; Christian Laes, "Desperately Different? *Delicia* Children in the Roman Household," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmann's, 2003) 298-326, esp. 320.



special status in the eyes of the master, all more common among Roman slave children than adults.

The legitimacy of such a reading of the centurion's slave as a child is further confirmed when one moves from a survey of the term *παῖς* in Luke's gospel to a more inclusive study of the use of the two related terms *παῖς* and *δούλος* in Luke's use across the gospel and Acts.

Luke uses the more general term, *δούλος*, extensively throughout both works, especially in the gospel.<sup>341</sup> Notably, in this unit itself, only the narrator himself uses the term in reference to the ill person. While the centurion uses the term *δούλος* in his message to Jesus (Lk 7:8), he does so not with reference to the *παῖς* in question, but rather, as a more general illustration of the command which he carries over all of his slaves. This then accords with the suggestion that *παῖς* means something more than just "slave" in Luke's account. Indeed, most interpreters concur with this, suggesting that the term, in relation to the statement about the slave's special status in 7:2 reflects a close and trusted relationship between the centurion and the slave.<sup>342</sup>

However, when one examines Luke's more fastidious use of this term, especially in Acts, that this special relationship reflects a familial status (as implicated by the connections with a Roman *vernae or delicia*) becomes clear. When the Lukan author employs the term *παῖς* in Acts with connection with servitude, as he does here and in 15:26, it is always as a double reference to an individual's special status before God as both slave *and child*. This is true especially in relation to Jesus in Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30 but also of David in Acts 4:25. Although in these

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<sup>341</sup> Cf. Lk 2:29; 7:2-3, 8, 10; 12:37, 43, 45-47; 14:17, 21-23; 15:22; 17:7, 9-10; 19:13, 15, 17, 22; 20:10-11; 22:50; Acts 2:18; 4:29; 16:17.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 261: "According to the legal concept of slavery in antiquity, this [value] could be understood financially. Luke intends to describe, however, a threatened interpersonal relationship (cf. the friends in v. 6). The office loves not only the alien people of Israel but also his neighbor (10:25-37). His high estimation of his servant shows that he considers him not only in his function but also as a person."

instances, for theological purposes, the author plays more on the meaning of child as a descendant rather than a youth, the understanding of the term as carrying a primary meaning in relation to childhood is clear.

Thus, while there is no definitive way to judge whether the centurion's slave was a loved adult or child, socio-cultural and textual indications point towards the reading of this slave as a young child, perhaps even *delicia*, as plausible and legitimate. Indeed, in light of a childist perspective that seeks to bring to light instances where children may have faded into the adultist background of writing and interpretation, this becomes a prime account for retrieving a vulnerable slave child from the background and observing Jesus' care in including this child in his ministry of healing and well-being.<sup>343</sup>

### *Experience of Inclusion*

While the narrative places the emphasis of the healing on the centurion's faith (Lk 7:9), the attention directed at the young slave, both by the centurion and by Jesus should not be overlooked. The value that this child holds in the eyes of the centurion has already been discussed at length above. The fact that Jesus never directly encounters this child slave comes about at the bequest of the centurion rather than Jesus. This does not indicate that this child is of any less value to the centurion, but rather, shows his deference to Jesus as a person of authority.

Based on rabbinic law, Tannehill suggests that it is likely that the centurion may have been concerned about the presumption of inviting "a Jewish holy man to defile himself by

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<sup>343</sup> The presence of a child in this narrative may also be supported, though loosely, by the intertextual connection to Elisha's healing of Naaman, which occurs at the intercession of a young Jewish girl (cf. Johnson 120; Tannehill, 123-124) for the parallels between the two accounts.

entering the dwelling of a Gentile.”<sup>344</sup> Notably, then, despite any purity concerns that may have existed, Jesus responds to the messengers and sets off towards the centurion’s house *for the sake of the child* immediately (v. 6). Only after Jesus comes near to the house does the centurion send word for him not to enter, and Jesus affirms the centurion’s faith. Therefore, one should not read Jesus’ initial act of compassion toward the slave child as having anything to do with the centurion’s faith, which has not yet been established, but rather as a locus of action directed toward an ailing child.

Just as the centurion, through his faith, receives Jesus’ affirmation, this child in illness is also included in Jesus’ affirming and, indeed, healing actions. Tannehill concludes, “Gentiles in the Lukan audience would rightly understand this scene to be an invitation to share in the community of Jesus and the reign of God.”<sup>345</sup> To this, it seems appropriate to add that children—even slave children of Gentiles—would also rightly understand this scene to be not just an invitation, but in fact, an act of inclusion, embracing them through Jesus’ attentiveness in the healing power of the Kingdom of God.

### **Jesus Raises a Youth at Nain (7:11-17)**

#### *The Youth as Child*

Of the specific instances of Jesus healing children in Luke’s gospel account, this is the most tenuous one.<sup>346</sup> Given the tendency of several English translations to render the perfect participle τεθνηκώς (v. 12, 15) as “dead man” (NKJV, NASB) or “man who had died” (NRSV,

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<sup>344</sup> Tannehill, 125:

<sup>345</sup> Tannehill, 126.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. Carroll, 177 for precedence on including this story among Luke’s child healing accounts. “Typically, in Lukan healing stories, the children Jesus aids are their parents’ *only* children (this is also the case for the only son of the widow at Nain in 7:11-17, although the age of the dead son is unknown” (Carroll, 180-181).

ESV) rather than the more literal “one who has died,” it may seem puzzling that this unit is even included in a discussion of children. Moreover, even when one accepts the ambiguity of this first designation, the second and only textual indication of the dead son’s age, which occurs by way of Jesus’ address to him, continues to point to this son’s identity as an adult in English translation. In 7:14, Jesus’ addresses the individual lying on the funeral bier with the imperative, *νεανίσκε σοὶ λέγω, ἐγερθητι* (“Young man, I say to you, get up!”).

However, such translations are less an indication of a known age of this youth and more another example of the methodological problem named earlier with regards to translating the ancient text in a way that can, at times, conceal the presence of children (or the possibility thereof).<sup>347</sup> While the rendering “young man” is technically accurate and appears in nearly every English translation, it can be misleading if taken as the sole indication of the dead person’s maturity.

The end of childhood, particularly in relation to the male gender, held in antiquity, is, as it continues to be for many people today, a nebulous definition. To begin with, there was no one Greek word the equivalent of which could be rendered “[non-adult] child.” As discussed above, the closest the Greek language comes are the terms *παῖς* and *παιδίον*. However, even these terms both fail to be inclusive of the whole range of childhood—focusing, instead, on the youngest age groups—and can, in certain contexts, be used either metaphorically or to indicate servile status instead. In practice, the ancient world utilized a whole range of vocabulary to designate the various stages in child development, much as we do today (e.g., “infant”, “toddler”, “preschooler”, “young child”, “adolescent”, “teenager”, etc.). Moreover, while for the purposes of certain legal and medical classifications, various taxonomies were proposed, in common usage

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<sup>347</sup> Cf. Horn and Martens, 93.

these words for childhood remain ambiguous and overlapping. This is particularly the case when it comes to defining the last stage of childhood and, correspondingly, the first stage of adulthood—the point on ancient taxonomies where the designation νεανίσκος falls.

In technical terms, the designation νεανίσκος, although it varies across sources, generally indicates a youth who is between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one.<sup>348</sup> In Luke's corpus, the term recurs again in Acts 2:17 together with πρεσβύτεροι with reference to Joel's prophecy that the LORD "will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 3:1, Eng 2:28). As noted above, in the broader context of God's judgment and salvation, indicated by the pouring out of God's spirit on *all flesh*, νεανίσκος here can, and for the sake of a childist reading, should be read in a more inclusive sense as a youthful contrast to old age, rather than as a delimited timespan.

In similar fashion, the remaining three references in Acts assume individuals with some freedom and capacity to act for themselves, while at the same time, emphasizing their youthfulness. In Acts 5:10 οἱ νεώτεροι discover and bury the body of Sapphira—an action that requires strength of body and speed. While in Acts 23:17 Paul refers to his nephew as a νεανίας, and later the tribune refers to the youth as a νεανίσκος (v. 22) after the boy overhears and informs them of a conspiracy against Paul. Here it is possible that the boy's youthfulness exclude him from further deliberation and inclusion in the covert actions of the tribunal. In any case, in each instance, no specific age range for the νεανίσκοι is assumed, although it is clear the term does not denote a very young child.

To begin to understand this ambiguity, one need only begin by considering the common

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<sup>348</sup> Cf. Dean-Jones: "According to *Fleashes* 13, a child becomes a *neaniskos* between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one" (110).

usage of the term “Young man” in English today. This phrase can be used, certainly, to designate a male’s newly acquired “adult” status, but it is perhaps just as frequently used to refer to a male, particularly a young male child, at any number of points of development. Consider, for example, a mother’s reproach to her juvenile son, “Young man, you stop that this instant!” So, too, in Greek, the term νεανίσκος and its root νεανίας can be translated as “young man,” but also frequently carry with them “a sense of a *youth* in character, i.e. either in a good sense, *impetuous, active*, or in a bad sense, *hot-headed, willful, headstrong*.”<sup>349</sup>

Given Jesus’ call for this youth to return from the dead, a return to the active and lively existence to which his subject previously belonged seems obvious. Given the lack of attention to childhood as a developmental stage throughout the rest of the narrative, that either the character of Jesus or the Lukan author has any intention in this address of defining the son out of such a stage seems unlikely at best. Instead, Luke’s Jesus, recognizing the youth of the boy on the funeral bier, addresses him as such with a conveyance of force and authority as he returns this child to the previous vitality he had lost in death.

This attention to the vitality of the newly resuscitated son is paralleled in the resuscitation accounts of the Elijah-Elisha cycles (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37), of which the Lukan author and his audience would have been familiar. While there is difference of opinion among interpreters regarding the degree to which Luke 7:11-17 parallels one or both of these previous accounts, there is a general assent that some similarity exists. Robert Tannehill thus observes with reference to 1 Kings 17:17-24 that while “the Lukan scene is not simply a copy of the scriptural story...there are sufficient similarities to jog the memories of persons well-versed in

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<sup>349</sup> LSJ, 1163.

scripture.”<sup>350</sup> In each of these accounts, a boy in the mid to latter stages of childhood—capable, when living, of acting for himself, and yet still residing in his family home and dependent upon his mother’s care—can be inferred.

In the LXX in each case the boy is referred to as both a υἱός (“son,” as in Lk 7:12) and παιδάριον (diminutive of παῖς meaning “child” or “youth”).<sup>351</sup> As with νεανίσκος, these terms cover a large time span, although παιδάριον has been traditionally associated more frequently with children who have not yet reached full maturity, e.g. adulthood. Indeed, this is the same word for children (παιδίους) that Luke uses later in chapter 7 to refer to children playing in the market (7:31-32). These children are clearly not yet fully grown, or they would not have the leisure to play at music and dance. However, in the Septuagint itself, the term generally takes on a bit older age range—referring most frequently to older teenagers, such as Joseph at 17 years old (Gen 37:30) and Benjamin at age 19 (Tobit 6:3).

Without anachronistically imposing an upper (or lower) limit to the first-century experience of childhood based on contemporary sensibilities about which stage of life (adolescence or ‘young adulthood’) one becomes an ‘adult’, it is perhaps most useful to think in

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<sup>350</sup> Tannehill, 127.

<sup>351</sup> While the original Hebrew maintains a bit more variance in terminology, the general sense remains the same—the boys are certainly not infants, given their ability to carry themselves; however, neither are they full grown. Cf. Parker, 144-155 for a detailed discussion on the Shunammite’s son of 2 Kings 4, with the conclusion that “the boy appears relatively young since a servant lifts and brings him to his mother (v. 20) and she carries him out of the prophet’s chamber at the end of the story (v. 37)” (Parker, 145). Cf. also Parker 61-64 for in depth word study on the Hebrew words נער and ילד for “boy” and “child” used in these narratives in 1 and 2 Kings. She notes, “As with נער, the ages of characters described as ילד vary significantly. A ילד can be as young as a fetus (Exod 21:22), but more often suggests a newborn child (e.g., Gen 21:8; Exod 2:3-10; 2 Sam 12:15; 1 Kgs 3:25; Isa 9:5 [Eng 9:6]; Ruth 4:16). Young boys and girls appear designated by ילד and ילדה in Joel 4:3 (Eng 3:3) and Zech 8:5. Noticeably older are the accomplished young men...brought from Israel to Babylon (Dan 1:4). After the seventeen-year-old Joseph (Gen 37:2) has been sold into slavery, Reuben describes him as a ילד (Gen 37:30), and uses the same term later when referring to this incident (Gen 42:22)” (Parker, 64).

terms of the social status conferred at each age. While it is clear that with each progression along the life cycle a child is awarded greater status, it is not until he or she passes youth, or young adulthood, the period designated by νεανίσκος, that male was considered in his or her ‘prime.’<sup>352</sup> To this end, even taxonomies such as that of Diogenes Laertius, which classify a νεανίσκος on the latter end of the age range—as late as 40 years old, maintain that this stage is distinct from that of [adult] maturity: “One remains a child (παῖς) for twenty years, then a youth (νεηνίσκος) for twenty more years, a mature person (νεηνίης) for another twenty years, and an older person (γέρων) for a final twenty years (8.10).”<sup>353</sup> Likewise, the Hippocratics, in setting a more typical post-puberty age range, count both a child (παῖς) and “young adult (*parthenoi, neaniskoi, meirakia*)” as “distinct from ‘those in their prime’ (*akmazontes*, a term designating individuals from about twenty-five to forty-five; e.g. *Prorrhetic* II.9).”<sup>354</sup>

It is, perhaps, most fitting to describe the νεανίσκος as inhabiting a liminal stage between early childhood and adulthood. For this reason, the contemporary terminology of ‘youth,’ with its precedence in earlier interpretations of ancient texts, seems most appropriate for this passage.

In the aforementioned cases of Joseph and Benjamin, even as older teenagers in the biblical accounts, continue to reside in their family homes. They maintain a sense of dependence, even as they continue to move further into independence, with regard to their parents and kin. Likewise, the youth in Luke 7:11-17 continues to reside in his mother’s home. This is indicated both by the lack of mention of any other family (wife or children), and thus the fullness of the

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<sup>352</sup> Note the distinction here between male and female life stages. Because the full legal status of a voting citizen was rarely if ever conferred upon females in this time period, no direct comparison exists. Instead, girls moved from one dependent relationship (to their father) into another (with their husband), usually at the time of puberty—between 11 and 14 years old.

<sup>353</sup> Diogene Laertius, cited in Marvin W. Meyer, “The Youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*,” in *Semeia* (Jan 1990) 139.

<sup>354</sup> Dean-Jones, 110.



tragedy for his widowed mother, as well as by the action of Jesus giving him, once resuscitated, back into his mother's care (v. 15). Indeed, while it is evident that the widowed mother is dependent upon her son for the hope that he brings to her future, that hope is not yet fully realized.

For this reason, Dixon describes the death of such a youth as reflecting the greatest tragedy in the ancient Roman world from a social perspective: "The typical focus of tragic or untimely death is the young adult—apparently about 16-30—with a socially recognized role, who had survived long enough for parents to form expectations that the child would outlive them."<sup>355</sup> In a society where infant mortality rate was high, that a child died young was a cause for mourning. In a world where disease and danger were a constant, that a child predeceased his or her parents at any age was likewise to be lamented. However, the greatest tragedy, in perhaps both emotional and economic terms was the death of a child who survived the most vulnerable years, only to die before reaching his or her prime.

In such a liminal state, it can be assumed that the relationship of dependence between mother and son in this narrative is indeed a mutual one. For as much as the mother needed her son, for the time being, at least, the son, handed back into the arms of his mother, remains also dependent upon her. This liminal in-betweenness of youth in the Greco-Roman world is further illustrated by both social and legal precedent.

Socially, males tended to enter into a first-marriage later than their female counterparts due to family and military obligations.<sup>356</sup> Thus, most boys experienced a liminal period transitioning into adulthood. The νεανίσκος, in this transitional stage continues to receive greater recognition in society—as, indeed, he has at each stage of his childhood up to this point—while

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<sup>355</sup> Dixon, 100.

<sup>356</sup> Dixon, 101-102; Cf. Chapter 1.

at the same time retaining certain freedoms as well as protections not available to adults, such as the expectation of a curator to oversee his legal transactions.<sup>357</sup>

Within this context, it is significant that after the age of twelve, Luke tells us that the boy Jesus returned home to Nazareth with his parents “and was obedient to them” (2:51), where he “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (2:52). After this report, it is not until Jesus is roughly thirty-years-old—past the upper limits of a νεανίσκος that Luke resumes narration, with a fully mature Jesus encountering John and beginning his adult ministry.

The final objection, then, that could be made to the youthful character of this young man at Nain has to do with the funerary procession itself. The question could be raised, would a funeral procession, such as the one described in v. 11, have been conducted for a youth not yet in his prime? Dixon’s reflections above regarding the degree of tragedy experienced at the death of a child, particularly a male child, in this age-range may begin to give indication of the answer itself. While it is true that very small children, particularly infants in the first weeks and months after birth, were not always mourned or buried with the same pomp, by the time a youth reached the age of ten-years-old, their allotted mourning period was the same as that of an adult. Plutarch describes different mourning practices for children between the ages of birth through three years, with the length of mourning increasing proportionate to the age of the child.<sup>358</sup> By the teenage years and into their twenties, the mourning of children was both officially recognized and comparable to the mourning of the loss of any member of the family. However, even before the age of ten, children were buried and commemorated in Roman funerary art, as noted earlier.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Dixon, 106-107.

<sup>358</sup> Plutarch, *Numa* 12.2 Cf. *Fragmenta Vaticana* 321 for the legal use in this context of the Latin verb *sublurgere* (to half-mourn), cited in Parkin, “Demographics,” 48.

<sup>359</sup> Larsson Lovén, 304-309; Cf. also Chapter 2 on the inclusion of children.

There remains no formal record of the exact age or manner in which children (or, for that matter, adults) were included in funerary processions. However, Dixon notes that extant evidence suggests, “This ceremonial, like the grouping of family remains in tombs or of the names on memorial tablets, marks the family as a unit and reminds all kin that kinship is an affiliation that cuts across other social groupings and transcends divisions between the generations and even between the living and the dead.”<sup>360</sup> While the exact social and religious details might vary, in general, just as they were celebrated in life and included in family gatherings in between, so too, children were commemorated in death.

In short, the youth resuscitated in Luke 7:11-17 is not an adult. As a νεανίσκος he does not possess the same rights or responsibilities as an older man. His social status is not the same. He continues to reside in his mother’s home; he is dependent upon her. Indeed, this is the parallel that Luke draws between the two clearly dependent children in the Elijah and Elisha narratives. Nevertheless, traditional scholarship and Bible translators, reading as they do through an adultist lens, when they give any mention to age at all, anachronistically read this “young man” to be in his prime of life.

Despite any remaining ambiguity, therefore, my decision to interpret this νεανίσκος as a youth—a non-adult child—and thus include him among those children whom Luke explicitly names as recipients of Jesus’ healing ministry is a decision of resistance. It is a conscious move to bring discussion of children, across the age spectrum, into the center of the text. This move of conscientization, however, is not done blindly, but rather, with the support of both fluid descriptions of age and adulthood, socio-historical support, intertextual parallels, and a plausible

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<sup>360</sup> Dixon, 135-136; Cf. also McWilliam, 282: “They [children] would have been affected by the deaths of adults and other children, attended their funerals, and visited their burial sites in graveyards housing remains of the dead.”<sup>360</sup>

and legitimate reading of the text.

### *Experience of Inclusion*

Having established the social position of the youth at Nain vis-à-vis his age, the next point of inquiry becomes the extent to which Jesus' resuscitation represents a point of inclusion for youth and children in Jesus' ministry. The mother seems to be the focus of Jesus' attention in Luke's account (e.g. "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her..." v. 13; "Jesus gave him back to his mother." v. 15). So Robert Price concludes, the "healing is done not for the son, but for the widow."<sup>361</sup> This is not a surprising conclusion given the adult centric cast of Luke's gospel and its interpreters. Moreover, such a reading has a place when considering, as Price does, Jesus' compassionate treatment and inclusion of widows in God's Kingdom. Indeed, the healing *is* done for the widow; however, this is only one side of the story.

The fact that interpretations tend to focus on the experience of the mother with little regard for the son further emphasizes the qualification of this story for consideration among Luke's narratives of child healings. If the youth had been a fully-grown man or an important citizen, one would suspect, as is the case with the attention given to both the healed servant *and* his centurion master in the scene previous, that the fate and experience of the son might be given at least passing notice.

Instead, Luke focuses hardly any attention at all on the youth, except to note that he "sat up and began to speak" (v. 15), which serve as proof of the efficacy of the miracle more than anything else. Just as his widowed mother was counted among the outcast and the marginalized, so this not yet grown youth is himself marginalized by Luke's account. Behind Luke's adult-

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<sup>361</sup> Robert M. Price, *The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist Critical Scrutiny* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1997) 85.

centered cloak, Jesus' concern for and inclusion of the youth *as a youth* can be seen in the attention that Jesus gives to him in the scene, the youth's own agential action, and the response and actions of those who witness the miracle.

To begin with, despite the indisputable fact of the grieving mother as the first object of Jesus' compassion, attention is still given to the youth himself. Short of a direct statement to the contrary, there is no reason to assume that Jesus' compassion must be limited to one person. Indeed, in John's account of the resuscitation of Lazarus, Jesus' compassion seems equally placed between the grieving sisters and his dead friend, Lazarus (John 11:1-144). Likewise, while Jesus' sight first falls on the mother, were his concern only for her, there are any number of other ways that the problem of her economic loss may have been resolved without the resuscitation of her son.

Indeed, this would be in keeping with the relativization of traditional gender and family roles that the Jesus of Luke's gospel seems to promote. Turid Karlsen Seim elaborates, "Gender determined family relationships in Luke are neither maintained nor promoted, but are dismissed as irrelevant, being redefined as categories of discipleship, as a new criterion for membership of the fictive family is established."<sup>362</sup> Thus, a move to redefine this widowed mother by her youthful son's ability to provide would run counter to the pattern in Luke of supporting the independence and even ascetic life of widows who so choose this path. Alternately, Jesus might have called the dead youth's mother to join with him, where she would later be cared for in the

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<sup>362</sup> Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 186. Cf. also Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 185: "Marriage and childbirth, which was normally women's primary possibility in life and their legitimation, is dismissed as irrelevant in the community of Jesus as Luke describes it. As concrete expressions of this, we have met independent women among Jesus' followers who appear by virtue of their own story and identity. Women have charge over their own houses and their own resources, while household duties cannot be used to draw them away from devotion to the word of the Lord."

fellowship of believers (Acts 2:44-45) and by the community's provision for widows (cf. Lk 20:46-47; Acts 6:1-6). He might have called down the Spirit to her that she conceive another son, helped to arrange a new marriage for her, placed her into the care of a prominent member of the community, or any number of other options some of which may have guaranteed more immediate return.

Instead, Jesus returns her youthful son—a boy not yet married, not yet the head of his own home, and not yet financially independent in his own right. In other words, his actions, while magnanimous, do not entirely solve the widow's problems. She has, once again, a hope for the future; and, of course, the precious life of her son. However, both mother and son's futures remain far from secure.

In light of this, there must be something more going on in Jesus' actions than mere concern for the economic future of a widowed mother who has lost her only son. While noting the economic repercussions of the youth's death for the widow, Bovon provides a more balanced view of the subject of Jesus' miracle, noting on the basis of Jesus' direct address to both mother (v. 13) and son (v. 14) that his "attention is turned to both mother *and* son."<sup>363</sup> Just as both of their futures remain insecure, both mother and son have something to gain in Jesus' action.

When Jesus resuscitates the youth, he "gave him" (ἔδωκεν αὐτόν) to his mother. While this verb can imply the simple act of bestowal, in connection with a mother-son relationship, it can more fully be translated as the action of putting something, or someone, in the care of another—to *entrust*. This is true in Luke, particularly with regard to Jesus' teachings about stewardship—e.g. a nobleman entrusting his money to his stewards while he is away (Lk 19:13-15; cf. also 12:48). The son is not the mother's rightful possession, which Jesus *returns*; rather,

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<sup>363</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 267.

this youth, restored to life, is a precious child of God the care of whom Jesus *entrusts* the mother with.

The relationship is two-sided. While acknowledging the unhappy reality that many parents in Roman antiquity, like the widow in Luke 7:11-17, found themselves prematurely burying their children, Dixon explains the prevailing cultural hopes and expectations of the day:

*Pietas* laid down certain claims within the family which ideally governed relations between the generations: ‘It was natural that parents should beget, rear, and educate children, and it was natural that children in return should honour and obey parents, give them material and psychological support, including grandchildren, comfort in old age, and burial.’<sup>364</sup>

Families, even one as small as just these two individuals, were interdependent of one another.

The son is expected to care for the mother, just as the mother is expected to care for him.

In this story lies much more than the typical return to fortune that traditional interpretations would point us to. A childist interpretation allows us to see the much deeper, restorative power of relationship in Jesus’ recognition of *both* mother *and* son. Only when the parent-child dyad is reunited together is the healing of either complete. The healing that Jesus performs is thus for both parties—an experience of the radical inclusion both of widows and youth in the healing, indeed life-giving reality of the Kingdom of God.

The inclusive power of Jesus’ healing action can further be seen in the active response of the youth himself. Although Luke does not report what the youth says, anymore than he sees it important to record the name of either mother or son, he does report that the youth speaks. It is left to the reader to fill in this gap in the Lukan narrative. Does the youth, in following with the manner by which it is proven that a person has been raised from the dead, ask for something to eat? (cf. Lk 8:55; 24:40-41) Does he express confusion? Or his thanks to Jesus? Or does he, in

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<sup>364</sup> Dixon, 157-158.

fact, instigate Jesus' next action, by *asking* for his mother?

Imagining the first response of a scared or injured child—even a teenager—in our culture, often calling out for a parent or loved one who brings security and peace, I conjecture that it is the latter. Indeed, if this is the content of the boy's speech, then it transforms our reading of what may otherwise seem an abrupt movement of Jesus' attention away from the child and toward the mother to, instead, a tender acknowledgment that one cannot give attention to one without also acknowledging the other. Parker acknowledges this with regard to the parallel attention given to mother and son in the Elisha narrative:

The anonymous child says and does little, while arguably remaining the center of attention. The stories of his birth and revival focus primarily on the mother and the prophet... While the child is still through most of the narrative, he is important even in his passivity. Concern for his life steers the plot.<sup>365</sup>

Although inferences can be made about the economic status of the widow in Luke's gospel and the consequent value of the son for her future, such a direct connection is never made. Even when one assumes such implications, a genuine care for her son and sorrow at the loss of his life *as a loss* seems also, if not primarily, to motivate this mother's weeping (v. 13). While her concern for herself may follow later, in this moment of her grief, it is possible, if not likely, that care for her son remains this woman's primary purpose. Indeed, if finances were the sole factor for her grief, she may not have invested in the expense of the funerary procession that Jesus' witnesses, accompanied as she is by such a large crowd—preferring instead to save for her uncertain future. In her mourning, this mother shows genuine concern for her son.

Thus, even in his death, this youth influences the actions of his mother. This is an example of what Cristina Grenholm calls the co-creative love of motherhood: "It is not merely

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<sup>365</sup> Parker, 144.



about procreation; it is about the coming into being of human beings in communion with others. We co-create each other. Pregnancy, child birth, and continuing care are important aspects of this act of creation.”<sup>366</sup> This describes both the affection and mutual dependence that the mother and son in Luke’s story have for one another.<sup>367</sup> When they are returned to one another in life, such mutuality can and should be expected to continue.

Finally, the response and actions of those who witness the miracle testify to the youth’s experience of healing as one of divine inclusion. This can be seen first in the witness of the large crowd of mourners accompanying the youth and his mother from the start (v. 11) and later in the testimony about Jesus’ actions by the disciples of John who, immediately following this scene in Nain, are said to have “reported all these things” to John (v. 18).

With reference to the immediate crowd of mourners, it bears remembering the predominance of children in crowds and cities of the first-century world. Since children were not and could not be shielded from death, so much an ever-present reality in their lives, the crowd accompanying a funeral procession would have been no different. The “large crowd” (v. 11) and the funeral procession would have involved children. These children, then, bear witness to Jesus’ miraculous actions for one of their own. They see Jesus step forward and dare to touch the ritually unclean funeral bier belonging, as it were, not to an important state official or religious

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<sup>366</sup> Cristina Grenholm, *Motherhood and Love: Beyond Gendered Stereotypes of Theology*, trans. Marie Tåqvist (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmann’s, 2011) 31.

<sup>367</sup> The dependency of the mother in this account, therefore, should not be seen as a sign of weakness. In contrast, the strength of her mutual relationship with her youthful son can be brought to bear in support Karlsen Seim’s claim for the independence of women in Luke over against those of feminist exegetes who have found in Luke a limited, passive view of the women. For a more complete review of these diverging feminist perspectives, cf. Claudia Janssen and Regene Lamb, “Gospel of Luke: The Humbled Will Be Lifted Up,” in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann’s, 2012) 645-661.

leader, but a simple youth (v. 14). It is possible that one or more of those carrying the bier may have been a youth or young child him or herself. McWilliam observes, “Children attended religious festivals and games, triumphs, and funerals... Some children were able to participate, perhaps singing at a funeral or state ceremony or walking processions the background to this story, children surround and are surrounded by the power of Jesus’ presence. The inclusive attention that Jesus gives to this youth—the lowly son of a widow—would therefore not be lost on them.

When Jesus subsequently returns the youth to the home and care of his mother, the comfort and security so crucial to children, particularly at a young age, would thus be connected in their minds in a real and tangible way with Jesus’ announcements of the advent of God’s Kingdom. Through the resuscitation of the youth at Nain, children in the crowds and among Jesus’ followers experience the inclusive and secure invitation to the Kingdom of God—extended to all of God’s children.

Such attention to the youth at Nain is then tacitly acknowledged and confirmed by the reports to John by his disciples. After they convey “all these things” to John (v. 18), John, presumably amazed by what he has heard, sends two disciples to speak with Jesus. In this conversation, the emphasis of the healing event is clearly removed from the widowed mother and placed squarely on the experience of the youthful son. Jesus “answered them, ‘God and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, *the dead are raised*, and the poor have good news brought to them’” (Lk 7:22, emphasis added). Affirming through his actions his identity as Messiah, Jesus does not dwell, with regard to the healing at Nain, on his action for the widowed mother—who quite

likely could be numbered among the poor or even the oppressed. Instead, he *adds* the prophetic expectation of the raising of the dead to this paradigmatic statement of Luke 4:18-19.

Luke having only recounted thus far one such resuscitation of the dead, and, indeed, it is only in Luke that this narrative appears, there is little doubt that the reference here has most specifically to do with the resuscitation of the youth at Nain. The experience of *this youth*—not his mother—therefore provides key testimony to Jesus' identity as the Messiah. He is included, not just in the experience of the Kingdom of God, but also now in the proclamation about Jesus as it brings others to believe.

From a simple account of healing and restoration, then, attention to this child opens for one an experience of God's grace extended to children and their parents through a restored relationship, the provision for trust and security, concern for the outcast and neglected, and inclusion of such ordinary people as the youth at Nain in the proof and proclamation of God's Kingdom. The inclusive grace and welcome extended at Nain, therefore, moves beyond the experience of one mother or one son to encompass more broadly God's plan for the salvation of all of God's children through the life, death, and ministry of God's own son—Jesus. The healing of this youth is more than one moment of gratuitous inclusion. It is not an incidental experience at the margins of Jesus' ministry. Rather, for the Lukan author and his audience, this experiences of healing both personifies and testifies to the radical nature of God's Kingdom as one of mutuality and relationship for all of God's children—reversing fortunes and including those otherwise forgotten and rejected by society, or, as in the case of children, too often simply ignored.

## Jesus Raises a Girl in Galilee (8:40-56)

### *The Girl as Child*

In contrast to the previous narrative, there is no reason to guess at the age of the child whom Jesus returns to life in Luke 8:40-56. The narrator tells us that Jairus' daughter is "about twelve years old" (v. 42). While Roman law permitted girls to be legally married at the age of twelve,<sup>368</sup> they typically married much later. P.R.C. Weaver estimates "the *average* age gap between first husband and first wife is at least ten years, probably more," with girls marrying between 15-20 years old and boys, on average, ten years later than that.<sup>369</sup> This average, gathered from analyses of funerary inscriptions and other extant evidence, is generally affirmed across scholars of antiquity, with the notable exception of "elite girls" who "may have been married early in their teens."<sup>370</sup>

Thus, rather than assign twelve as the blanket age at which a girl became an adult in first-century Mediterranean society, the consideration of her actual marital state among other social factors provides a more nuanced perspective.<sup>371</sup> In contrast to boys whose transition to adulthood was frequently marked with a series of public rituals, "There was no comparable civic rite of passage for girls, as they never became full citizens in the political sense of voting and standing for office, and they were never eligible for military service."<sup>372</sup> In place of a public transition to

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<sup>368</sup> Harlow, "Family Relationships," 17; Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships," 27.

<sup>369</sup> P.R.C. Weaver, "Children of Freedmen (and Freedwomen)," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 176.

<sup>370</sup> D'Ambra, 46. Cf. also Robert Garland, "Children in Athenian Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 214; Harlow, "Family Relationships," 17; McWilliam, 273; Weaver, 175.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Chapter 1 on definitions of childhood.

<sup>372</sup> Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships," 27-28.

citizenship, a girl publicly attained adulthood through marriage and childbearing.<sup>373</sup> When a girl married, she left her childhood, along with her paternal family, behind and joined the household (οἶκος) of her husband. Because the girl in this unit lives in the home of her father (cf. Lk 8:41, 49, 51), she is to be understood as not yet married. Thus, with respect to her status in the household, she is a child.

The girl's status as child is further confirmed textually by the narrator who refers to her as a "child" (ἡ παῖς) twice in v. 51. And, again, by Jesus' character using the same term in her resuscitation itself when he calls out, "Child, get up!" (v. 54). While there are times when some interpreters argue for a broader translation of the term παῖς, the girl's stated age (which Luke moves to the forefront of the story relative to the other synoptic accounts) and the overall context confirm here an unquestionable reference to her as a non-adult child.

### *Experience of Inclusion*

The narrator immediately links this girl's encounter with the previous account of the resuscitation of the youth at Nain, both with the theme of children who have died (or are close to death) and the mention that these children are, in fact, only children (μονογενής, 7:12; 8:42).<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Harlow, "Family Relationships," 17; cf. also D'Ambra, who describes this transition vividly as a still liminal time, despite the definitive moment of marriage: "The adolescent girl, often represented in the visual arts as part child, part woman on the brink of growing up, was domesticated by marriage" (12); This transition was often marked by a ritual sacrifice of the girl's childhood dolls, cf. Harlow, "Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood," 332, 334-335.

<sup>374</sup> While most translations render the term in 8:42 "only daughter," it is actually a gender neutral term, thus increasing the stakes of what Jairus has to lose at the loss, not just of his only daughter, but, indeed, his only child. Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 337: "Luke describes this exclusive relationship [between father and daughter] with μονογενής ("only [daughter]"), in a world that, in contrast to our own, values a multiple number of children. The tragedy is intensified by the fact that the daughter who lays dying has just become nubile, and is thus at an age at which she can give life to others."

In light of these connections, an attentive reader may begin to expect, despite the narrative detour, an experience of healing and reception for the girl. The girl's inclusion in Jesus' healing ministry is seen in a similar light to that of the youth at Nain.<sup>375</sup> However, the introduction of the theme of faith in the combined narrative of the restored girl and the healed woman add a further element of inclusion to consider. Ultimately, a close reading of the text from a childist perspective show the girl's receipt of God's grace, as mediated through Jesus, in both her primary resuscitation and Jesus' imperative that faith saves this child.

At the most basic level this girl is included in Jesus' ministry as a recipient of his healing power. It is worth noting that while the narrative interruption of the girl's healing in which Jesus attends to a hemorrhaging woman before a child could imply a hierarchy of needs, I choose rather to read both healings as consistent with Jesus' ministry of restoration and inclusion. As humans, we tend to act as though everything in our world must be zero-sum, such that if Jesus helps one person another person is necessarily neglected. However, throughout Scripture God consistently chooses a different path. God doesn't operate with a zero sum.

In this unit, the urgency of *both* individuals—the girl and the woman—is downplayed by Jesus, with the narrative effect of giving the impression that regardless of chronological order, *neither one* is given priority with regards to Jesus' attention. The chronology of the narrative necessitates that one person's needs are met first; however, the narrator uses this chronology to demonstrate that chronological time no longer dominates in Jesus' Kingdom. Bovon explains, "Luke emphasizes, almost in Pauline fashion but with Johannine accents, that it is never too late

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<sup>375</sup> While there is every reason to assume that other children would have been present among the crowd that initially welcome Jesus, observe the woman's healing, and hear Jairus' request, and, indeed, among the mourners, this presence is not explored at length here since the unit makes clear that those who observe the actual healing of this child are limited to her parents, Jesus, Peter, James, and John (v. 51).

for God, because God uses even situations in which—humanly speaking—everything is far too late, in order to reveal the glory of his Son.”<sup>376</sup>

God works in *kairos*, rather than *chronos*, time in such a way that brings relief in the current moment, while at the same time always treating the moment as a larger whole. Such a *kairos* orientation looks both before and after the moment to bring about God’s restorative grace. Thus, Jesus’ attention to the woman and the girl does not need to be an either/or in terms of restoration or inclusion. Rather, it is a both/and through which Jesus brings the hope of God’s eschatological Kingdom into the present, embodied in the paired vulnerable persons of a suffering woman and a young girl.

Within this *kairos* time, the young girl’s experience of Jesus’ power and thus God’s inclusion is thus heightened by the narrative comparison of her healing alongside that of a grown woman.<sup>377</sup> Despite their different assumed roles in their households and community, fraught with as they were with their respective experiences of vulnerability and marginalization, both women are received as *subjects* through Jesus’ healing power of touch.

In the case of the woman, “She touched the fringe of his [Jesus’] clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (v. 44). In the case of the girl, “Jesus took her by the hand and called out, ‘Child, get up!’ Her spirit returned, and she got up at once” (vv. 54-55). The woman, both because of her status and the degree of her illness (the girl being already dead), is able to approach Jesus more directly. However, the story does not let the girl’s position (even in

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<sup>376</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 339.

<sup>377</sup> For more on the narrative links between these two healings, cf. Johnson, 143: “More than a mechanical sandwiching links the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the hemorrhaging woman. Both women are called ‘daughter.’ The girl is twelve years old, an age traditionally associated with menarche (cf. *Protoevangelium of James* 8:3); the woman has had a ‘flow of blood’ (obviously gynecological in origin) for twelve years... The situation of both seems hopeless... [Moreover,] The stories are joined most explicitly by the healing power of Jesus and the saving response of faith.”

death!) define her into passivity.<sup>378</sup> Jesus does not simply touch the hem of her garment and declare to the father that his daughter is well; rather, Jesus takes the girl *by the hand* and demands action *of her*: “Child, get up!” (v. 54).

In both instances, through the emphasis on touch “Luke stresses the personal character of the healings.”<sup>379</sup> The experiences of these two people are not merely paradigmatic of Jesus’ healing power, as in summary statements at other points of Luke’s narrative, but rather, reflect a deeper and personal connection that Jesus extends to each one of them. Bovon reflects,

Jesus the wonder-worker did not play the only significant role. Both the women [*sic.*] are relevant, especially in their relationship with Jesus. Sociologically, the account does not concern merely the crescendo from healing to resurrection, but also Jesus’ acceptance of two women, that is, their acceptance by the early Christian community.<sup>380</sup>

Bovon fails to recognize in his the significance of the girl’s inclusion, not simply as a female, but as a child, referring to both characters at this point as “women,” despite his acknowledgment of the recipient of the latter miracle as a child in his more text-critical remarks.<sup>381</sup> Nevertheless, he correctly notes the significance of this passage for establishing the inclusion of these characters, and by extension their demographic groups, within the Kingdom of God and later the early Christian community.

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<sup>378</sup> It has been noted that even before her death, “[t]he sick girl does not appear, but rather her father” (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 335); however, neither should this be taken as indicative of her status as a child, so much as an indication of how sick she already was such that she was unable to approach Jesus, as the hemorrhaging woman does, on her own. For parallels of adults or people of uncertain age whose requests are likewise brought by a representative cf. Lk 4:40; 5:17-26; 7:1-10 and those approached directly by Jesus 6:8-10; 7:11-17; 7:21; 8:26-33; 13:10-13; 14:1-6.

<sup>379</sup> Johnson, 143.

<sup>380</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 335.

<sup>381</sup> Cf. also Bovon, *Luke 1*, 336: “If one is aware of the extent to which the vocabulary of resurrection was used in the early Church to describe Christian existence, could one not see in the daughter of Jairus the experience of young Christian women?” in contrast to Bovon, *Luke 1*, 334, 337, and 340-341 (esp. fn 61).



This inclusion can be further seen in Luke’s description of Jesus as having taken the girl “by the hand,” an expression which, while used more frequently by Mark and in the LXX, is used with reference to healing by the Lukan author only in this unit. Uniquely, then, among his healing narratives, Luke uses the expression “by the hand” to link the girl’s experience to that of the people of Israel, whom God is spoken of as taking by the hand (cf. Isa 41:13; 42:6; Ps 73:23).<sup>382</sup> In this way, the girl’s clear inclusion as a child of Israel and thus a child of God is affirmed. At only twelve-years of age, she is just as much a part of God’s salvation as anyone else.

Nor is God’s gracious act for this child limited to a single moment. Still more profoundly, the woman and the child in this narrative are linked by the saving effect of faith. To the woman Jesus comforts, “Daughter, your faith (πίστις) has made you well (σέσωκέν σε); go in peace” (8:48). To the girl’s father, Jesus commands, “Only believe and she will be saved” (μόνον πίστευσον, και σωθήσεται, 8:50). Although the NRSV translates each phrase with different words, the same roots are present for each in Greek—πίστις can be rendered as either faith or belief and σώζω comprehensively conveys the action of making one well and salvation, terms which were linked in early Christian understanding. Fitzmyer notes, “In the Gospel, ‘salvation’ often denotes deliverance from such evils as sickness, infirmity, or sin; and its relation to ‘faith’ (*pistis*) is often noted (e.g. 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19).”<sup>383</sup>

Both the woman and the girl experience such deliverance as subjects of Jesus’ healing in 8:40-56. So, Johnson notes, they conclude a longer sequence of miracle stories in Luke 7-8, in which “Luke has emphasized the call and saving of the outcast.”<sup>384</sup> Seeing, then, the two female

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<sup>382</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 340; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 749.

<sup>383</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 223.

<sup>384</sup> Johnson, 143.

characters at the center of this narrative, Johnson concludes, “Finally, these two women [*sic.*] joined by the isolation of sickness, death and impurity, are addressed as daughter, and saved by faith (8:40-56).”<sup>385</sup> Like Bovon, when he moves from textual analysis to a more theological reflection, Johnson inadvertently falls into an adultist treatment of both characters as women—presumably, grown. Nevertheless, perhaps in part because of this lapse, Johnson seems to move beyond for a moment the broader contemporary question of whether a child can have faith, to envision both characters as representative of saving faith.

Nevertheless, Johnson does not specifically name whose faith saves each character. Indeed, on first reading, it appears as though the girl’s salvation may be dependent upon her father’s faith in v. 50 since his imperative to have faith is addressed to Jairus.<sup>386</sup> Yet, the broader context of faith and salvation as they are described in Luke’s narrative suggests another possible reading.

Faith and salvation in Luke’s gospel are not about intellectual affirmations, nor are they preceded by human initiative. Rather, they are linked by the common experience of hearing the word of God and responding. Take, for example, the woman who “stood behind him [Jesus] at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment” (Lk 7:38). Although this woman never speaks once, Jesus says to her, “Your faith (πίστις) has saved you (σέσωκέν σε); go in peace” (7:50). These are the exact same words that he speaks to the hemorrhaging woman in 8:48. Yet, both women have *already* experienced the magnitude of God’s grace *before* Jesus

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<sup>385</sup> Johnson, 144.

<sup>386</sup> The ambiguity of the Greek leaves possible (but unlikely) the messenger from Jairus’ house as an alternative object of Jesus’ command. The context, however, seems to suggest the father. In any case, the girl who is not present at the scene does not make sense either contextually or grammatically as the subject of Jesus’ imperative.

announces their salvation. Jesus is acting in *kairos* time.

In the first case, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the woman is acting with great love *because* “her sins, which were many, have been forgiven” (7:57). In the case of the second woman, “immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (8:44) before she is even acknowledged by Jesus. The reader is to understand, therefore, that neither of these women have contributed to their own salvation anymore than the passive child lying dead in her father’s home.

Rather, in his explanation of the parable of the sower, which transects these two accounts, Jesus makes clear that salvation (8:11) belongs to “the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (8:15). As such, faith, or more accurately translated, faithfulness, remains about each person’s openness to the movement of God in their life. In the words of the Lukan author, it is to respond with open ears and obedient action to the word of God.<sup>387</sup> The Galilean girl in this unit embodies her faith by resting her hand in the palm of Jesus as he guides her up.

So, while on first reading it may appear as though the girl’s salvation is dependent upon her father’s faith, in terms of faithful openness she actually outperforms her father Jairus in Luke’s account. In contrast to Mark’s present imperative, “Do not fear, only believe (πίστευε)” (Mk 5:36), which could imply a continuation of the faith that Jairus already has, Luke’s use of the aorist πίστευσεν suggests that Jairus does not already have faith. Nor does the narrative give any reason to believe that Jairus’ state of belief changes prior to his daughter’s healing. In fact, the ambiguity of the Greek, which does not distinguish the mourners from Jairus and his family in vv. 52-53 in terms of who was “weeping and wailing” for the girl and “laughed at” Jesus “knowing that she was dead,” may actively suggest that Jairus *does not* believe before Jesus

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<sup>387</sup> For more on this as the qualification of discipleship and the role of children in fulfilling it, cf. Chapters 3 and 4 of this work; Cf. also Johnson, 143.

heals his daughter.

In contrast, when Jesus “calls out” to the girl (v. 54) and she responds by getting up “at once” (v. 55). In its most basic formula, this child, despite the doubts of her father and those in his household, hears the word of God—through Jesus’ call—and obeys it. Even when the narrative diminishes her roll, failing to either grant voice or name to this child who responds to Jesus’ call, her single-minded faithfulness shines through.

In their interpretation of this same sequence of events in Mark’s account, Horn and Martens note that despite her silence, this child, like the other children in Mark’s healings whom they describe, accepts Jesus’ healing. Consequently, they reason,

Although the children are presented as silent in each of these cases [including that of Jairus’ daughter, named above], their silence should not be read as indicating indifference. Their silent acceptance of healing is a lesson to the adult readers and hearers. To accept Jesus is to accept divine intervention as it might occur. This may be the model of receiving the kingdom like a child: the child’s silence acknowledges the true nature of Jesus and demonstrates faith that he will heal the one who needs healing.<sup>388</sup>

The efficacy of the girl’s resuscitation gives silent testimony to her inclusion in the saving power of Jesus through her faith. Or, to put it more simply, this Galilean girl, like the hemorrhaging woman, in her hearing and responding to the Gospel, experiences *wholeness* as a child of God.

Moreover, this wholeness further extends to the inclusion of both the girl and the woman in their communities.<sup>389</sup> In the first-century, whether a person was pagan or Jewish, there existed no separation between religious and secular life. Therefore, the woman, who had been ceremonially unclean due to her hemorrhage for twelve years, had been excluded from both

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<sup>388</sup> Horn & Martens, 263.

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Johnson, 143: “In both stories, we notice, the person who is saved is restored to community. The girl is returned to her family. More impressive still is the woman with the hemorrhage who for twelve years was excluded from the common life of the people because of purity regulations.”

religious and community life due to this ailment. Likewise, this child, in so much as she was considered to be a part of God's covenant with Israel was also considered to be a part of the corpus of the community. To be restored to life in one sphere was to be restored to life in the other. Thus, the girl's salvation from her death causing illness indicates, at the same time, her inclusion both among her family and community as well as among the broader people of God (of whom, as a daughter of Israel, she would have also previously been a part).

Applied further, to the early Christian context of Luke's presumed readers, Bovon adds, "The significance of πιστεύω ("to believe") and σώζω ("to save") are initially limited to the case of the girl who has died, but the reader sees beyond this to understand that it also means everyone's death and resurrection, and the Christian faith as such."<sup>390</sup> Such an inclusion both implicitly links the belief and salvation to the girl herself (rather than her father) and, from there, suggests that the faith of this child indeed models a response for all Christians in light of Christian teachings about a shared death and resurrection with Christ. The claim, while theologically significant in its own right, from a childist perspective makes visible in one more way the continuity of place for children across Jewish and Christian receptions of Luke's narrative as *included* and *made well*, indeed, *saved* as individuals among all of God's children.

Here we encounter the *kairos* time once more, as Jesus' action in *tem* reaches across time to bring both the initial recipients of his grace, and through them, their whole communities to wholeness and completion. The girl's salvation from her death causing illness indicates, at the same time, her inclusion among her family and community in time, as well as among the broader people of God across time.

Once again, comparing this girl's experience to that of the male youth revived in Nain,

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<sup>390</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 340.

we then see the thread of wide-sweeping inclusion of the young continue to expand across Luke's narrative. As will be taken up later, this narrative strand follows suit with the broader theme of inclusion of the outcast, and, indeed, reversal of fortunes in Luke's narrative. With regard to such inclusion in both resuscitation narratives, Tannehill notes,

The Lukan audience would not only find hope and healing and resurrection in these stories but also encouragement to keep their communities open to contrasting sorts of people. A man and a woman, the former prominent in Jewish society, the latter excluded from the temple and a source of pollution to others, are accepted and helped by Jesus. Therefore, they must also be accepted in the community of Jesus' followers.<sup>391</sup>

These resuscitations performed in Nain and Galilee, indeed, testify to a broader theme of acceptance among Jesus' community of followers. However, while Tannehill sees such acceptance drawn primarily in relation to gender and class, the childist lens applied above opens the possibility for a reading that also includes the acceptance of all people—child or adult—among the community of Jesus' followers. Indeed, the case of the young girl and her father, Jairus, make clear that the quality of one's relationship with Jesus is in no way dependent upon physical maturity or age.

### **Jesus Casts a Demon from a boy in Galilee (9:37-45)**

#### *The Boy as Child*

The story of Jesus casting out a demon from a boy whom his disciples have previously attempted to help unsuccessfully marks the third in Luke's stories involving children and their parents. This account in 9:37-45 is also the third clear description of Jesus extending his healing powers to a young child. Here again, no clear indication of age is given, except for the narrator's

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<sup>391</sup> Tannehill, 150-151.

comment towards the end of the account that Jesus healed the “boy,” literally, “child” (παῖδια, v. 42). This puts the boy in the same age category as the twelve-year-old girl in 8:40-56, as well as the twelve-year-old Jesus who traveled with his parents to Jerusalem (2:43).<sup>392</sup> Johnson even goes so far as to suggest, “The way Luke has structured the story [the small child (παῖδιον) whom Jesus places among his disciples in 9:47] could even be the exorcised boy.”<sup>393</sup> If the narrative is read as such, the lower limit of the boy’s age drops significantly further. In any case, the designation of παῖς, combined with the clear connection with the preceding two parent-child narratives,<sup>394</sup> clearly signals to the reader that another non-adult child is involved. Further narrative clues also help to establish the youth of the boy—both his continued presence in his father’s house and his illness itself.

As with the sick girl who continues to reside in the home of her father, Jairus, the clear presentation of the boy in this story under the care of his father may point towards his youth and familial dependence. He has not yet been apprenticed to a particular trade, nor has he married and begun a household of his own. While it is also possible that the boy’s condition has influenced these factors, it is worth noting that his father has not, as yet, cast him out of the household either (contrast Lk 8:27). The father’s continued commitment to the welfare and well-being of his son are thus indicative of a boy at least relatively young in age—fitting with the narrator’s description of him as a παῖς in v. 42.

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<sup>392</sup> The term παῖς may also be used to convey the meaning “servant” or “slave” (cf. Lk 7:7; 15:26); however, given the clear description of this boy as the father’s “son” (τὸν υἱὸν μου), and his only child (μονογενής) at that, the context clearly indicates a reference to a non-adult child (v. 38).

<sup>393</sup> Johnson, 159.

<sup>394</sup> Cf. Johnson, 158; Tannehill, 163. Fitzmyer also sees in the disciples’ initial inability to effect a cure a possible connection to Gehazi’s inability to help the boy resuscitated in 2 Kgs 4:31 (*Luke I-IX*, 809). For more parallels to this child healing account, see the above discussion of the youth at Nain.

Finally, the boy's affliction, which Luke has the father describe in some detail, is typical of a child in the ancient world. The father describes the cause of the boy's trouble as "a spirit" (πνεῦμα, v. 39), while the narrator later labels it both "a demon" (τὸ δαιμόνιον, v. 42) and "an unclean spirit" (τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ, v. 42). Yet, there is no reference to sins on the part of either the father or the child that might have brought upon such a spirit. Instead, the account of the demon should be read as a protological explanation for a sickness that was still shrouded in mystery in the ancient world. Modern medicine assigns the boy's symptoms to epilepsy, specifically, *grand mal seizures*;<sup>395</sup> however, the conventional wisdom of antiquity was not so precise. Bovon explains,

An educated ancient reader of the Synoptic accounts would interpret this description of the illness as ἱερὴ νοῦσος ("sacred disease," *morbis sacer*). For ancient scientific medicine recognized the main characteristics of an epileptic attack, distinguished among the three phases of a crises, mentioned the signs that would appear before an attack, and also described the scream as the victim fell to the ground... But according to the original understanding of the disease, which of course lived on in popular culture and in magical lore until late antiquity, the origin of the evil is not to be seen in nature.<sup>396</sup>

Those familiar with the boy's symptoms would thus likely have ascribed to them, as Luke does, a supernatural origin. Nevertheless, it was not a completely unknown affliction. Rather, it was a condition known to exist of which the causes and treatment were unknown. It is, thus, reasonable to expect that Luke and his audience would have been aware, as modern medicine is today, that such epileptic attacks generally begin in childhood or puberty.<sup>397</sup> In short, what we have in Luke 9:37-45 is a father bringing to Jesus his young son, perhaps at the age of puberty or just below, who is suffering from a known childhood condition attributed to a demon.

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<sup>395</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 808; Johnson, 158.

<sup>396</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 386.

<sup>397</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 808.



### *Experience of Inclusion*

The most obvious way in which Jesus extends God’s power to this demon possessed boy is expressed succinctly as the second of three actions in Luke 9:41 “and Jesus healed the boy” (καὶ ἰάσατο τὸν παῖδία).<sup>398</sup> As in the first two child healings addressed, through his miraculous power of healing, Jesus now extends God’s grace and power to this young boy as an experience of inclusion. Moreover, again in parallel to the accounts of the youth at Nain and the girl in Galilee, the demon possessed boy experiences Jesus’ act of inclusion at the familial and communal level as well. Through Jesus’ action, the boy is both recognized and restored to full status as a valued member, not just of his household or God’s coming Kingdom, but of the covenantal community in which he resides.

This tri-fold inclusion is signaled in Jesus’ three actions in relation to the boy in 9:42. Bovon explains Luke’s narration as describing Jesus’ action “three times, depending on the person concerned—the unclean spirit, the boy, or the father.”<sup>399</sup> This is fitting with his delineation of the unit along traditional form-critical lines between 9:37-43a. However, when one looks at the story within the larger narrative whole, Jesus’ next move—to address his disciples—can be taken as a completion of the boy’s restoration, by addressing *all* those involved: the demon, the father, the boy, and the witnesses, i.e., the disciples and the crowd. In light of the effect of Jesus’ address both to the demon and the disciples, the boy’s restoration to community is actually affirmed twice by the narrative, sandwiching the more personal experiences of

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<sup>398</sup> The term “healing” is uncommon here, but given the coalescence of ancient understandings of demon possession and disease, not entirely out of place. Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 810: “In most cases the verb *iasthai* is used of healing diseases (as in 5:17; 6:18-19; 7:7; 8:47; 9:2, 11; 14:4; 17:15; 22:51; Acts 9:34; 28:8), but here it is said of an exorcism (cf. Acts 10:38). This is another indication of ‘demon-sickness’ or the failure to distinguish clearly between a healing and an exorcism.” Cf. also Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 545.

<sup>399</sup> Bovon, *Luke I*, 383.

restoration to Jesus and his father. Such an emphasis on community makes clear the place of inclusion and welcome that Luke's Jesus intends for this boy to enjoy among God's people as a whole.

First, Luke signals the boy's inclusion in his community at large through Jesus' removal of his demonic stigma. While any illness is necessarily debilitating to some degree, the stigma of this boy's particular condition is emphasized at several points in Luke's description. First, it is attributed to supernatural powers—a point of general mystery and concern in the ancient world. Although their conditions are not identical, the description of the Gerasene demoniac living among the tombs in Luke 8:27 provides a bleak picture of what this boy's life might entail if his affliction continues.

Second, as a part of the Jewish community, regulated by standards and rituals to determine “clean” and “uncleanness,” to have been afflicted by an “unclean spirit” (τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ, v. 42), as this boy is, would have had immediate consequences (cf. discussion of the hemorrhaging woman in Lk 8:43 above). Finally, as a more general experience of this latter point, the honor/shame culture of Roman antiquity would likely also have come into play in ostracizing the boy and his family from their broader community. Bovon summarizes these points in relation to the boy's father:

The possession of his son by demons would not only cause the father emotional suffering, but would also stigmatize him in ancient society. It endangers both his descendants and his current reputation. His suffering is rooted in his fear of the unpredictable attacks, in his grieving over his son, and in his own shame (cf. the similar ὄνειδος, ‘shame,’ of Elizabeth in Luke 1:25).<sup>400</sup>

When one moves beyond the adult-centric focus that motivates Bovon to focus on the experience of the father here, it is easy to see how similar stigma would have been experienced to the same

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<sup>400</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 385.

degree, if not greater, by the child himself. Thus, the expulsion of the demon, effected by Jesus' rebuke in 9:42 achieves restoration for both this child and his father at a communal level, even apart from the physical effects.

Second, Luke signals the boy's inclusion in Jesus' mission through Jesus' personal connection with and healing of him. Such connection, indeed, is what the boy's father appeals so passionately for in the first part of the narrative. Despite the commotion going on around Jesus—the crowds welcoming him (9:37a), the father imploring him (9:37b), and the demon resisting (9:42)—until after the healing is complete, Jesus' focus is on the young boy. Only after the boy is healed (9:42) does Jesus return his attention to the disciples and the crowd, elaborating on the brief rebuke of 9:41. And, indeed, this is what the father has requested from the start—that Jesus “look at my son” (ἐπιβλέψαι ἐπὶ τὸν υἱόν μου, 9:37). Here the repetition of ἐπί (‘to,’ ‘at’) makes clear that the object towards which Jesus is to direct his attention is not the spirit or the father, but, in fact, the son—the boy.<sup>401</sup> While Jesus' miracle-working action in v. 42 is directed toward three different objects (demon, child, and father), the purpose for his activity, and thus the focus of all that he does, remains centered on the boy.

The quality of such action can be further seen in both the father's plea and Jesus' response. The verb ἐπιβλέπω adds a degree of emphasis or focus to the more basic βλέπω (“to look”). It can be translated “to look intently,” “to pay close attention to,” “show special respect for,” “gaze upon,” or “look attentively at, with the implication of personal concern for someone.”<sup>402</sup> This is the same verb that Luke uses of God's compassion for Mary in her celebration of Jesus' conception in 1:48.<sup>403</sup> It is used only one other time in the New Testament,

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<sup>401</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 385.

<sup>402</sup> BDAG, 368.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 808; BDAG, 369.

in James 2:3, where the meaning conveys a special respect or attention given to people of special status.

In line with the theme of reversal in Luke, it is fitting that such respect, when it is noted in his gospel account, occurs not for the wealthy or high in status, but for the “lowly” (1:48), those toward whom society does not traditionally pay such heed—indeed, to the child in the midst (cf. 9:46-48 for Jesus’ more explicit acknowledgment of this reversal in God’s measure of greatness). In this way, the father shows a strong compassion and concern for his child; and Jesus, honoring the father’s request, mirrors this same compassion and concern—indeed, looking upon the boy with favor and grace.

Following the pattern of the previous two child healings, Luke continues to describe the child in this account as silent. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, such silence should not be mistaken for complacency or lack of agency. Rather, it is both a symptom of the adult-centric narrative in which the story stands and the severe malady that afflicts the boy within it. With reference to the latter, Bovon reflects, “The condition that we today call epilepsy is one of the most cryptic of diseases. The loss of consciousness for a time would have meant in antiquity that the afflicted person was possessed by a superhuman power. What could anyone, either the shocked spectator or the sick person, do to stop it?”<sup>404</sup> The boy does not approach Jesus on his own account not for lack of will or lack of faithfulness, but, quite simply, because he is afflicted—so much so that even when Jesus calls for his father to *bring him*, “the demon dashed him [the boy] to the ground in convulsions” (v. 42). Undeniably, it is the very dependency of this sick child—just as, it should be noted, an epileptic adult would also have been dependent upon the good will of another—that highlights the power and compassion of God through Jesus. The

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<sup>404</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 388.

boy may not be able to request his own healing, but he remains the focus of his father and Jesus throughout the account.

This singularity of focus is highlighted by Luke's emphasis on the healing as one of compassion and not of faith (*contra* Mark 9:23-24; Matt 17:19-20). In the face of the boy's suffering, Luke's Jesus is not primarily concerned with using this child to teach adults a lesson—neither the disciples who could not heal the child, nor the boy's father himself. Biblical interpreters of texts involving children could take a cue here. Instead, Luke is interested in highlighting the compassion and power of God.<sup>405</sup> Consequently, “Jesus does not examine the father's guilt—which would have corresponded to a possible doctrine of retribution in contemporary Judaism—but has only the future of the possessed boy in view.”<sup>406</sup> From the father's request, Jesus' reaction, and his ultimate healing, the boy remains resolutely at the center of this scene.<sup>407</sup>

Third, Luke signals the boy's inclusion in his father's household through the father's impassioned plea and Jesus' subsequent return of the child to his father. Jesus' action of returning the boy to his father (v. 42) recalls Jesus' previous encounter in which he gives the resuscitated youth to his mother at Nain (7:15).<sup>408</sup> The verbs, however, reflect a significant, while nuanced, difference between the two exchanges. The youth at Nain is already dead; his mother has lost him. Therefore, Jesus “gives him” (ἔδωκεν αὐτόν) in the simplest sense of the English term. In contrast, the boy in 9:37-50 is not dead, nor has his father yet counted him as a loss.

Already, above, we have seen the impassioned appeal that the father makes for this boy,

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<sup>405</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 384; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 807; Johnson, 186.

<sup>406</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 386.

<sup>407</sup> Indeed, the centrality of the child in Jesus' response becomes even more apparent if one imagines, with Johnson, that he may be the same child placed into the center of the disciples' dispute in the parenthesis that follows (9:47).

<sup>408</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 810; Johnson, 158.

whom he claims as his own in vv. 37-40. Tannehill notes, “The father’s request for help is long in comparison with other elements of the story. It contains vivid description of his son’s suffering.”<sup>409</sup> Throughout the narrative, both before and after Jesus heals the boy, the words and actions of the father thus testify to the inclusion of the boy in his familial household. Although his father may be stigmatized by his inability to work in the household in the expected way, or potentially, to produce heirs, the father remains steadfastly committed to this boy as a valued part of his family and home.

Thus, it would be inappropriate for Jesus to “give” this child back to the father, who already squarely “possesses” him as such. Instead, Luke relates, Jesus “gave him back to his father” (ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν τὸν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, 9:42). The prefix ἀπό added to the main verb changes the sense from a one-sided gift to the return of the object, in this case, a child, to the original possessor. Hence, it is translated as “give back,” “return,” or even “restore.”<sup>410</sup> In this instance, the child enters into Jesus’ custody temporarily when the father brings him to Jesus (vv. 41-42); however, the boy’s place in the household is never fully lost. Nevertheless, the shift from describing the boy solely by his relationship (“son”) to the more independent signification of “boy” or “child” after he is healed in v. 42 may indicate that Jesus returns to the father not just a son, which he has always had, but a *child*, who is now able to fully participate in the household to which he has always belonged.

Finally, Luke again signals the boy’s inclusion in the broader community by dislocating the confidence of those who might have previously condescended toward him, while at the same time locating the boy himself among the crowd. This final point, which points to Luke’s emphasis on the significant inclusion of the boy within the broader community, hinges largely on

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<sup>409</sup> Tannehill, 163.

<sup>410</sup> BDAG, 110.

the demarcation of the unit. Form critics such as Fitzmyer and Bovon<sup>411</sup> tend to describe the section as complete at v. 43b, with the rationale, as Bovon notes, that “The unit 9:37-43a forms a complete healing miracle.”<sup>412</sup> Narrative critics such as Tannehill and Johnson, however, take a more holistic approach, reading 9:37-50 as a single scene.<sup>413</sup>

Apart from the unity seen most simply in the narrative indicators of continuous time (e.g. “While everyone was amazed...” v. 43b; “[and]”<sup>414</sup> an argument arose among them...” (v. 46), both Tannehill and Johnson identify in this larger unit a common emphasis on the inabilities of the disciples.<sup>415</sup> Narratologically, I agree with this demarcation; however, for the purposes of this chapter, I end the scene dealing specifically with the healing of the boy at v. 45, since I have already dealt significantly with the final segment (9:46-50) above.

In terms of the boy’s restoration to community, moreover, it is this section (vv. 43b-45) that most explicitly applies. Johnson notes, “Luke intentionally joins this second passion prediction (cf. 9:22) to the previous story by the participle, ‘while they were all marveling’ (v. 43b), rather than the more general introduction used by Mark 9:30 and Matt 17:22.”<sup>416</sup> Such a joining fits with the Lukan theme of inclusion, allowing the crowds who have just experienced the strength of God’s power to listen in on the future surrender of this power upon which Jesus is

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<sup>411</sup> Although he does not directly engage in form-critical analysis, cf. also Carroll, 177, 180.

<sup>412</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 382.

<sup>413</sup> Cf. also Ulrich Busse, *Die Wunder des Propheten Jesus: Die Rezeption, Komposition, und Interpretation der Wundertradition im Evangelium des Lukas* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977) 252-253.

<sup>414</sup> Johnson translates vv. 45b-46, “‘And they were afraid to ask him about it. Instead, they entered into a discussion concerning who might be the greater among them.’ ... The translation takes the conjunction *de* seriously. Luke intends a real contrast between the disciples’ unwillingness to discuss Jesus’ suffering and their eager participation in a debate about their rank” (Johnson, 157, 159).

<sup>415</sup> Johnson, 157; Tannehill, 163.

<sup>416</sup> Johnson, 158.

about to embark.<sup>417</sup>

One should remember here that “disciples,” for Luke, rarely signifies the Twelve assumed adults, but rather the broader group of Jesus’ followers—among whom, there likely were children.<sup>418</sup> Moreover, the “great crowd” (v. 37) itself, given the demographics and social makeup of first-century Galilee, would have almost certainly included children. Therefore, the boy’s return to and inclusion among this group would not be atypical, but rather an indication of his restoration to his community at large. Furthermore, to the extent that these two groups—the disciples and the crowd—are included in Jesus’ teaching, we can also assume that the boy, along with other children, are addressed by Jesus too.

What, then, does this crowd—including its children—hear? To begin with, within the core healing story itself, Jesus exclaims, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?” (v. 41). Given their identified emphasis on the inabilities of the disciples, both Tannehill and Johnson see the disciples as the primary audience of this rebuke.<sup>419</sup> Alternately, Fitzmyer suggests, “The ‘all’ of v. 43b [*sic.*] would seem to indicate that Luke was referring to both the disciples and the others.”<sup>420</sup> Despite a possible priority given to the disciples’ hearing of this message, taken in its broader context I am inclined to agree that it is not intended to be heard solely by them.

The general reference to the entirety of the present “generation” (γενεά, v. 41), combined with the presence of the crowd described in v. 36, and with the inclusive “all” (πάντες, v. 43a) to

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<sup>417</sup> Cf. Tannehill, 164: “There is a sharp shift of mood here. Everyone else is rejoicing in amazement, but Jesus turns to his disciples and says with vehemence, ‘Let these words sink into your ears,’ then indicates that the Son of Man whose deeds are so powerful will have no power to escape his human enemies.”

<sup>418</sup> Cf. Chapter 3 on Discipleship.

<sup>419</sup> Johnson, 160; Tannehill, 163.

<sup>420</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 809.



which Fitzmyer refers, point to the possibility of a correspondingly inclusive reading of the audience. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that both Fitzmyer, in his affirmation of an extended audience, and Tannehill, in his rejection of the same, focus on the possible audience as limited to the father, the disciples, and the crowd, without giving specific reference to the boy himself, or, not unexpectedly, his peers among the crowd.<sup>421</sup> I propose that, while the disciples' shortcomings seem to be the motivation behind Jesus' lament, his words are directed more generally towards all those with ears to hear. That children could and would have been included in such a judgment of "this generation" has already been shown in relation to the sign of Jonah (11:29-32) and the days of Noah and Lot (17:25ff.).

Assuming the presence of children in the intended audience of this lament, however, one also hears a veiled reference to their presence, as part of the crowd and disciples, "with Jesus," who is compelled to "bear with" the present generation despite their faithlessness and perversity (v. 41).<sup>422</sup> Indeed, resignation to such a calling—bearing with humanity in all of its failures—may be indicated by Jesus' shift from his communal lament to the singular command, "Bring your son" (v. 41b). If this is so, then the inclusion of the boy, and likely other children as well, in the initial audience becomes even more probable. Despite humanity's faithlessness, Jesus continues to extend God's power and mercy to those, like the boy, who are in need.

Such encompassing inclusion is further experienced when one considers the remainder of the narrative (vv. 43b-45, and 46-50) as an extension of this first scene. In v. 43b, Jesus returns his attention to his disciples, but again, with the crowd, the father, and the child, still in earshot. Not coincidentally, then, his address revolves, as it does throughout the Lukan narrative, on the

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<sup>421</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 809; Tannehill, 163.

<sup>422</sup> This theme will be expanded upon in the following section with regard to the restoration of the two brothers to their father in what is traditionally called the parable of the prodigal son.

ability of his followers to hear and understand (9:44a). Bovon explains,

In this half-verse, the intention of the entire Lukan composition becomes comprehensible, or rather, ‘audible,’ for being a Christian is an existence concerned with hearing, whereby one needs to receive not just any words, but especially these words (τοὺς λόγους τούτους), which should be retained in memory, and which concern christology and, within Christology, the passion narrative.<sup>423</sup>

Jesus addresses the disciples, but they do not understand. On the other hand, the possibility remains that others in the crowd might respond differently. Regardless, however, all have equal opportunity to hear this second announcement of Jesus’ passion, as he prepares to embark on the road towards Jerusalem. All—including the boy and his peers—are privy to the unfolding of Jesus’ ministry in their generation and in their lives.

Moreover, returning to Johnson’s suggestion that the boy in v. 47 might be the same boy from v. 42, it is possible to infer that there is already one in the midst of the disciples and the crowd who is prepared to respond at Jesus’ directive. Expounding on this possibility, Johnson concludes,

There is nothing sentimental...in Jesus’ saying about the child received in his name. Neither is there (in contrast to the parallels) a direct moral lesson about becoming small, although one might be deduced. Luke’s point is more directly derogatory of the disciples’ pretensions. Jesus could pick *anybody* to do what he has picked them to do. They have not shown the power, and they have not understood the mission. The very powerlessness of a child makes the point dramatically. The ‘greatness’ of any of them derives not from themselves but from the mission of representation (of the prophet and of God) on which they have been sent.<sup>424</sup>

Their individual identities notwithstanding, the boy of 9:42, the child of 9:47, and indeed each one of the disciples themselves, do not earn their place in the Kingdom of God or achieve their individual greatness. Instead, just as the boy is healed from his demon possession by God’s great

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<sup>423</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 393.

<sup>424</sup> Johnson, 160.

power and possession, so too are the disciples made “great” in the Kingdom of God by God’s great power and compassion. So much so that, even when they behave poorly and disappoint (cf. 9:41), God continues to extend a welcoming hand, welcoming all of God’s children—child and adult—into Jesus’ ministry for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

### **Jesus’ Tale of the Restoration of Two Brothers to their Father (15:11-32)**

#### *The Brothers as Children*

In each of the healing accounts discussed so far, it has become clear that Luke’s primary concern is not the dissipation of a particular illness, but rather the demonstration of God’s power and grace. As the narrative moves from these initial demonstrations of God’s power, Jesus takes on an increased teaching role. Notwithstanding, the themes of God’s power and grace—and, indeed, of the inclusivity of these experiences—continue to predominate.

While it can be more difficult to distinguish specific addressees of Jesus’ teachings, beyond general audiences such as the disciples and crowds discussed above, and thus to consider whether they may have included children among them, indications can be given by the themes of the teachings themselves. In particular, children respond to stories about other children with whom they can identify.<sup>425</sup> Establishing among Jesus’ parables, then, stories that involve children’s experience of inclusion both point to this as a broader theme in Jesus’ teaching and as a potentially lived experience by children among Luke’s imagined audience, to whom the parables are addressed.

The difficulty of determining approximate ages of characters in Luke’s gospel account, which is itself conveyed as story, is amplified in determining the ages of characters in the

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<sup>425</sup> Aasgaard, 202. For more evidence on the practice of telling stories to children in antiquity, see also Aasgaard, 198-202.

parabolic accounts contained therein. It is entirely possible, in fact, probable, that the characters in these parables in their earliest forms were never conceived with a specific age. The advantage and disadvantage of this is that it leaves the reader to fill in this literary gap with a plausible and legitimate estimation. Furthermore, to suggest that elements of this parable can appeal to the experience of children is not to suggest that children were its sole or even primary audience. As Aasgaard notes, “the boundaries between tales for children and adults were probably far from distinct.”<sup>426</sup>

Instead, I suggest that this parable contains a message that would be applicable to children as well as adults and that the child audience is equally included in the experience of grace offered by the forgiving father; unfortunately, a childist perspective of this text has been dormant for far too long. The question, therefore, in relation to Luke 15:11-32 is not so much whether the brothers *must* be understood as children—indeed, we cannot and may never have been intended to know. Instead, the question is, from a childist perspective, whether these brothers *can* feasibly be understood as children. To determine this, we must turn to contextual clues in the text itself.

Most interpretations of this parable do not specifically address the age of the brothers in the story. Nevertheless, the adultist trend in biblical scholarship comes out subtly through commentators’ typical references to the younger brother as a “young man.”<sup>427</sup> Such a moniker, while not specifically ascertaining the character’s maturity, seems to lean in that direction; still, it

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<sup>426</sup> Aasgaard, 193.

<sup>427</sup> A notable exception to this tendency is Fitzmyer, who alternates between referencing the younger son as a “young man” and, more frequently, “young son;” even referring to him at one point in relation to his employment with the Gentile pig farmer as a “Jewish boy” (*Luke X-XXIV*, 1088). Unfortunately, because he does not address the issue of age specifically, it is impossible to know whether this is a lapse in language or whether Fitzmyer himself imagines the younger son as a young boy. Setting aside previous presuppositions about the age of the characters, his commentary can be read to support either interpretation.

is important to note the room for interpretation that even this appellation gives. Alternatively, Ibita and Bieringer use a similarly ambiguous moniker on the other end of the spectrum, suggesting that the “Parable of the Prodigal Son gives voice to both an erring and (self-)righteous child.”<sup>428</sup> Although they do not elaborate further on their reasoning for reading the younger son as a child, the context of Ibita and Bieringer’s essay suggests a reading that understands this character in a youthful way.

Similarly, artistic depictions of the parable range the spectrum from Lionello Spada’s rather youthful portrait in *Return of the Prodigal* (ca. 1680)<sup>429</sup> in what appears to be adolescence or early teenage years to Pieter Coecke van Aelst’s much likeness depicting a much older son, surrounded by prostitutes and bearing full facial hair in *Scenes from the Life of the Prodigal* (ca. 1530),<sup>430</sup> with all manner of more ambiguous representations in between that skate the boundary between adolescent and young adult.<sup>431</sup> Following this pattern of treating the sons’ ages as a relatively malleable construct, I project a portrait of the younger son in early to mid-adolescence, drawn from socio-cultural background about and textual inferences within the parable itself.

Socio-cultural study of the place of children in the first-century Roman world suggests that as early as five-year-old children began to take a significant place in the household

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<sup>428</sup> Ma. Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer, “(Stifled) Voices of the Future: Learning about Children in the Bible,” in *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 93.

<sup>429</sup> Lionello Spada, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1608, oil on canvas, 160x119cm, The Louvre, Paris.

<sup>430</sup> Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *Scenes from the Life of the Prodigal*, 1530, pen and brown ink and gray wash, over traces of black chalk, 19.2x51.4cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 431-438 for a “History of Interpretation” that includes a brief survey of artistic treatments of this parable in the literary and dramatic genres. Notably, an adaptation Burkhard Waldis in 1527, “A narrator introduces the action, then comments on it at the end of each of the two acts of the play,” while “A *child* reads the Gospel at the beginning and pronounces the benediction at the end” (Bovon, *Luke 2*, 428 emphasis added).

ecosystem. Boys in particular frequently began work in the fields around this age, either as the free sons of modest landowners or as slaves or day workers on larger estates. Columella's letters on the practice of agriculture addressed to Roman estate owners in the early to mid-first-century provide important details in establishing this practice. Horn and Martens summarizes the relevant passages:

Slaves generally worked in the fields. Their work began at dawn (*Rust.* 11.1.14-17) and ended at twilight (*Rust.* 11.1.18). There was no distinction regarding age with respect to the work they performed or the time they engaged in it. The single exception pertained to the overseer, who was to be neither too old nor too young (*Rust.* 1.8.3; 11.1.3-6). Columella suggested that an overseer should not be a *iuvenis* (*Rust.* 1.8.3), but rather one of the *adolescentes* (*Rust.* 11.1.6). That the overseer was to assume the task of running the estate at such a young age indicates his intimate familiarity with the many tasks required of him already from boyhood on (*Rust.* 1.8.3), a point which accords with Isomachus's advice cited elsewhere in Columella that one should 'train' one's own overseer (*Rust.* 11.1.4-5).<sup>432</sup>

While the ages associated with the terms *iuvenis* and *adolescentes* can overlap one another depending upon the account, it is clear that Columella understands them here as distinct, with *adolescentes* representing the more youthful, teenage stage before reaching young adulthood.

Furthermore, references to the overseer as "not too young" points toward the affirmation of child labor quite before the adolescent stage. This is born out in Columella's parallel description of tenant farms, which were "rented out to families whose members grew up on the land and who worked the land together with their children. Country estates, therefore, seemed to have employed considerable numbers of child laborers, especially young slaves, who were performing duties alongside adult slaves both in the home and in the fields."<sup>433</sup>

Although Columella's audience is primarily the owners of wealthy landed estates whose

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<sup>432</sup> Horn and Martens, 168.

<sup>433</sup> Horn and Martens, 169.

sons would not have needed to work the land, the dispersion of ages that he describes can also be inferred to have existed in smaller estates as well. In such estates, it would have been necessary for the landowner, his children, and their slaves to have worked the land side-by-side, as in the context of Luke's parable (e.g. 15:25, 29).<sup>434</sup> Thus, Horn and Martens are led to conclude, "Whether or not the [younger] son was still a child, the work he did was identical with the kind of work which children performed on large estates."<sup>435</sup> Indeed, from the agricultural context itself there is no reason to assume the either brother has reached full adulthood.

Another indication of a young person's status in the adult world of antiquity was his or her marital status. For girls, this was almost always the most determinative factor. For boys, as discussed in relation to the young man whom Jesus raised at Nain, there was a more ambiguous period of transition between their arrival at puberty and receipt (for Roman citizens) of the *toga praetexta* and their acquisition of the complete responsibilities of family. Thus, while Rawson places the ceremonial exchange of togas somewhere between the ages of fifteen and seventeen,<sup>436</sup> boys in the Roman world would not typically be expected to marry until the ages of 25 to 30 years old<sup>437</sup>—after completing either an apprenticeship or military service (the latter required of all male citizens between the ages of 17-18).<sup>438</sup> This period of transition between boyhood and "young adulthood" was typically referred to within the learned schemas as it is in Columella's correspondence as *adolescentes*.

Given the context of Luke's parable, which assumes both that the older brother has never

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<sup>434</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 428: "That he himself [the older son] works the land—an observation mentioned in passing [v. 24c-25]—is an indication that the father is not a large landowner of a great landed estate (*latifundia*) but someone who exploits an estate of medium size."

<sup>435</sup> Horn and Martens, 177.

<sup>436</sup> Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships," 28.

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Weaver, 46.

<sup>438</sup> Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships," 28.

left home and that the younger had not left until receiving his inheritance (cf. Lk 16:29), it is assumed that neither brother was a Roman citizen since they do not appear to have been required to perform compulsory military service. Lacking such formal recognition of a change in responsibility, their status in the household, as with Roman daughters described above, may have been more closely tied to their generational status. The parable gives no indication of the presence of wives of children of these brothers.

One contemporary Arab mother reflects anecdotally on this absence, noting “that as a parent she can understand the father’s generous forgiveness of the younger son, but she would not have understood this before becoming a parent. ‘That’s why the older son cannot experience’ the father’s reaction.”<sup>439</sup> Likewise, the younger son, if he had a family for which he was responsible, would not have had the luxury to behave so irresponsibly. Both brothers seem to be missing a part of the generational puzzle.<sup>440</sup> As such, the assumption can be reasonably be made that the brothers are to be understood as a part of the youngest generation in the father’s

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<sup>439</sup> Carol Schersten LaHurd, “Re-viewing Luke 15 with Arab Christian Women,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 265.

<sup>440</sup> Some interpreters might be tempted to argue for the sexual maturity of the younger brother, despite his unmarried status, in light of tradition that suggests he spent his inheritance on prostitutes (cf. the older brother’s complaint in Lk 15:30). Two points must be clarified here. First, while the older brother makes this suggestion, presumably with no previous knowledge of his brother’s whereabouts or activity, the phrase translated as “dissolute living” (ζῶν ἄσώτως, v. 13) from which the term “prodigal” comes indicates that the younger son spent his inheritance wastefully, or profligately, but does not by itself suggest any sexual excess (cf. also Johnson, 236). Further, the likelihood that a boy at or even below puberty in the ancient world might partake in sexual encounters with a prostitute should not be overlooked. Pre-pubescent children were sold into sexual slavery and worked as prostitutes, slave children could be treated as *deliciae* or sexual playthings by their masters, and free boys may even enter into receiving sexual relationships in order to curry favor and respect among older men. The sexual freedom and activity of post-pubescent adolescents and teenagers would have been even more common and assumed, especially considering androcentric adultery laws that defined the crime only in terms of the violation of a married woman. Thus, while artistic depictions that imagine such licentiousness tend to lean towards an older portrait of the prodigal, this is neither called for by the text nor the ancient context from which it originates.



household—as still themselves *children*.

Further textual clues bolster this interpretation of the two brothers as (likely adolescent) children, including the place of each youth in his father’s estate, possible intertextual parallels within the Hebrew Bible, and the broader context of Luke’s narrative in which the parable is told.

To begin with, the most ostensibly apparent clues as to the position of each brother within the household have to do with the distribution of the estate. In v. 12 the younger brother asks for “the share of the property” (μέρος τῆς οὐσίας). Much ink has been spilt on determining the legal or contractual particularities of the inheritance that this request describes. Given the parabolic nature of this story, however, I concur with the strand of scholarship that sees less need in ascertaining the specific origin and legal ramifications of the practice so much as determining its narrative place and function.

As for the plausibility of such a practice as the distribution of one’s estate before one’s death, while the Jewish law does not specifically account for it, the intertestamental texts of Tobit and Sirach point to the practice, if not the wisdom, of such an act. In Tobit, Raguel’s gift of half of all he owns to Tobias at the marriage for Tobias and Raguel’s daughter (an only child) sets a precedent for the division of inheritance while the head of the household is still living (Tobit 8:19-21).

Likewise, explicit heed against such practice in the book of Sirach suggests that such a practice was known to exist among the Israelites (cf. Sir 33:19-23). Further, while Raguel’s gift occurs at the marriage, and thus entry into adulthood, of his daughter, the description in Sirach places no such restrictions on the breadth of the practice—broadly advising against the distribution of one’s property to anybody before one’s death. Indeed, the parable fits better the

generalities of this context given the evidence against the marriage of either brother as discussed above.

The brazenness of the younger brother in asking for such a distribution of his father's wealth is thus less an indication of his own maturity to receive such a gift and more an indication of his youthful impudence. Neither son has a legal claim on the property of which the young son makes his demand (cf. also the future tense of the claim the son makes in v. 12), but rather, the distribution of the wealth is at the sole discretion of the father as *pater familias*. This would have been the case in the ancient world regardless of the ages of the brothers.

This relationship of subservience of the brothers to their father is further indicated by the older son's continued status within the household below his father, even after the younger son receives his share. Bovon notes that in vv. 22-23, "It is evident that for Luke the father remains in control of that part of his estate that he has not already given to his younger son. The older son does not complain about that fact."<sup>441</sup> Given the structure of the ancient household, such subservience would have existed between the *pater familias* and his sons for the entirety of the father's lifespan, both when his sons were young children and when they were grown adults with children of their own. In contemporary sensibilities, however, the deference that the older son shows to his father speaks again to a perception of youthfulness more than anything else. The older son does not complain about his role because he, just as his younger brother will once he is restored to the family, remains in a position of dependence in relation to his father. Such dependence can, though it need not, indicate the youth of the brothers involved.

Moreover, the use of language and themes within the parable call to mind more specific intertexts within the Hebrew Bible, which while not explicitly mentioned, would likely have

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<sup>441</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 427.

been familiar to both the Lukan author and his audience and thus potentially called to mind. These texts, in addition to bolstering the theme of forgiveness and acceptance at the heart of the parable,<sup>442</sup> also link the figure of the young son with other well-known youths in the Israelite tradition.

First, Bovon suggests that reference to a famine in v. 13 can be read as a formulaic element that “recalls Joseph’s saga, or the story of Tobias.”<sup>443</sup> To this, one could also add the “travel to a distant country” (v. 13) as reminiscent of both these accounts. Moreover, Bovon compares the father’s gift of the ring and shoes to Pharaoh’s gifts to Joseph in Gen 41:42, suggesting an overall strong link to the Joseph narrative.<sup>444</sup> While, obviously, Joseph’s narrative in the Hebrew Bible spans the entirety of his life, his journey to the distant country of Egypt and thus his connection with the young brother in Luke’s text begins when his brothers sell him into slavery at the age of seventeen (Gen 37:2-28)—within the period of adolescence as it is loosely defined. Similarly, while the book of Tobit does not so distinctly define Tobias’ age, with nearly half of the narrative occurring prior to his marriage (Tobit 1:1-6:18) and spanning itself a fair number of years, it can be assumed that when Tobias begins this account of his life it is at a relatively early age.

Hence, the characters with whom the Lukan author and his audience, and indeed, the Jewish audience within the narrative context of Jesus’ parable itself, would most readily have identified the younger brother would have been youths at the intersection of childhood and adult responsibility, but not yet themselves fully men in the social sense of the term.

Lastly, the broader context of Luke’s narrative as we have uncovered its familiarity with

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<sup>442</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 426-428.

<sup>443</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 426.

<sup>444</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 428.

children thus far supports a reading of the two brothers in the parable as children themselves. The father's exclamation in Luke 15:24a, "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again," while it has connections to the broader resurrection of Jesus and all of the saints, is most immediately associated with the two resuscitation accounts already discussed (Lk 7:11-17 and 8:40-56). In both of these accounts, the person restored to life has been shown to be a child or young adolescent, not yet possessing the full social integration characteristic of an adult.

The restoration of this third child to "life" in the eyes of his father should not be lost as a part of the broader narrative of restoration, which the Lukan author is spinning through the narration of these stories. Ultimately, through Jesus' resurrection, this is made complete as the relationship between humanity itself and our creator God are restored (cf. Lk 24:46-47). In the meantime, however, the Lukan author lays the groundwork for this conclusion by carefully retelling the restoration of dependent children to their parents in the persons of the youth at Nain and his mother, the girl in Galilee and Jairus, her father, and now, finally, with a parabolic connection to God God's self, this young brother and his forgiving Father.

Even within the parable's more immediate literary context, a connection to children can be seen. The parable of the two brothers occurs within the larger literary unit of parables of "lost and found" in Luke's gospel, beginning with a shepherd who loses his sheep (15:1-7), continuing with a woman who loses her coin (Lk 15:8-10), and culminating in the longer narration of a father who loses his son (Lk 15 11:32). Turid Karlsen Seim sees in these first two parables an example of what she terms "gender pairs"<sup>445</sup>—"a dual witnessing in the sense of a duplication of testimonials to address an audience composed of men and women..." By this logic, the Lukan author tells a story of restoration from the context of both a man and a woman in order to appeal

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<sup>445</sup> Turid Karlsen Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 730.

to his larger audience.

However, beyond perhaps an unstated assumption of the Lukan author's patriarchal preference, Karlsen Seim does not explain the presence of the third and final parable about two brothers and their father that follows this gender pair. While not negating the value for a feminist reading of noting gender pairings in Luke's text, it is possible to read this grouping of parables in a different way, through the lens of the ancient household. To this end, the model of the ancient *Haustafel*, or "household code" lends an interesting parallel.

The traditional structure of such a household code involved instructions for husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves—the three primary relationships in the traditional household.<sup>446</sup> Returning to Columella's remarks above, it is understood that the owner of an estate—for example, one that possessed one hundred sheep—would not likely have been found directly tending the animals himself. Instead, the role of "shepherd" was often given to the slaves and the children in the family. In the case of a large estate, this role would have fallen to a slave or hired worker.<sup>447</sup>

As such, I suggest that, in addition to presenting male-female counterparts, this literary unit presents images from all spheres of household relations—the sphere of service/work in the person of the shepherd as represented in the *haustafel* by the relationship of a master and a slave; the sphere of domesticity/marriage in the person of the woman searching within her house, as represented in the *haustafel* by the relationship of a husband and a wife; and, finally, the sphere of child rearing in the persons of the two brothers and their father, most explicitly defined, as represented in the *haustafel* by the relationship of parents to their children.

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<sup>446</sup> Cf. Betsy J. Bauman-Martin, "Women on the Edge: New Perspectives on Women in the Petrine Haustafel" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123:2 (2004) 265.

<sup>447</sup> Consider also the marginalized status attributed by Luke to the shepherds who attend Jesus' birth in 2:8-20.

Simultaneously, while not noting the broader literary connections, Destro and Pesce also connect this final parable with Luke's definition of household conduct. They write,

The parable wishes to put forward a model in which the traditional household has to accept within itself, unconditionally, also those who fail and those who have threatened its existence. In Luke's Jesus's ideal, the household should offer the guarantee of perpetual help even to those who split off from it.<sup>448</sup>

The proper management of God's household, by this measure, is one of grace and inclusivity—even in the face of offense. Such advice runs counter, of course, to most judicious codes of household conduct that one would expect either in antiquity or today. Indeed, Carolyn Osiek and David Balch note, in ancient agrarian society, the parable of the prodigal son would be “an alienating, offensive, implausible, potentially transforming metaphor of the kingdom of God clashing with centuries of domestic, didactic wisdom.”<sup>449</sup> However, it is just such offense that leaves room for Luke's depiction of the radical grace and inclusion extended by God. Indeed, the former two parables also place the traditional *haustafel* on its head, focusing on the agency of the lesser party (slave or woman) and celebrating small returns; however, it fits seamlessly with Luke's message of inclusion and forgiveness.

Thus, more than just bringing out the gendered nature of Luke's audience as Karlsen Seim rightly observes, the attention to all spheres of the household structure in this unit of parables in fact can be understood to point to the diversity of ages and genders, not just among the crowds who followed Jesus, but among the first audiences who heard and read Luke's gospel as well. Such a reading lends even greater weight to this combination of parables as Karlsen Seim describes it, “a literary device by which the author seeks to capture the attention of a mixed

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<sup>448</sup> Destro and Pesce, 224-225.

<sup>449</sup> Balch and Osiek, 139.

audience.”<sup>450</sup> In this way, not only does the text of the parable point to the identity of the brothers (or at minimum the younger brother) themselves as children, but it opens the way for a more inclusive understanding of Luke’s audience as well.

### *The Young Slave as Child*

The brothers need not be the only children uncovered in this text. As with the servant of the centurion (7:1-10), a group of slaves is again referred to as τῶν παιδίων in Luke 15:26. Although this term can be understood more as a form of diminutive address rather than of actual age when used in reference to a worker, several conditions in Luke’s parable suggest otherwise in this circumstance.

To begin with, parallels with Columella’s account of first-century agricultural estates suggest an analogous atmosphere to that described in the parable. Horn and Martens observe, “The picture in Luke’s parable is similar to the type of estate Columella described, with day laborers, tenant farmers, and slaves engaged in farming crops or in raising animals. Certainly, among these slave workers there were also children.”<sup>451</sup> Thus, the presence of workers who were both slaves and children would have been common and expected in the audience’s frame of reference (both for the audience of the parable and that of the gospel itself).

Once again acknowledging that, given the storied nature of the narrative, there is no real fixed age for the characters in the parable, such possibility allows room for a plausible and legitimate reading of the servant as a child slave. Moreover, the likelihood that group of slaves in v. 26 are children is increased by their proximity to the house (cf. Lk 15:25 “...and when he came and approached the house...”). As we have seen above, child slaves, particularly the very

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<sup>450</sup> Karlsen Seim, “The Gospel of Luke,” 731.

<sup>451</sup> Horn and Martens, 177-178.

young, were frequently assigned to duties within the house—just as the young children of the household also were. Thus, the probability is raised that this slave, who is referred to by the common term for a young child, is indeed a young child.<sup>452</sup>

The value of such a reading can be seen in that, unlike in Luke 7:1-10, here it is the narrator and not any of the other characters who refers to the slave who the elder brother summons as a *παῖς*. This term is frequently used in ancient literature with reference to (presumed) adult slaves as a specific term of relationship, for example, referring to a close or trusted status of the slave.<sup>453</sup> However, since it is employed here with reference to a group of slaves about whom the parable gives no other indication of special status, and is used as an objective description rather than a personal address, such connotations seem to be missing. The neutrality of the narrator's use of the term (contrast with Lk 7:2-3, 10), then, taken together with the expectation of child slaves among the estate, suggest a valid reading of the slave whom the elder brother summons is a young slave.

Given use of the more general term *δούλος* throughout the gospel and Acts already detailed in relation to the slave in 7:1-10, it is evident that the term is well known by the Lukan author and preferred, in general, to the more exceptional use of *παῖς*, used only here and at Luke 7:7. As such, *παῖς*, should not be understood as a neutral synonym for *δούλος* within the Lukan author's vocabulary, but rather as an indication of special status, or, more simply age. This is corroborated by the exclusive use of *παῖς* as a term of servitude by the Lukan author in Acts as a double reference to an individual's special status before God as both slave and child.

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<sup>452</sup> This is also the position of Bovon, although he gives no support for his reading other than a reference back to the parallel in Lk 7:7, about which his commentary is silent on the age of the centurion's slave. Cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 428: "We should probably group the 'servants' (*παῖδες*) (v. 26) with the 'servants' (*δούλοι*) of v. 22; all of them are the master's servants, except the ones in v. 26 (*παῖδες*) are probably the younger servants (cf. 7:7)."

<sup>453</sup> Cf. Lk 7:7; Gen 24:2ff LXX; Appian, *Iber.* 27, 107



A childist reading therefore legitimately understands the slave with whom the elder brother converses as a child. Moreover, the fact that this child slave is clearly portrayed as knowledgeable about the events of the household lends further credence to the inclusion of children in the household, at work, and even in celebratory events—all places where children, slave and free, whose families came into contact with Jesus through his ministry would themselves be likely to encounter Jesus.

### *Experiences of Inclusion*

Luke's parable in 15:11-32 thus leaves us with not just one, but three child characters through whom to learn about Jesus' extension of God's grace and welcome to children in his midst. Indeed, each character experiences this inclusive grace in a different way, which will be explored in turn. Before moving to these individual analyses, however, it is worth noticing that in this fundamental teaching about God's relationship with God's people, unique to Luke, every character who is given a speaking role, with the exception of the father who is to be understood as personifying God, is portrayed as a *child*.

Such a cast of characters cannot help but recall and deepen the reader or hearer's understanding of Jesus' words in 9:48: "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me...for the least among all of you is the greatest," and, indeed anticipate Luke 18:17: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." However, before Luke brings his audience to contemplating how, in fact, children receive God's Kingdom, through the parable of these two brothers, he lays out the abundant grace with which God first receives such children into God's Kingdom God's self.

God's gracious inclusion of even wayward children in the Kingdom is first revealed

through the Father's treatment of the younger son in the parable. This son demonstrates arrogance and disrespect early in the parable, beginning with his imperious demand of his father (Lk 15:12). Certain socio-cultural models even suggest that the manner with which the boy leaves his household would have necessitated the father ceremonially declaring him "dead" to him, thus explaining the father's words in 15:24, 32 and necessitating the restorative acts of 15:22. In any case, the son has clearly used up all of his inheritance (Lk 15:13) and returns to the family with his previous sense of entitlement stricken (cf. Lk 15:18-19 "...and I will say to [my father], "...Father, I am no longer worth to be called your son."").

This boy, who once thought so highly of himself and his independence, has now reached his ultimate low. Johnson emphasizes this, recalling, "As in the story of the Gerasene demoniac (8:32), the herd of pigs represents something unclean for Jews (see Lev 11:7; 14:8)... To tend the pigs of a Gentile is about as alienated as a Jew could imagine being."<sup>454</sup> He has nothing to offer and returns to his father, not as an idealistically innocent youth, but rather as a child who has known and been known by the world and seeks now in the household of his father the security and provision (v. 17) that he has lost.

Luke's depiction of this repentant boy (v. 17)<sup>455</sup> thus contrasts sharply with many contemporary notions of what it means to receive the Kingdom of God as a child. In their place, Luke makes room for the more realistic person of the "knowing child"<sup>456</sup>—one among the many children stricken by war, famine, prostitution, hunger, and all other kinds of hardship and abuse.

It is such a child (and readers and hearers might also infer, such adults,) who comes to

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<sup>454</sup> Johnson, 237.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. Bovon on this religious interpretation of the phrase "came to himself" (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν): "For Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity it expressed a decisive step of 'conversion' (μετάνοια), a return to God" (Bovon, *Luke 2*, 426).

<sup>456</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, 18-23; Cf. Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

God of his own free will and agency. The son himself is the subject of the first two verbs in v. 20: “set off” (ἀναστὰς) and “went” (ἦλθεν), as well as the turning action of coming to himself (ἔλθων, v. 17), just as he was the subject of the verbs leading to his temporary alienation—when he first “gathered” (συναγαγών) all that he had, then traveled (ἀπεδήμησεν) to a far away country and “squandered” (διεσκόρπισεν) it (v. 13).

This child is not only included in God’s grace and mercy by the forgiveness of his father, but the need for forgiveness also shows his inclusion in the whole course of human sin that first carried him away from his father. Carroll thus concludes, “Indeed, if the father in the parable of the two sons is viewed as a positive character, perhaps an image of the extravagantly compassionate, merciful God (15:11-32), then even wayward, disappointing, and rebellious children do not forfeit the loving care of their fathers (parents).”<sup>457</sup> Neither Jesus nor the narrator excuses the son’s actions on account of his youth. Rather, through his example, we see how God extends forgiveness and mercy to the young son not because of the boy’s childishness or even in spite of his childishness, but rather, the boy is restored to relationship solely on account of *God’s* graciousness.

Likewise, inclusion in God’s Kingdom is also extended to the elder son on the same grounds of paternal graciousness. So Johnson observes, “It is his [the father’s] even-handed compassion and concern that extends to both children.”<sup>458</sup> Although the actions of this elder boy remain unresolved at the end of the parable, he too is granted the liberty to act for himself. Even after their tense exchange regarding the father’s reception of his brother in vv. 28-30, the father maintains their relationship both by calling him by the endearing relational term of “child” (τέκνον, v. 31) and by reminding him, in the present tense, “you know that all that is mine *is*

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<sup>457</sup> Carroll, 181.

<sup>458</sup> Johnson, 240.

yours” (σὺ πάντοτε μετ’ ἐμοῦ πάντα τὰ ἐμά σά ἐστίν, v. 31 emphasis added). Here again, a reading that foregrounds the boy’s youth foreshadows Jesus’ more well-known saying about children in Luke 18:15-17: “For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God *belongs*” (Lk 18:16b emphasis added). Even before the boy moves to enter the party or accept his brother, his father reminds him of his own ongoing inclusion in his household as a member of the family.<sup>459</sup>

Finally, there comes the less extreme, but nonetheless meaningful expression of inclusion extended toward the child slave in Luke’s parable. As noted above, this child is well integrated into household, being readily able to summarize for the elder son the events that have taken place while he was in the field: “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound” (Lk 15:27). This child, even as a slave, is thus included in the activities and celebrations that the father—the landowner—has set about. Furthermore, as a member of the more general class of δούλοι in the estate, the young slave also counts among those whom the young son reflects, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare...” (Lk 15:17). From this we know that the slaves, including child slaves, are provided for in this father’s household and given more than enough. Indeed, it is to such slaves that the boy is most likely comparing himself when he imagines a better lot back home—both due to his own youth and his role as a hired worker feeding pigs, a job often associated with children.

Just as the young son returns, seeking security in the father’s household, so this security is already present for the young slaves to whom the elder brother calls. In this way, albeit given

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<sup>459</sup> Anecdotally, this is fitting with contemporary Middle Eastern notions of family. In LaHurd’s interview with 5 Arab women about this parable, contrary to models that present the structure of the Middle Eastern household in strict terms of honor and shame, these Christian Arab women affirmed, “when asked whether any part of the father’s behavior was unexpected in the light of their experience of the Middle Eastern family, all answered negatively and provided stories about how the family serves as location of unconditional care” (259).

the disparities of slavery and status that cannot and should not be ignored, the young slave is also extended by the parable a place in the household of God.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, these five narratives—one healing, two resuscitations, one exorcism, and one reconciliation—represent far more than individual testimonies to the presence of children in Luke’s gospel account or the receipt by such children of Jesus’ ministrations. Rather, these narratives tell of this and much more. This string of stories, largely within the broader section of Luke’s gospel dealing with the restoration to God of the lost, form a narrative pattern by which one experiences time and time again through very different circumstances and very different children the extent of God’s inclusive and restorative grace.

Children are not simply rhetorical shorthand for humility or innocence to the Lukan author. Each child who experiences restoration at the word of Jesus in these narratives is a distinct individual. Their accounts are highlighted in the text among the many children whom Jesus healed who are not mentioned explicitly (cf. Lk 4:40-41) in order to illustrate the breadth and depth of the restoration and renewal that God is bringing about through Jesus. Recall the words of angel Gabriel’s prophecy about John to Zechariah, “With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:17). Through Jesus, children together with their parents experience restoration.

In Luke’s theology, the Lord has come to bring about a Kingdom that reaches out to the outcast and celebrates the return of the lost. Although in all but one of these accounts of restoration the voices of the children themselves have not been preserved, the power of Jesus’ intervention for them remains. Jesus’ actions are thus to be understood, as Horn and Martens

remind us, “not simply for the sake of the parents, but for the children’s own well-being.”<sup>460</sup>

Through Jesus, children are included in the restoration that God is bringing into the world.<sup>461</sup>

Such inclusion of children in the ancient world was not, of course, unique to Jesus or to Christianity.<sup>462</sup> The concern and action on behalf of children by the adult members of their household, both Jewish and Gentile, illustrate the valued place that children held as a part of their communities and their families. Horn and Martens write,

In all of these cases, Jesus acted for a child on behalf of family or friends; the value of the child for the grieving parents was clear: these were not lesser beings, but loved and integral members of the family. In their sickness, the vulnerability of the children was not only increased, but also extended to their parents; it was to the combined vulnerability of the parent and child that Jesus was shown to have responded.<sup>463</sup>

The message that emerges from attention to child characters in Luke’s gospel, then, is neither one that demands of adults a caricatured “child-like” response to Christ nor one of Christian moral superiority with regard to Christ’s response to children. Instead, through Jesus’ encounter and interaction with these children, Luke includes them within a broader narrative of restoration and grace that brings hope to the lost and renewal to the marginalized and afflicted.

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<sup>460</sup> Horn & Martens, 93.

<sup>461</sup> This is not intended to reflect an idealistic vision that ignores the pronouncements of judgment and division that Jesus brings. These are dealt with elsewhere in Ch 2 with relation to children’s inclusion in God’s judgment and Ch 4 with relation to the Lukan costs of discipleship for all Jesus’ followers, inclusive of children. However, it should not be lost on the reader that Jesus’ mission is not division for the sake of division, but rather, for the sake of a broader restoration in the household of God (cf. Lk 15:11-32).

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Chapter 2 on the welcome and inclusion of children in the first-century Roman and Jewish world.

<sup>463</sup> Horn & Martens, 93-94.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHILD DISCIPLES AS COMPANIONS OF JESUS

*“If there are no small children, there will be no disciples;  
If there are no disciples, there will be no sages;  
If there are no sages, there will be no Torah;  
If there is no Torah, there will be no synagogues and academies;  
If there are no synagogues and academies, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will no longer allow  
His Presence to dwell in this world.”*

- Leviticus Rabbah<sup>464</sup>

#### Introduction

Children and their causes are often touted within Christianity as important with the rationale that children are “the future of the church.” Lee Levine’s citation of the Leviticus Rabbah (above) implies a similar interpretation of the ancient text, with the insertion of the word “[future]” in front of the term “disciples” in the first line. This, however, is not the only way to understand the relationship of children to religion—either in first-century Judaism or twenty-first-century Christianity. At the heart of this study is the contention that children are not merely the future of the church; children *are* the church. Or, at least, children are *as much* a part of the church as any other demographic group.

The apostle Paul asserts that every believer, or disciple, is as much a part of the body of Christ as any other individual member (cf. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8). The open question, of course, remains whether for Paul and the early Church children were considered to be disciples, or members of Christ’s body, in the first place. While the biblical texts can be read in a number of ways, this chapter demonstrates that the inclusion of children as disciples in Luke’s gospel account is a plausible and legitimate way to read the text and, indeed, holds value for the sake of

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<sup>464</sup> Leviticus Rabbah 11.7 (p. 230) cited in Levine, 404.

child disciples in the church today.

Participation in Jesus' earthly ministry, of course, would not yet have been referred to as being a part of the "body of Christ" in the gospel accounts. The closest parallel to this later Pauline language comes when Jesus' disciples are invited to partake of Christ's body, given for them, as they share Jesus' last supper with him (Lk 22:19).<sup>465</sup> Rather, these first followers of Jesus were identified not by their membership in Christ's body, but rather by their physical presence with him (σὺν αὐτῷ)—following Jesus and participating in a shared proclamation of the advent of the Kingdom of God. This, for Luke, is what it means to be a disciple. Such a definition contrasts with the conflation of the category of disciples (οἱ μαθηταὶ) with the special status of the Twelve (Jesus' inner circle) as described in Matthew and Mark and draws a wide net of who is intended by the Lukan use of the word "disciple".

In Luke, a broad inclusivity among Jesus' disciples is clear from the first mention of the twelve by name, at which point Luke Jesus describes Jesus as addressing "a great crowd of his disciples" (ὄχλος πολλὸς μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, Lk 6:17) from among whom he has just selected twelve, "whom he also named apostles" (οὓς καὶ ὠνόμασεν ἀποστόλους, Lk 6:13). This inclusive definition of discipleship as a larger group among whom the twelve apostles are a part is carried throughout Luke, magnified upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem with his disciples accompanying him, Luke describes "the whole multitude of disciples" (τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν) as praising Jesus (Lk 19:37), after two of the disciples are sent ahead to prepare the way for them (Lk 19:29ff). So too, Luke's association of the disciples with a large group or community is assumed in Acts when "the twelve called

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<sup>465</sup> Although discipleship has never been understood as limited to those who partook in this Last Supper (see as early as the first chapter of Acts), it will be later argued that the presence and participation of children together with Jesus even at this pivotal event in his ministry should not be precluded.



together the whole community of the disciples” (προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν, Acts 6:2a).

From the beginning to the end of Jesus’ ministry, the disciples are thus understood by Luke as a large group accompanying Jesus while he is on earth and even continuing to increase after his ascension (cf. Acts 6:7; 14:21), from among whom Jesus occasionally selects particular representatives for specific tasks. The role of Jesus’ disciples in Luke’s gospel overlaps with, while remaining distinct from, the apostleship of the twelve as Jesus’ inner circle of followers.

While Luke’s Jesus clarifies the specific responsibilities of discipleship at particular points, there are other points when it is clear that Jesus refers to people as disciples who are not yet living up to the term as he has defined it. Hence, while Jesus twice defines his family, or those serving God’s Kingdom, as “those who hear the word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21; 11:28),<sup>466</sup> his disciples still fail to “hear” with the sense of understanding (e.g. Lk 9:43-45) and “do” the work of God without stumbling (e.g. Lk 9:37-42).

Likewise, while Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 14:25-26, cf. v. 33), and again, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple,” (Lk 14:27), his disciples—even Peter—fail to follow him to the cross (Lk 22:31-34, 54-62). Therefore, the broadest definition of Jesus’ disciples as portrayed by Luke seems most simply to be that Jesus’ disciples are those who follow, or accompany Jesus. They are the ones who are with Jesus along his way—listening, though not always healing and striving, though not always succeeding to do the word of God that Jesus proclaims.

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<sup>466</sup> This program for discipleship is then further fleshed out in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Lk 8:1-15), which describes four kinds of people, affirming those who both hear and respond to the word of God as those who follow the will of Jesus.

In relation to children this means several things. First, Luke's broad definition of discipleship leaves room for the presence of children not just among the crowds who hear Jesus' teachings and receive healing and restoration through Jesus' word,<sup>467</sup> but indeed among the close followers—the disciples of Jesus themselves. Second, in order to determine whether the category of disciple could or should be applied to children, Luke gives us three criteria to consider: accompaniment, hearing, and doing the word of God.<sup>468</sup>

Moreover, each of these criteria, particularly the latter two, are presented by Luke as a work in progress for Jesus' disciples rather than as immediate and unconditional demands that are immediately met.<sup>469</sup> Therefore, in as much as children in Luke's gospel can be seen to meet, or more accurately be striving to meet, these criteria, such children can and, indeed, for the sake of the Church, ought to be understood as a part of those named disciples who accompanied Jesus in his earthly ministry.

In this chapter, I explore the first criterion of accompaniment and its application to children both implicit and explicit in Luke's narrative in turn, setting the stage for a more thorough application of the latter two criteria to children in chapter 5.

### **Accompanying Jesus as a Criterion for Discipleship**

Beginning with the call of Simon, James, and John in Luke 5:1-11, the reader is aware that there are men who have "left everything and followed" Jesus (Lk 5:11). These are the men

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<sup>467</sup> See chapters 1 and 2 on the inclusion and restoration of children in Jesus' ministry for a detailed support of this claim.

<sup>468</sup> This last category of "doing" subsumes the more specific instructions of abnegation in 14:26-33, as will be demonstrated later on.

<sup>469</sup> As will be seen in the analyses that follow, even the twelve apostles ultimately fall short of the demands of discipleship by the end of the Lukan gospel (cf. Lk 22:54-62); nevertheless, by the beginning of Acts this term is picked up again as a designation of all except Judas Iscariot (Acts 6:1; cf. also Acts 1:15-26).

whom the contemporary reader generally associates with disciples; however, the first reference to Jesus' companions as "disciples" does not occur until later at 5:30 (τοὺς μαθητὰς). Even then, the term does not initially come from Jesus or the Lukan narrator directly. Instead, the narrator employs the label "disciples" in reference to the scribes and the Pharisees' complaint against Jesus (5:30). Jesus then compares his companions to their own disciples and those of John the Baptist (5:33) as like communities who engage in different practices.

Although the term "disciple" later comes to take on special meaning within some Christian circles and is often associated with Jesus' inner circle of twelve (including Simon, James, and John), for the Pharisees and John the Baptist, the term consistently refers to the broader group of people associated with their particular set of views.<sup>470</sup> Thus, Luke never distinguishes an inner circle from among the broader group associated with John in the gospel account. Reference to Jesus' disciples by the Pharisees, then, should be assumed to have such a broad group in mind. Indeed, since Jesus has not yet formed the inner group of twelve, this is the only logical meaning.

After this point in the narrative, the designation of disciples is picked up by the narrator again in Luke 6:1 as a general designation for those who are with Jesus. Throughout the rest of the narrative, the term disciple is used frequently to designate the large group of people accompanying Jesus in his ministry,<sup>471</sup> particularly as the direct recipients of certain teachings.<sup>472</sup> Moreover, not only is Luke's discipleship community larger than the twelve named apostles of 6:12-16, but the narrative also clearly acknowledges its inclusion of women. Such inclusion is especially evident in 14:26-33; 19:37 and Jesus' teaching in Luke 9:18-27, which Luke 24:6-8

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<sup>470</sup> Cf. BDAG, 609.

<sup>471</sup> Lk 6:13, 17; 7:11; 9:14; and 19:37.

<sup>472</sup> Lk 6:20; 9:18, 43; 10:22-23; 11:1; 12:1, 22; 16:1; 17:1, 22; 20:45; and 22:39, 45.

confirms that the women in Luke 8.1-3 were privy to. That this group includes both men and women is made clear when Mary, Joanna, and the other women are said to have “remembered” (24.6-10) what Jesus said to the disciples in 9.18-22.<sup>473</sup> Later, in Acts 9:36 Tabitha is also directly named as a disciple (μαθήτρια).

The manner in which the Lukan author depicts the transition of the community between Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension helps to illustrate the centrality of accompaniment as a criterion of Lukan discipleship both in the gospel and, carried over by means of the Holy Spirit, in the Acts of the Apostles as well.

Up until Jesus’ arrest at Gethsemane, the disciples are portrayed as being almost continually with Jesus. They follow Jesus in his travels through and away from Galilee, near to him also in his private moments (Lk 9:18; 10:23; 11:1; 22:39, 45). Even when they are not directly named, the narrator assumes the disciples’ presence with Jesus. Thus, the narrator returns Jesus’ attention easily to the disciples without noting where they have come from after significant narrative gaps, such as when Jesus addresses his disciples in the midst of a crowd in 12:1, after they have not been formally named as a group since one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray at a different location in 11:1.

However, from the moment of Jesus’ arrest, the disciples as a group are noticeably absent from Luke’s narrative. While several known disciples and apostles are mentioned by name or in smaller groupings, such as “the women” from Galilee (23:49, 55; 24:22) or “the eleven” (24:9,

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<sup>473</sup> Esther deBoer, “The Lukan Mary Magdalene and the Other Women Following Jesus” in *Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002) 145. The initial ambiguity of 9:18-22 has been attributed to the literary device of prolepsis – waiting to reveal information until later in the narrative for dramatic effect. However, in light of my understanding of Luke 8.1-3 as a summary statement, described below, I suggest that it is more likely that a specific reference would have been unnecessary, since from Luke 8.1-3 on Mary and Joanna would have been assumed to be with this group.

33), the community as a whole is referenced only in relation to one another (e.g. “the eleven and the rest,” 24:9; “some women of our group,” 24:22; “the eleven and their companions,” 24:33) or simply as Jesus’ acquaintances (πάντες οἱ γνωστοὶ αὐτῷ lit. “all those who had known him,” 23:49). Indeed, even after Jesus’ ascension, accompaniment becomes a key measure of status, if not exclusivity, in the community of believers, such that a replacement for Judas among the apostles is selected from among “one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21).

Nevertheless, while Luke almost immediately resumes use of the term “apostles” (ἀποστόλοις) in Acts 1:2 to designate the twelve, he continues to associate them with the larger community of Jesus’ followers. Such association is made by means of both relation and proximity. Luke writes that the apostles were “together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers” (Acts 1:14) and that “Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons),” (Acts 1:15). Similarly, he describes Judas as “numbered among us” (Acts 1:16-17) and recounts that the believers “were altogether in one place” until after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff). In each case, before the coming of the Holy Spirit the sub-group of apostles are grouped together with the larger community of believers—a continuation of the disciples of Luke’s gospel account.

Following the giving of the Holy Spirit, Acts tells us that “about three thousand persons were added” to the community who had accompanied Jesus (2:41) and that this group continued to grow in “great numbers of both men and women” (5:14). That this group of believers is the same community previously identified as the disciples is made clear in 6:1-2 when “the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples.” That the qualification of accompaniment

has now been extended to the whole community of those who believe in Jesus as the Christ is further affirmed throughout the rest of the narrative (Acts 9:26; 15:10; 19:1, 8; 21:16).

Significantly, then, the term disciple is extended throughout both Luke's gospel and Acts of the Apostles to all of those who live in relationship with one another for the sake of Jesus' mission—the proclamation and embodiment of the Word of God in the world.

### **Children Among Jesus' Companions**

As we have already seen in Chapter 2, children, while rarely mentioned in ancient texts, were plentiful in the public sphere of the first-century world. Thus, although the Lukan narrative obscures them, children can and should be assumed to have been an ample part of the crowds and households among whom Jesus moved and taught. In this sense, there are, of course, children present “with” Jesus throughout the Lukan narrative.

However, the Lukan author (sometimes more clearly than at others) consistently distinguishes between the “crowds” (οἱ ὄχλοι) of people who follow Jesus and the community of his “disciples” (οἱ μαθηταὶ) who are also with him.<sup>474</sup> In light of this, Rosalie Ryan infers that to be “with Jesus” in these terms “means much more than physical presence.”<sup>475</sup> As “a technical expression of discipleship (8:28; 9:18; 22:56),”<sup>476</sup> to be “with Jesus” means to accompany him in his proclamation and in his mission. Barbara Reid elaborates,

Throughout his public ministry Jesus is portrayed not as a lone itinerant prophet, but rather as one who is surrounded by a community of disciples. Accordingly, the life of his disciples is life together in community, characterized by corporate mission, shared decision-making, accountability to one another, networking

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<sup>474</sup> Lk 7:11; 8:9, 22-40; 9:14-16, 18, 37-45; 12:1-13, 41; 14:25-33; 18:15; 19:37-40; 20:45.

<sup>475</sup> Rosalie Ryan, “The Women From Galilee and Discipleship in Luke” in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 15:2 (1985) 57.

<sup>476</sup> Cf. Brown, cited in Ryan, 57.

and hospitality among the communities, and sharing of material possessions.<sup>477</sup>

The ministry that Jesus conducts in Luke relies upon and builds a corporate community. Those who are Jesus' disciples, above everything else, are those who form a part of this community—who *accompany* him, participating given their various capacities in his ministry.

This raises the dual question of whether children can and, if so do participate together with Jesus in his ministry.<sup>478</sup> These questions I proceed to answer with reference to the call of and proximity of children to Jesus, social structure of the discipleship community, and demands of itinerancy.

#### *The Call of and Proximity of Children to Jesus*

The presence and inclusion of children among the households, crowds, and synagogues among whom Jesus moved has already established the proximity of children to Jesus in a general sense. However, at the same time, it has been noted that the status of all people in these institutions and public settings was not one of equality in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. Children were concomitantly included in the daily life and workings of their families and communities and excluded from positions of prominence, rank, and power. In fact, in many cases their very inclusion was with the intention of socializing them to pre-established adult conceptions of household and society, and thus, their bodies were simultaneously included at the

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<sup>477</sup> Barbara Reid, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2012) 38.

<sup>478</sup> Contemporary Lutheran baptismal liturgies assume such participation when the assembly greets the newly baptized, including infants, with the words, "We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share" (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006] 231).

same time that their state of *being as children* was excluded from common practice and concern.<sup>479</sup>

Therefore, the presence of children close to and even among those who followed Jesus is insufficient to warrant the claim that children themselves either believed in or acted out of their own volition to follow Jesus—thus, willfully, accompanying him. Likewise, that children were present as a point of fact does not by itself indicate that Jesus desired them to accompany him. To substantiate these claims it is necessary to consider both Jesus' call, or invitation, to children to accompany him and their subsequent responses.

To begin with, Jesus' desire for children to be among those who accompany him, as illustrated by their presence around him in a general sense, can be seen by the call that he extends to them in their specific identification as children. Joel Green explains, "For Luke, the call to discipleship is fundamentally an invitation for persons to align themselves with Jesus, and thus with God."<sup>480</sup> Luke's Jesus extends such an invitation to children at first indirectly in his instruction to his disciples to "welcome this child (παιδίον) in my name" (Lk 9:48) and then directly when he calls (προσεκαλέσατο) for the infants (βρέφη) to come to him, instructing those who would hinder them, "Let the little children (παιδιά) come to me (ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με)" (Lk 18:16). In Luke's narrative, children do not just happen to be present among Jesus and his disciples; Jesus summons them (18:16) and even places them at his side (9:48).

The meaning of the verb προσκαλέω is "to call to or notify in order to secure someone's presence" and connotes the sense of a summons or invitation.<sup>481</sup> It is used exclusively in the middle voice in the New Testament (and predominately in the LXX and other Greek literature as

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<sup>479</sup> Cf. Chapter 2, "Young Children Included in the Household of God" for a detailed support of these conclusions.

<sup>480</sup> Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 23.

<sup>481</sup> BDAG, 881.



well) with the implication of calling or summoning another person to one's self. Thus, in Luke 18, Jesus does not simply permit, but in fact, invites small children into his presence. So Bovon writes, Luke's Jesus "calls, even summons, the very small children. The verb 'call to oneself' (προσκαλέομαι) is carefully chosen and is a felicitous replacement for the banal 'say' in Mark 10:14."<sup>482</sup> Jesus' specific and personalized action both makes it clear that he is addressing the children who were being brought to him and not the objecting disciples (who are presumably already in his presence) and creates a clear and personal connection between Jesus and these children.

Moreover, for the contemporary reader, this language of "call" creates an immediate connection between Jesus' relationship with the children in Luke 18:15-17 and with the twelve apostles, many of whose call stories are individually narrated. Such a connection stems from the conception of the disciples as those most intimately connected with—accompanying—Jesus and thus those who, one infers, Jesus has called to himself. At this thematic level, emphasizing the role of proximity to Jesus, the connection is a legitimate one. However, one must be careful not to take the linguistic connection too far.

In English, "call" or invitation is frequently attached with the assembly of Jesus' first disciples, such that the subheadings of chapter 5 in the *New Interpreter's Study Bible* indicate "Jesus Calls the First Disciples" and "Jesus Calls Levi."<sup>483</sup> Such headings are typical of most mainline printings that include this convention. Nevertheless, none of the evangelists employ either the term προσκαλέω or the related προσφωνέω ("to call out, address"; in the middle voice:

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<sup>482</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 558.

<sup>483</sup> *NIB*, 1861-1862.

“to call to oneself, summon”) with relation to these accounts.<sup>484</sup> Rather, the call is more implicit, manifested in individual disciples’ actions and response. Thus, Luke describes Jesus as telling Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be called fishers of people” (Lk 5:10), after which Simon, James, and John “left everything and followed him” (5:11). Likewise, though in a somewhat more direct manner, Luke’s Jesus says (ἔϊπεν) to Levi, “Follow me,” (5:27) and “he got up, left everything, and followed him” (5:28). In each instance, then, the focus is not so much on a specific verb of vocation, but rather on the invitation of Jesus extended in various forms (declaration in 5:10; summons in 5:27; call in 8:16) followed by an affirmative response by the individuals to whom it is directed.

The children in Luke 18:15-17 can be understood to fit into this tradition of call to discipleship, then, in so much as they respond positively to Jesus’ invitation. While the responses of the disciples in Luke 5:11 and 5:28 are clearly narrated, in chapter 18 Luke leaves his audience to fill in the gap.<sup>485</sup> While it is possible to thus assume that these children never actually continue toward Jesus after the disciples’ initial reproach, this seems unlikely given Jesus’ subsequent use of children as a positive example of discipleship following his personal invitation. Jesus states, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little

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<sup>484</sup> Matthew and Mark do both use the term προσκαλουμαι in connection with Jesus’ calling to himself and subsequently naming and sending the twelve disciples / apostles (Matt 10:1; Mk 3:13), where Luke uses προσφωνέω in 6:13. However, given the function of each verb more in terms of summons than vocation—a meaning that is nowhere specifically attached to either verb in the gospel accounts—such use serves neither to add or detract from the argument that the Lukan author portrays Jesus in Lk 18:15-17 as inviting young children into his presence.

<sup>485</sup> A gap which, for at least some of Luke’s audience may have been/be filled by intertextual knowledge of Mark’s account, which states, “And he [Jesus] took them [the children] up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them” (Mk 10:16) or similarly, Matthew 19:15: “And he [Jesus] laid his hands on them [the children] and went on his way.” Notably, however, the fact that Luke does not send Jesus immediately away from the children following this incident suggests a stronger picture of child accompaniment than does its Matthean parallel, despite Matthew’s more direct reference to Jesus touching the children.

child will never enter it” (18:17). Since it seems unlikely that Jesus would suggest that the proper way to receive the kingdom of God is by, in fact, shying away from it, it can be inferred that following Jesus’ invitation, the children whom he has beckoned do in fact draw near to him—an action more explicitly stated in both Mark and Matthew’s accounts (Mk 10:16; Matt 19:15).

Moreover, in terms of volition, it is notable that by not narrating the children’s approach as either directed by Jesus or their caregivers, the Lukan author leaves room for the willful action of these children themselves to come to Jesus. That such a response is anticipated is implied by the placement of children (παῖδιά) as the main subject of the verb in v. 16.<sup>486</sup> It is these children, not himself, his disciples, or any other adult, whom Jesus invites into action. Indeed, these children respond in such an appropriate way that Jesus uplifts them as examples for how everyone ought to behave when approaching the mission and ministry of God’s Kingdom.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> This represents a shift from the use of the term βρέφη in v. 15. As noted in Chapter 1, βρέφη is an age specific term that, while primarily culturally determined, reaches its upward limit in the literature around the age of four (around the age that most children would be expected to have been weaned). As such, despite the best contemporary English translation as “infants,” this is misleading in the sense that many of these “infants” need not be pictured as babes in arms, unable to approach Jesus of their own volition, but rather could just as easily have been toddlers or even small children more than able to walk and respond for themselves. Nevertheless, the lower limit of this age category (actually extending to children within the womb, e.g. Lk 1:41, 44) does present some difficulty in a reading that assumes child led action. Here sensitivity toward the specific physical action of movement toward Jesus must be tempered with Luke’s literary notion of the ability of even such young infants to respond to Jesus (Lk 1:39-45) alongside of findings among contemporary child psychologists that increasingly place the age of volition and even moral reasoning at the very start of life (cf. Paul Bloom, “The Moral Life of Babies,” in *New York Times*, 5 May 2010).

<sup>487</sup> Bovon’s lengthy analysis of the verbs in Luke’s text illustrate this point: “The verb ‘let’ (ἄφετε) blows a wind of freedom that excludes any constraint. ‘Come to me’ is an expression rooted in sapiential literature that Luke had already applied to Jesus (6:47). ‘Come to him’ or ‘go to him’ is a personalized manner of approaching God, turning away from one’s egocentric way of living, subscribing to the Word, and practicing repentance/conversion (μετάνοια). Obedience here means the path of following: ‘principles’ are ruled out in favor of relations of person (‘you’) to person (‘me’). Life is understood as a walk; religion, as a movement” (*Luke 2*, 559).

The little children in Luke’s gospel are not only allowed to respond to Jesus, but it is reasonable to infer from the text that their response is one of approaching Jesus, subscribing to his Word, and accompanying him on his path of ministry. Jesus invites the children in Luke 18:15-17 to accompany him in discipleship and, at least some of them, follow.

The connection between children as exemplars of discipleship, however, begins in Luke’s narrative much earlier than this. In Luke 9:48, the child whom Jesus places alongside himself is both signaled out in terms of his proximity to Jesus, as one accompanying him, and at the same time, assumed to have been there all along. As Bovon notes, “The subject [of the discussion in 9:46] was who would be the greatest among the disciples, not who would be greater than the disciples, as the answer in v. 48b finally makes clear.”<sup>488</sup>

In the context, the child (παιδίον) whom Jesus draws to his side is meant to illustrate “the least among all of you” (v. 48b), thus at the same time affirming this child as a disciple—accompanying both Jesus and those in the dispute—and making this child representative of what it means to be an ideal disciple—to be great (v. 48b).<sup>489</sup> Although an active response of this child is not recorded, Jesus’ attention to him nevertheless sets the scene for the children in Luke 18:15-17 to act as active examples of discipleship. Moreover, in each case, it is clear that the inclusion of children among Jesus’ followers in both instances reflects their inclusion *qua* children.

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<sup>488</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 395.

<sup>489</sup> Similarly, cf. Carter on the significance of this passage in Matthew, although in Luke the language of call is omitted in favor of Jesus’ direct action of embracing a child assumed already to be among the group. Carter writes: “The instruction about discipleship begins when the audience is told that Jesus ‘called’ a child to him. The verb προσκαλέω is employed in 10.1 in the call of the twelve disciples (so also 15.32; 20.25). The context of the call (the question about being the greatest in the kingdom) explicitly links the child, discipleship, and the kingdom; in responding to Jesus’ call, the child represents the starting point for all discipleship” (*Households and Discipleship*, 96).

Children are not welcomed into this group of followers in hopes that they will be socialized according to the activities of their adult companions, but rather, for the sake of their already active and valid participation in Jesus' ministry in their own right. Indeed, in a typical Lukan reversal, the adults are instructed to welcome these children (Lk 9:48a) and receive the kingdom as a little child (18:17), in fact socializing themselves according to the manner of their child companions instead. This theme can also be read in Jesus' warning to his disciples in 17:2: "It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble." The term for "these little ones" (τῶν μικρῶν τούτων), while not exclusively reserved for children, has been seen to apply to them.

In Luke 17, Jesus' concern seems to express the possibility that the "cause of stumbling" represents those in community causing others among them to sin. In the immediate context, following Jesus' response to the Pharisees, Jesus' words can be read as both a rebuke of the Pharisees as being guilty of such action, and a warning to the disciples not to be like the Pharisees. So Bovon concludes, "This presupposes the setting of a community: the disciples (perhaps considered as ministers) shock other believers (called 'little ones' in v. 2) by their scandalous behavior; by taking advantage of their power, embezzling funds, betraying conjugal fidelity, giving up serving God alone, and so on."<sup>490</sup> However, while the warning certainly calls for a community of believers (those who are accompanying Jesus) as its setting, Bovon's identification of "disciples" as ministers and "other believers" as little ones goes against the picture of discipleship in the rest of Luke's gospel.

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<sup>490</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 494.

If this were the intent, it would have been better for Jesus to address his lesson to the “apostles” rather than the “disciples” in v. 1. Instead, the term “little ones” more appropriately looks back to Luke’s reference to a child as one of “the least among you” in 9:48 and turns the disciples’ attention to the dangers inherent in the socialization of the young. Consequently, one can read Jesus’ lesson as an instruction for the adult disciples to be cautious that they not cause their younger counterparts (and those who seek to emulate them by “being the least”) to stumble from the right path they are already following by training them according to the adult standards of the world instead.

While it is dangerous to make broad generalizations about any group of people that connote “all” behave or behaved in a uniform way, it is nevertheless possible to at least state that some children within Luke’s narrative can be read as having been called into accompaniment by and responding to Jesus in such a way that bespeaks discipleship. What is even more radical is the purpose of such inclusion. Luke’s inclusion of children as disciples contrasts with the typical Greco-Roman inclusion of children in public and religious rituals for the purposes of socialization intent on forming children into adults. Instead, Luke places value on what these children might bring to the community *as* children, indeed even forming or re-forming adult disciples in the process.

Such a reversal of common expectations is in line with Luke’s new conception of God’s household and what it means to be in community with one another as depicted throughout Luke-Acts. Cornelia Horn and John Martens write,

The Gospel material stresses the priority of following Jesus and discourages familial life in the light of the eschaton. Jesus permits children among his followers, even if it means turning families and family relationships upside down. Included in the call to follow were those very children about whom Jesus had said to his

disciple,s ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me’ (Mk 9:37; Mt 18:5; cf. Lk 9:48).<sup>491</sup>

The life of discipleship may not be an easy life for youth and small children, but it is one to which Jesus calls them and to which at least some children in Luke’s account willingly and actively respond.

### *The Demands of Itinerancy*

The most demanding life of discipleship for both children and adults in Luke’s gospel was that of itinerancy. For Luke, this is one among two types of discipleship, which Destro and Pesce divide into itinerant and sedentary followers of Jesus.<sup>492</sup> While discipleship takes on a narrower definition in some of the other accounts, Luke’s Jesus identifies his family and, one can infer, his disciples, quite broadly with those who hear the word of God and do it (8:19-21; 11:27-28). Thus, itinerancy, while the most highlighted way of performing God’s will in Luke’s gospel, is not the only option that Luke presents. Illuminating Luke’s portrayal of sedentary disciples as well, Destro and Pesce observe, “Jesus and his movement need the household structure because they have to find somewhere to lodge.”<sup>493</sup> They thereby conclude, upon analysis of Luke’s household parables, that Jesus has both itinerant followers *and* “sedentary followers who have to open up their houses.”<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Horn & Martens, 266.

<sup>492</sup> Destro and Pesce, 232.

<sup>493</sup> Destro and Pesce, 226.

<sup>494</sup> Destro and Pesce, 232. Nevertheless, following their initial dismissal of the role of young children and adolescents in Jesus’ discipleship movement, Destro and Pesce retain this sedentary role of hospitality for householders—the *pater familias*—as representatives of the older generation. They write, “[W]ithin Luke’s vision, the householder or head of the family has an essential function in Jesus’ movement not because he is itinerant, but because he is the head of a host structure that is transformed according to the social and religious style of the movement” (234). Having already addressed these authors’ too easy dismissal of the youngest generation as

This sedentary life would have allowed such disciples to retain and, indeed, capitalize upon the protections of their household in ways that itinerant disciples could not. Citing the examples of Zacchaeus and the rich man and Lazarus (the latter as a counter example), Destro and Pesce maintain, “Only itinerant followers, in Luke’s view, must sell everything, whereas sympathizers may adopt a less radical attitude. This is consistent with the image of a movement that is based, at the same time, on the one hand on its more active members *leaving* the households and on the other hand, on householders *providing* hospitality.”<sup>495</sup> Sedentary disciples provide a necessary service to Jesus and his itinerant followers by supporting the new household of believers wherever they might find themselves.

While Destro and Pesce portray this largely with reference to the *pater familias* who would be able to provide familial protection, it follows that others in their household, including young children, due to their increased dependency upon such family leaders both for protection and socialization, would have followed suit. Although child disciples could not, on their own accord, open up their homes as such, their service through the routine tasks of the household remained indispensable. Thus, sedentary discipleship is a ripe avenue through which to view and investigate the role of children among Jesus’ disciples.

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a part of Jesus’ movement, I posit that the integral roles which youth and children played in the host structure of antiquity, albeit not as the head, nevertheless contributed to the successful reception of Jesus, his itinerant disciples, and the poor. Were children—both slave and free—and, for that matter, women and younger generations of men to have resisted this transformation of the system by not welcoming and providing for Jesus, his itinerant disciples, and the poor, the entire enterprise would have failed to succeed. Take for example, again, the parable of the restoration of the two sons to their father (Lk 15:11-32)—it is the servants (some likely children) who actually arrange the welcome that the father commands. Moreover, even when he shows initial resistance, the father continues, against expectations, to beckon the eldest son to participate in the celebration—in the welcoming of the younger son and subsequent transformation of the host structure. In this way, the place of children as disciples of Jesus within the sedentary household is also being transformed.

<sup>495</sup> Destro and Pesce, 230.



## 1. Children Among the Sedentary Disciples

Luke 15:11-32, touched on briefly by Destro and Pesce in defense of this category of discipleship and shown to involve multiple child characters, can thus elucidate the role of children among Jesus' itinerant disciples. In this parable of the restoration of two sons to their father, through the magnanimous invitation of the father to the eldest son to join in the celebration, Luke makes clear that the role of welcoming the lost, poor, and marginalized (in this case, the younger son) does not rest solely upon the householder, but is extended across the entire household structure—including children. Indeed, it is child slaves (παιδων, v. 26) who enact the celebration that the father declares. The successful reception of Jesus and his itinerant followers by this sedentary population would have been effectually impossible without the participation of the young.<sup>496</sup>

Luke's inclusion of such children in Jesus' discipleship community on account of their association with Christian households has long been argued by proponents of infant baptism in relation to texts that describe the baptism of entire households.<sup>497</sup> To the extent that such

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<sup>496</sup> This, however, raises serious questions about the difference between participation by personal assent or by power driven coercion. Given the heavy role of the household, as represented by the will of the *pater familias*, in socializing children (both slave and free) it is difficult if not impossible to entirely separate these two motives. As a child was socialized in the first-century atmosphere, the will of the *pater familias* became his or her will. Nevertheless, characters such as the eldest son in Luke's parable suggest that this was not always the case. Indeed, childhood as a transitional moment in development may offer the largest window into social resistance at the household level available in antiquity. The dissent of children who were still learning the ways of the household and their society would have been excused in ways that were not possible for adults (cf. Reidar Aasgaard on the "cultural challenging" attributed to the boy Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, 79-84). While such questions will be taken up in the concluding chapter as a path forward both for research and the Christian church, for now the conflation of these two motives—free and coerced—must remain in tension as an opportunity to see the lived role of children within Jesus' discipleship community.

<sup>497</sup> Acts 10:24-48; 16:14, 32; cf. also 1 Cor 1:16-18; 16:15-16; cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, trans. David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

inclusion of children in the later Christian community is accepted in relation to their role in the οἶκος, it is reasonable to read a similar inclusion among the earliest followers of Jesus due to their same household positioning. Moreover, as happened through infant baptism, the preference of these child disciples in sedentary households would have promoted the growth and perpetuation of the Lukan community.

## 2. Children Among the Itinerant Disciples

Notwithstanding the potential room for reclaiming the place of children in these household narratives, the primary group of disciples to whom Jesus' addresses himself in Luke's gospel is, by virtue of proximity, those disciples who have followed Jesus from Galilee and beyond. To exclude children from this group, even while including them, as they almost certainly were, among the sedentary followers of Jesus, would be to exclude them from a significant experience of and participation in Jesus' ministry as relayed by Luke and limit (re)construction of their place and role, given the nature of Luke's text as, largely, a travel narrative.

Moreover, if the absence of children among the itinerant disciples of Luke's account continues to be assumed despite an allowance for their presence among sedentary household disciples, the harmful neglect caused by the metaphorization and allegorization of children within Luke's travel account is merely softened at best. Only when the lived realities of children are read as holistically a part of Jesus' mission and ministry—both sedentary and itinerant—can

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1960); Arthur Yates, *Why Baptize Infants? A Study of the Biblical, Traditional, and Theological Evidence* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1993).

we move beyond such adultist approaches and thus read the welcome extended to children in texts such as Luke 18:15-17 truly in a liberating and empowering way.<sup>498</sup>

Therefore, while acknowledging the existence of children and youth among Luke's sedentary disciples of Jesus, it remains necessary to consider the feasibility of their participation among the itinerant disciples of Jesus as well. To do so both moves children from hapless victims of the family division described in Luke 12:49-53 and 14:25-26 to active participants in it for the sake of the gospel. Moreover, it looks beyond mere consideration of a child's smallness as a vulnerability and hindrance within an itinerant lifestyle to a holistic view of children as children that, while not overlooking their particular needs and dependencies, at the same time sees children for their potential to enrich the itinerant community in their own right.

To begin with, the agency of itinerant child disciples in Luke's gospel who *choose* to follow Jesus has been illustrated in the above discussion of children's response to Jesus' call in Luke 18:15-17. A. James Murphy disputes this assumption on the grounds that Jesus' statements about leaving family and hating *even sons and daughters* prove disruptive to children left in a would-be [adult] disciple's wake. He writes, "I contend that the inclusiveness of children among the disciples and in the kingdom of God by the Synoptic authors is tempered by images of

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<sup>498</sup> To this end, I concur with Murphy's assessment that Luke's challenge to the marginal status of children must be read together with "the special challenges for non-adult children presented by respective characterizations of children against sayings relativizing family ties and the lifestyle indicative of the radical call to discipleship of the broader Synoptic narratives" (33). It is not enough simply to paint a rhetorically pleasing picture of Jesus blessing the children without examining the lived experience that such children would have necessarily had in light of the Jesus movement. Murphy's monograph addresses this lacuna across the three synoptic narratives, concluding that, despite their eschatological portrait of child inclusion, the reality of such children, when brought out of the shadows of the text, suggests a much more precarious reception. In this section, I accept Murphy's challenge to take "seriously the plight of 'real' children in the temporal world of the text" and "deliberately separate the plight of temporal families from the eschatological promises of the authors"—refusing "to sacrifice real children for eschatological or metaphorical ones in the narrative" (135).

household division and alienation of children as a consequence of Jesus' eschatological gathering of followers."<sup>499</sup> Indeed, if the history of the early Church is any indication, Luke's itinerant disciples can be plausibly assumed to have left many family members—including non-adult children in their wake.<sup>500</sup> Nevertheless, it is equally reasonable to assume that in Luke's vision, such non-adult children themselves were, in some cases, the cause of such division.

The terms "sons" and "daughters" or "children" (παῖδια) themselves do not indicate age so much as relationship and are, in fact, two among a whole list of relational identities disrupted by a life of discipleship.<sup>501</sup> In Peter's response to Jesus in Luke 18:28-30, Destro and Pesce correctly note, "Luke puts forward a series of alternative cases that defines the intermediate generation: he who abandons his wife, or his brothers or else parents or children."<sup>502</sup> However, once again, their focus is too narrow. On account of the itinerant disciples' self-described abandonment of either parents or children, Destro and Pesce argue that such disciples must come from an intermediate generation with both living parents and (non-adult) children to leave behind.

However, the either/or character of this statement also leaves room for the possibility that while some disciples fit into this intermediate category, other (older) disciples may have had solely children to leave behind and younger (non-adult) disciples correspondingly may have had solely parents to leave behind. Horn and Martens agree: "It is not clear whether this [leaving behind of family] means that all of [the disciples] were married and had children, or whether it

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<sup>499</sup> Murphy, 103.

<sup>500</sup> Cf. the lives of such early Christian martyrs as Perpetua, Felicitas, and Melania the Elder in *Lives of Christian Women*, trans. and ed. by Carolinne White (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>501</sup> Destro and Pesce's review of Luke's household structure, detailed below, confirms a general understanding of the terms "sons and daughters" within Greco-Roman society in which such filial terms describe each generation beneath the *pater familias*—including both physiological children and their grown parents when, quite typically, a grandfather remains alive.

<sup>502</sup> Destro and Pesce, 221-222.

means that a widowed mother may have followed her young son on the road in his itinerant ministry. This, too, would be a ‘family.’”<sup>503</sup> The only clear affirmation in these descriptions of disruption is that for Luke’s Jesus, and indeed, across the synoptics, one’s commitment to discipleship must come before one’s personal family ties.

The use of such relational terms is thus aimed directly at those family members who would object to or stand in the way of a disciple following Jesus. This role, in fact, is less likely to apply to a young child (or any non-adult child), given their dependent and impressionable place in the family. This role would make them unlikely to forcibly exercise such an objection in relation to their caregiver. Moreover, Luke never states that *all* child-parent dyads must be separated by an affirmative response to discipleship. Given their particular dependencies, combined with the absence of any specific directive that they must be left behind, it is likely that many children responded to this call *together* with at least one of their primary caregivers.

Nevertheless, some children, just as some adult family members, were left behind—either from their own choice, the choice of their caregiver, or a combination of the two. These are the sons and daughters, of all ages, to whom Luke’s Jesus refers as those for whom the disruption must occur.<sup>504</sup> Indeed, the very fact that Luke’s Jesus describes this division in terms of disruption rather than abandonment, as assumed by Murphy,<sup>505</sup> implies a choice for the non-adult children of adult disciples as to whether or not to follow Jesus with their parents as disciples themselves.

Nevertheless, the possibility of such autonomy itself for non-adult children in the first-century Mediterranean context has been questioned by some scholars. Warren Carter answers

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<sup>503</sup> Horn and Martens, 265.

<sup>504</sup> “Clearly the discouragement of family connections applied also to children who followed Jesus, not just to adults who turned from their families” (Horn & Martens, 266).

<sup>505</sup> Cf. Murphy, 102.

this point, countering the suggestion "... that the disciples may have felt that the children were too young to make a commitment," cautioning that "the silence of the text and the difficulty of determining the age of the *παιδία* urge caution."<sup>506</sup> I go further to suggest that the relative autonomy seen in children working and playing in first-century Mediterranean culture suggests that such a commitment is in keeping with the general autonomy of children in this culture. Thus, the major cultural barrier that would have prevented non-adult children from committing to follow Jesus would not have been their youth. Rather, such children would likely have been hindered only in so much as adult children were also hindered by the overarching control of the *pater familias* when he did not also accept the call to discipleship.

Luke's Jesus addresses this break with culture required of all his disciples in his counsel about the disruption of family in 12:49-53 and 14:25-26. Hence, Murphy's objection to the inclusivity of children among Jesus' disciples—what he describes as "a bewildering gap between the *realia* of Jewish and Hellenistic-Roman society, where children could not leave their families behind to join voluntary associations like Jesus' eschatological band, and the social world conjured by the Synoptic authors"<sup>507</sup>—describes the cultural norm not only for non-adult children but also for the intermediate generation, which has been largely assumed to have made up a majority of Jesus' followers in Luke's text.<sup>508</sup> The presence of this intermediate generation among Jesus' followers in Luke is attested in the attributions given to four of the Twelve: James and John, "sons of Zebedee"; "James son of Alphaeus"; and "Judas son of James" (5:10; 6:15-16). The gap to which Murphy refers between the synoptics and surrounding culture can thus

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<sup>506</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 94, fn 1, citing Brown, 'Child', 284.

<sup>507</sup> Murphy, 114.

<sup>508</sup> Cf. Destro and Pesce.

best be understood as the very disruption that Luke owns, through the disruption sayings of Jesus, as a component of discipleship.

While many child followers behind the Lukan text can thus be accounted for as joining the discipleship band together with another family member, it remains important to note the possibility and, indeed, likelihood that at least some of these child followers—particularly as they grew older in age—would also have answered the call to follow Jesus on their own. As early as the second century, such independent discipleship of the young, while perhaps not the norm, seems to be taken for granted.

In Celsus' 2<sup>nd</sup> century description of the education of children in the Christian faith, John Barclay explains that Celsus makes plain, “Even children may be converted without the acquiescence of their parents (2<sup>nd</sup> century Celsus describes children being instructed by Christian ‘cobblers’ not to listen to their fathers).”<sup>509</sup> In addition, Barclay cites the young flute girl recorded in the *Acts of Thomas* as an example of a child who joins the itinerant fellowship of the early disciples. In this account, a Hebrew flute-girl (*auletria*) who “is presented as an associate of the young...seems to have been attracted by Thomas’s youthful beauty and joined the young married couple [for whose wedding she played] when they assumed a life of asceticism, eventually going with them to India to meet Thomas.”<sup>510</sup> Although the young girl’s age is never given, her identified association with the young in combination with “the evidence Bradley assembled on child entertainers in the ancient world,” lead Horn and Martens to conclude that “it is quite likely that this flute player still was a relatively young girl”—perhaps as young as five-years-old.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Barclay, 73.

<sup>510</sup> Horn and Martens, 181.

<sup>511</sup> Horn and Martens, 181.

In each instance that Barclay cites, children, while clearly welcomed into the fellowship of disciples, remain ancillary to the goals of the texts that contain them. In the first place, the question is one of education; in the second place, the narrative is centered on the young couple who marry and then follow Thomas into a life of asceticism. Consequently, the relative silence of ancient literature on the lives of children remains, and it is impossible from these texts to know how common or exemplary these instances of child discipleship apart from others in their families would have been in the early Christian communities.

In each case, what we can know is that these child disciples do not enter into the life of discipleship alone—even when they leave their family to do so. Instead, they follow and are instructed by other adult disciples. This is the very essence of the new family that Luke’s Jesus describes for those who leave their families for the sake of the gospel: “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’” (18:29-30).<sup>512</sup>

Disciples who leave their families on account of the disruption that their discipleship might cause are not promised a new family in the age to come, but rather, in the *present* age. This new and abundant family (including the homes where they might stay among non-itinerant disciples) is the discipleship community itself. Luke makes this clear in the beginning chapters of Acts, describing all of the things that the disciples held in common. Hence, child disciples need not worry about leaving the care and security that their previous households afforded them,

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<sup>512</sup> Cf. also Lk 21:16-19



because through their discipleship Luke effectually incorporates them into the wider family of disciples—the new household of God.<sup>513</sup>

Moreover, such agential participation of children as itinerant disciples of Jesus must not be understood as a liability, but rather, an asset to Luke’s community. Although the life of itinerancy itself was undoubtedly difficult, it is likely that some of the demands of such discipleship would have been easier for children to meet. The Roman household system that dominated the first-century ambient cultures of Luke’s gospel account valued children for their contributions to the household, but granted them no legal stake in the household itself. Rawson writes, “The law was clear that the child of a Roman marriage belonged to its father.”<sup>514</sup> As such, children—even children of the very wealthy—would have had little or no possessions to leave behind. The value of wealthy children existed in what they stood to inherit, not in what they actually possessed.<sup>515</sup> When Jesus thus describes the task of estimating one’s ability to follow through with an abandonment of personal property in Luke 14:25-33, for child disciples this would have been an easy task.

Such a point is further made when Jesus comments on the difficulty for the rich of entering the Kingdom of Heaven in Luke 18:18-24. Indeed, this text follows immediately upon Luke’s description of Jesus receiving young children, whom he cites as models for the adult disciples. It cannot be—and has not been—taken for a coincidence that this mandate of dispossession follows immediately after Jesus’ command to be like a little child in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Itinerant discipleship demands that one no longer be a slave to wealth or cling to possessions as though they were one’s source of security or social position,

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<sup>513</sup> Cf. Gundry, 160.

<sup>514</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 26.

<sup>515</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 26.

and that one give precedence to the family of God and especially to those in need. In this regard, young children—on account of their unique status within the household system—can take the lead.

In short, nothing within the social structure of the discipleship community in Luke precludes the participation of children. The interdependent and egalitarian nature of the first communities of Jesus' disciples described by Luke highlights and supports the ways in which children were already active in their individual households and communities. Luke's characterization of such a community may even suggest a model—albeit one which has been neglected by Christians throughout history—in which the place and autonomy of children within the community might even have been thought to be elevated.

#### *The Social Structure of the Discipleship Community and the Contribution of Children*

Accepting that, in Luke's narrative, Jesus calls children to accompany him in discipleship and that this call is met with a positive response, one must then (re)vision the composition and social structure of the discipleship community during Jesus' earthly ministry. Of what groups was such a community composed? How did they interact with one another? How did they interact with larger community around them? And, of course, how did children fit in? The most obvious place to begin such an inquiry, as insinuated by already-given attention in Luke's narrative to the prominence of the οἶκος, is from the point of view of the household.

Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce aptly note, “Luke's Jesus looks at the social life of his time from the point of view of the households. No section of them seems left inert or neutral to him.”<sup>516</sup> In many of Jesus' teachings and healings—as we have seen in the cases of the youth at

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<sup>516</sup> Destro and Pesce, 233. Notably, however, despite this initial insinuation of breadth of scope, Destro and Pesce almost immediately dismiss the place of the youngest generation—children,

Nain and his mother, the young servant and the centurion, the dying girl and her father Jairus, and the boy with the demon and his father—the structures and relationship of the household come to the fore.<sup>517</sup> Household, then, serves as a primary reference point (both positively and negatively) for Jesus, even as he reforms the ideal of household among the community of his disciples.

For those who follow Jesus, the new community of disciples supplants the previous households of which they each had been respectively a part. So Jesus concludes his blessings and woes directed to the “great crowd of his disciples” (Lk 6:17) and others in the crowd with the admonition, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children (υιοι) of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked” (6:35). Continuing in his Jewish tradition of identifying the Israelites as the children of God (Deut 14:1), Luke’s Jesus affirms that relationships in the Kingdom of God are not defined by biology, but rather by participation in community.<sup>518</sup>

Luke magnifies the centrality of relationships within the household of God for the present generation, however, when Jesus identifies his own family as those who hear the word of God and do it. For Luke’s Jesus, such identification was no longer tied to descent from Abraham or viewed as an eschatological promise, lived out primarily in conjunction with conventional

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addressing only the challenges that they understand Jesus to be posing to the older and intermediate generations. I take up this oversight more fully in what follows.

<sup>517</sup> For a sampling of Jesus’ teachings that employ the setting or characters of the household, cf. Lk 5:33-39; 9:57-62; 10:38-42; 11:9-13; 12:13-21, 42-48, 49-53; 13:10-17, 34-35; 14:1-6; 25-33; 15:8-10, 11-32; 16:1-13, 18; 17:7-10, 22-37; 18:18-30; 19:1-10, 11-27; 20:9-18, 27-40.

<sup>518</sup> In the Jewish community, one sign of participation in this community became circumcision (cf. Gen 17:1-27; 34:13). In his depiction of the community of Jesus’ followers, particularly after his ascension, Luke emphasizes more generally the prescription to hear (understand) and do the word of God than any particular action (cf. Acts 15:1-29).

household responsibilities. Rather, it is with relation to the imminent demands of God's Kingdom that such membership in God's household takes priority (cf. Lk 9:60).<sup>519</sup>

Thus, following shortly after Jesus' longest exposition on discipleship in Luke (the parable of the sower and its explanation [Lk 8:4-15]), Jesus is informed that his mother and brothers have come to see him (Lk 8:20); he affirms the priority of a different kind of household. While not denying a place in the new household to these members of his biological family (cf. Acts 1:14; also possibly Lk 24:10), Luke's Jesus' response makes it clear that community, indeed family, is now defined in terms of discipleship. He states, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21).<sup>520</sup>

Likewise, when a woman in the crowd calls out a blessing to "the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" (Lk 11:27), Luke's Jesus replies, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Lk 11:28). In God's household, as embodied by the discipleship community, one's own actions and response are more important than one's kinship. Turid Karlsen Seim explains, "The relationship to the word of the Lord is constitutive for the

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<sup>519</sup> Stephen Barton, in his essay, "The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Greco-Roman Traditions," in *Construction Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (New York: Routledge, 1997), persuasively shows that the demand to place religious loyalties above loyalties to household and kin "was not unprecedented in the traditions and practices of either Judaism or of the Greco-Roman world as a whole" (81). Nevertheless, the magnitude with which this relativization was felt within the Jesus movement due to the demands of itinerancy can still be said to have placed the issue of this conflict at the fore in a way that Greco-Roman and Jewish religious practices did not typically demand.

<sup>520</sup> Cf. Matt 12:46-50; Mk 3:31-35. While none of the synoptic accounts specifically exclude Jesus' mother, brothers, and even sisters (cf. diverging manuscript traditions of Mk 3:32), arguably, Luke, by omitting Jesus' direct indication of those around him, to the exclusion of the family members waiting outside, offers the most inclusive reading when it comes to locating Jesus' biological family within the new household of disciples.

family of Jesus and the community of the disciples, and transforms the obligations and relationships presupposed by the biological family.”<sup>521</sup>

While such a transformation might relativize Jesus’ relationship with Mary, it also places the power of agency in her hands (and the hands of all Jesus’ disciples) to determine the extent to which she participates in God’s household. Her membership depends not upon her reproductive capacity or a biological lottery, but rather upon God’s grace and her initiative in hearing and responding to God’s word.

Such relativization of the biological family and of women’s reproductive capacities in particular has led some feminist scholars, including Karlsen Seim, to conclude that the women who follow Jesus disavow any maternal roles or capacities. Karlsen Seim continues, “For women, this means that their reproductive functions cease, and the women who follow Jesus are portrayed precisely as women with an autonomous mobility; they do not seem to be subordinated to family obligations” (207).<sup>522</sup> The cessation of such reproductive function presumes that the women who follow Jesus, if not already childless, intend no longer to bear any (further) children of their own. In some cases, such an understanding may also lead to the assumption that the women who follow Jesus in Luke’s account, if they may be presumed to already have had young children in their household, have abandoned these children in order to do so.<sup>523</sup>

However, such conclusions are necessarily speculative. The maternal status of the women who follow Jesus in Luke’s gospel is largely left open—a literary gap for each reader to fill responsibly. However, Luke does explicitly name several of these women as mothers, such as

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<sup>521</sup> Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 207.

<sup>522</sup> Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 207.

<sup>523</sup> Murphy, 103: “...the inclusiveness of children among the disciples and in the kingdom of God by the Synoptic authors is tempered by images of household division and alienation of children as a consequence of Jesus’ eschatological gathering of followers.”

Mary the mother of Jesus (8:20-21) and Mary the Mother of James (24:10), although it is generally assumed that James, like Jesus, at this point in the narrative is grown. Nevertheless, the absence of the direct identification of young mothers in a narrative that rarely identifies women or children as a general rule should not be taken as reason enough to dismiss them from the discipleship community as a whole.

In contrast, Luke's narrative provides striking reason why such statements by Jesus about household ties being related to hearing and action rather than kinship ought not to be taken as a negation of the blessing on Jesus' mother or others in his biological family, but rather as a reorientation in terms of the source of their blessing. Mary is not blessed because she bore a special son, but rather because of her faithfulness to the word of God.<sup>524</sup> To this end, Jesus' response in Luke 11 is actually a confirmation of Elizabeth's words in Luke 1:45, "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." Mary is not "blessed among women" *because* of the "fruit of her womb" (Lk 1:42), but rather because she *believes*—with hearing ears—what had been spoken to her regarding her unborn child and *acts* accordingly. In Luke 8, then, Jesus does not exclude Mary and her children from the household of disciples, but rather, reorients the crowds' view of the means by which they might find their inclusion. Thus, Luke 8:21 and Luke 11:27 serve simultaneously as a paradigmatic definition of discipleship and an inclusive invitation into God's household.

Consequently, one should not exclude the possibility—indeed, the likelihood—that not only individuals, but also families or portions of family groups were among Jesus' disciples.

Talvikki Mattila writes,

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<sup>524</sup> Cf. F. Scott Spencer, "A Woman's Right to Choose? Mother Mary as Spirited Agent and Actor (Luke 1-2) in *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012) 55-100.

...it is possible to imagine that families were the ones following Jesus. If there were sons and mothers, it is likely that there were daughters too. In the feeding miracles in Matthew (14:21; 15:38), it is said that many men shared in these meals “to say nothing of women and children”. In the crowd following Jesus there were men, women, and children. The inner circle of disciples might have consisted of families, in which there were twelve men who afterwards were chosen as the symbolical group for the new Israel.<sup>525</sup>

In Luke, in particular, it is clear that the inner circle of twelve does not reflect the discipleship community as a whole. Even to the extent that they do, that this group may have had other family members together with them in the broader discipleship group need not be excluded.

The passage most frequently cited as evidence that these disciples left their families is Peter’s declaration in Luke 18:28. The NRSV translates this verse, “Then Peter said, ‘Look, we have left our homes and followed you.’” The NIV translates the same verse, “Peter said to him, ‘We have left all we had to follow you!’” In Greek, the word translated respectively as “our homes” and “all we had” is τὰ ἴδια, which means literally “our own things.” It is in the context not of Jesus’ statements about the divisions of family, but rather in response to Jesus’ parenthesis to the rich ruler who sought to live out all of the commandments. Jesus replied, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Lk 18:22). Thus, the things that Peter replies he and the other disciples have already left ought most closely to be associated with material belongings rather than family members.

In response to this material claim, Jesus raises the stakes and assures the disciples, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house (οἰκίαν) or wife or brothers or parents or children

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<sup>525</sup> Talvikki Mattila. “Naming the Nameless: Gender and Discipleship in Matthew’s Passion Narrative,” in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 168.

(τέκνα), for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age (ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ) and in the age to come eternal life” (18:29-30). However, this is less a confirmation that every disciple has left all of these things and people, and rather an affirmation that whatever (or whoever) they left in their previous household for the sake of the Kingdom, they have already received again in plenty in the new household of God—and, indeed, they will receive in the age of eternal life to come.

That the cost of discipleship was not the same for everyone in the community is made clear by the use of the conjunction “or” (ἢ) rather than “and” (καὶ, δὲ) in v. 29.

Relativisation of family ties, clearly demanded by Luke’s Jesus, need not be understood as abandonment of one’s family. Indeed, that all of the disciples left even all of their material things remains unlikely, given the background in Luke 8:1-3 that the women with Jesus “provided for [Jesus and the twelve apostles] out of their resources” (v. 3). What is necessary to follow Jesus, as with contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman religious associations that required sacrifice, is not that disciples abandon everything, but rather that they value God before everything else. To the extent that maintaining family ties did not conflict with Jesus’ mission, it can be expected that many disciples traveled with their family as they followed Jesus from Galilee.

The expectation of the presence of family members, especially children, among Jesus’ discipleship group is validated in Luke 11:1-13. In response to the request of one of his disciples that he teach them how to pray (v. 1), Jesus instructs his disciples both in words and illustration. First Jesus says to the disciples, “Suppose one of you has a friend (φίλον), and you go to him at midnight, and say to him, ‘Friend (Φίλε), lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine (φίλος μου) has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children (τὰ παιδιά μου) are with me in



bed; I cannot get up and give you anything” (vv. 5-8). Here, although it is not stated whether the imagined friend is a disciple or not, Luke’s Jesus describes a community of mutual concern (φιλέω) in which friends provide for one another and parents look out for their small children. Moreover, in order for such an illustration to carry the intended meaning for Jesus’ disciples, it is necessary that they understand and relate to this sort of mutual concern—both in the role of friend and in the role of parent.

That at least some of the disciples could, indeed, relate to the concerns of parental affection expressed in 11:6 is confirmed in Jesus’ next illustration. He adds, continuing to address his disciples, “Is there anyone among you who, if your child (ἐξ ὑμῶν τὸν πατέρα αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς) asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children (τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν), how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (vv. 11-13). The age of the child in vv. 11-12 is less clear; however, it may be inferred in relation both to the reference to small children (τὰ παιδιά) in v. 7 and the implicit dependence of the child, literally “son,” asking for a fish or an egg from his father (πατέρα).

More significantly, with regard to the question of family groups among Jesus’ disciples, however, is the reference to the disciples to whom Jesus addresses himself in relational terms—in the illustration, as a father and son. Furthermore, as with the first illustration, in order for this teaching to carry the intended meaning, the disciples would need to still understand and experience such a relationship in positive terms. It is not the point of the teaching to depict the heavenly Father as one who abandons his children, but rather as a parent who is affectionately concerned for the little ones under his care. Jesus’ statement implies here that at least some of the disciples themselves have children.

This is in keeping with Destro and Pesce’s description of Luke’s “typical disciple”<sup>526</sup> in light of the *logions* of Luke 12:52 and 14:26. Specifically with relation to 14:26, they write, “The *logion* supposes that the typical disciple is a male who has a father and mother, who is married with children and who has brothers and sisters.”<sup>527</sup> The broader community of Jesus’ disciples is therefore expected, in Luke, to have personal experience with parent-child relationships on either side of this dialectic, and for many of them, in the intermediate position of both parent and child.<sup>528</sup> Moreover, in order for the comparison between a loving parent and the heavenly Father

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<sup>526</sup> Note that although they define the intermediate adult male as the “typical disciple,” Destro and Pesce allow for other conceptions of the disciples, specifically with regard to the women of Lk 8:1-3. In their reading of Lk 12:52-53, Destro and Pesce note, “It [Lk 12:52-53] contains the representation, albeit hypothetical, of the conflict that may be generated when a member of the household wishes to become an itinerant disciple of Jesus. This means that, according to Luke, the disciple who follows Jesus by leaving the οἶκος may belong to different generations. They may not only be sons, but also daughters and even wives (as in fact Luke 8:1-3 emphasizes with regard to Joanna, Chuza’s wife)” (220).

<sup>527</sup> Destro and Pesce, 221; cf. also Destro and Pesce, 221: “What is worth noticing is that Luke implicitly places Jesus’ *logion* in a context of social obligations enforced by οἶκος membership (as described in the parable of the Great Supper, Luke 14:18-20). The *logion* seems to imply the rejection of an essential generational line, that links the so-called consanguineous of three generations... Luke might have said: ‘who does not hate his/her οἶκος (in other words his/her overall social position). The *logion* seems to imply not just the obligation of a clear separation, but also a radical condemnation of the normal relations within the οἶκος.”

<sup>528</sup> Destro and Pesce, while acknowledging that the “typical disciple” is not representative of the entire community of disciples (cf. fn 35 above), nevertheless maintain that among Jesus’ *itinerant* disciples—the group following him from Galilee—all of the disciples seem to be drawn from this intermediate generation. Their rationale for dismissing the itinerancy of the older “householder” generation is more detailed and moreover, not of immediate pertinence to this argument; however, their rationale for dismissing the presence of the younger—child—generation among Jesus’ itinerant disciples is worth addressing. They simply assert, “None [of Jesus’ itinerant disciples] belong to the generation of the νεανίσκοι or the παῖδες. They seem to belong to an intermediate generation of adults” (Destro and Pesce, 217). This claim is followed up on only with a brief reference to the son of the widow of Nain about whom they write, “It seems that neither the mother nor the son are disciples of Jesus. After Jesus woke him up, the young man does not show any desire to follow him, nor does Jesus ask him to, perhaps precisely because he is very young (νεανίσκος)” (Destro and Pesce, 219). However, it should be noted that in both instances Destro and Pesce qualify their conclusions with the term “it seems,” finding no substantive evidence of the absence of children among Jesus’ itinerant disciples in Luke’s gospel itself. Moreover, a review of the recorded healings in Luke’s gospel yields the conclusion that

to make sense in the way that Luke seems to intend it to, the disciples must retain a positive conception of the parent-child relationship. They would not be able to relate to God as an affectionate parent if they had all (or even most) abandoned their own children for the sake of discipleship. Instead, Jesus assumes that many disciples continue to be able to provide for their children within the discipleship community; children are thus established as a valued part of the discipleship group.

This presence is not surprising: it has already been seen in Luke 9:47, when Jesus, aware that an argument about status had arisen between the disciples, takes a little child and puts it by his side in an act of solidarity. It is again implied in the presence of children in Luke 18:15-17 whom Jesus calls to himself. As discussed in Chapter 2, the primary context of dialogue in Luke 9:43b-49 centers around Jesus and his disciples. Therefore, the child whom Jesus places by his side is most likely to have originated from amidst the community of disciples to whom Jesus

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Jesus *never* asks someone whom he has just healed to join with his group of disciples (in fact, in Lk 8:39-40 he expressly commands the man—clearly here an adult given the length of time he had lived among the tombs (v. 27)—from whom he had just cast many demons to return instead to his home after he begs to follow Jesus). Nevertheless, Lk 8:2 makes it clear that many people “who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities” did, indeed, join the group of Jesus’ itinerant followers. Although many explanations have been given for this, in particular with reference to the Gerasene demoniac and his status as a foreigner, it may be that this gap in Luke’s portrayal of the discipleship of those whom Jesus heals is intended more to emphasize the nature of God’s caring relationship with God’s children as not requiring or expecting any response in return, in contrast to the more contractual and compensatory relationships of the Roman household of that day. In any case, Luke portrays many people following Jesus whose exact moment of response is left untold; therefore, one should not exclude the possibility that the youth and his mother followed Jesus after Luke’s account of their restoration—the intended focus of the narrative—in Nain. Regardless of how a reader chooses to fill in the details of this particular experience, however, it is dangerous to take the case of one youth as demonstrative of the role of all youth and children in Jesus’ ministry. Indeed, as demonstrated above, the evidence points, to the contrary, of the presence and participation of such youth and children among the community of disciples.

addresses himself.<sup>529</sup> Yet, more to the point, in this text and even more clearly in Luke 18:15-17, children are not merely acknowledged as present in the vicinity of Jesus and his disciples, but are held up as archetypes of discipleship. By placing this child at his *side*, it has been noted that Jesus demonstrates a stance of solidarity with this child—his ministry is not simply *for* or *about* children in a paternalistic sense, it is *alongside* them.<sup>530</sup>

With reference to the parallel of Luke 18:15-17 in Matthew 19:13-15, Carter writes, “At the literal level, it affirms the importance of children in the alternative households of the kingdom. At a metaphorical level, it identifies disciples as children and children as a model for discipleship.”<sup>531</sup> Child disciples provide the ideal model for discipleship according to these texts and their synoptic parallels. Most contemporary interpretations, however, place so much emphasis on what adults might be able to draw from such a model that they miss the apparent reality that such a comparison assumes the discipleship of children themselves.

The significance of such modeling moves one from merely establishing the place of children among Jesus’ disciples to considering what it is that children as children uniquely bring to the community of disciples. James Francis, albeit primarily focusing on the metaphorical use of children in these texts, brings this contribution to light. He writes,

In the metaphorical significance of the child as an image of discipleship, whilst the NT shares a culture critique of childishness, a remarkable emphasis is placed on childlikeness whereby it is not only the role of the child to be taught by the adult but that the adult may learn lessons of faith from the child, and

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<sup>529</sup> Although, as noted in Ch. 3, the possibility remains that this child may have, in fact, been the boy from whom Jesus had previously cast a demon out of in Lk 9:37-45 (cf. Johnson, 186). If this is the case, it raises the question of whether this boy and his father may have joined with Jesus’ disciples following this incident; in any case, the context of Jesus’ address directly to his disciples at this point in the narrative remains clear (9:43b).

<sup>530</sup> Cf. Betsworth, 123-124; James L. Bailey, “Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13-16,” in *Word and World* 15:1 (Winter 1995) 63.

<sup>531</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 90.

indeed must become as a child in trustful dependency and in the discovery of God in the marginalized.<sup>532</sup>

Whereas children were traditionally valued as members of households, cultural and religious groups, and societies, as productive participants, capable of being socialized according to the dominant values, Luke's Jesus supposes something different.<sup>533</sup>

Rather than seeing children only as sponges to be taught to become adults and assist in adult tasks, the Lukan author presents children as capable of *teaching* adults. Beyond affection, service, and future potential, Luke's Jesus affirms that children *as children* have something uniquely valuable to contribute to the discipleship community. Francis names this as "trustful dependency," a theme also emphasized by Judith Gundry who writes, it is "not any particular quality of the child, but 'the child's littleness, immaturity and need of assistance, though commonly disparaged, [that] keep the way open for the fatherly love of God.'"<sup>534</sup> Both of these scholars draw attention to the gospel writers' portraits of real children as active contributors to the dialectic within the discipleship community.

Affirming the spirit in which they so bring children to the fore, I would nuance Francis' use of the word "dependency" with the term "inter-dependency." Inter-dependency better reflects the quality that both Francis and Gundry seem to describe of children, who by their nature of

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<sup>532</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 84-85.

<sup>533</sup> Here it is worth noting that, unfortunately, while the literary portrayal of children as models for discipleship suggests something unique, this does not seem to have played out historically in a significantly different treatment of young children among early Christians in relation to their Jewish and Roman counterparts. Francis writes, "The welcome by Jesus of children in the Synoptic Gospel stories and the image of the child associated with receiving and entering the kingdom did not themselves necessarily change or raise the profile of children in the early Church. On the other hand the metaphorical meaning of the child in Jesus' teaching is strong in contributing to a particular perspective in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and which took root in strengthening discipleship in the early Church in a valuing of the least" (*Adults as Children*, 22).

<sup>534</sup> Gundry, 152.

littleness and immaturity, continue to need assistance from their adult counterparts, while at the same time, being portrayed by the synoptic authors as *giving* assistance to these adults by way of modeling a posture of discipleship. So Carter writes,

The metaphor underlines that discipleship is an egalitarian existence. All disciples are children. In the Matthean household code, in contrast to the Aristotelian tradition, there is no reference to the duties of parents. In the prevailing household organization parental status betokens power over others, and this is denied to the disciples... Equality among disciples and not hierarchy is to pervade the kingdom's households. The hierarchical distinctions are abolished, to be replaced by an anti-structure existence, an egalitarian way of life in which all disciples are obedient to the will of God their Father.<sup>535</sup>

Similarly, the authority of parents over children is not emphasized in Luke's gospel because the single authority in Jesus' new household is understood as God. However, the *relationship* between parents and children within God's household is not abolished. Instead, as in Jesus' teachings in Luke 11:1-13 and 18:15-17, this dialectical relationship of interdependency is recast as a model for the relationship between *all* disciples (young and old) and God as their caring parent.

Moreover, in Luke's account, this model of the household as a bastion of care and support, both among disciples as equals and in their relations to God as the heavenly Father, goes further. Luke suggests that God not only welcomes and supports those disciples who perfectly follow the demands of discipleship, or even demonstrate their need and dependency on God, but also extends a consistent welcome to those who fail and return. This is most profoundly represented in the restoration of Jesus' disciples after their abandonment of Jesus at the cross.

However, it is also recognized in Luke 15:11-32, through the relationship between the two sons and their father. Destro and Pesce note, "The parable wishes to put forward a model in

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<sup>535</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 114.

which the traditional household has to accept within itself, unconditionally, also those who fail and those who have threatened its existence. In Luke's Jesus's ideal, the household should offer the guarantee of perpetual help even to those who split off from it."<sup>536</sup> While Destro and Pesce have adult subjects in mind, the forgiveness they describe can shed light on the childist reading of this parable presented in Chapter 3. Even though it may be expected that children and youth may not always be able to live up to the demands of discipleship (sometimes failing in the same way as their adult counterparts, and other times in ways unique to their unique identities as children), God as a loving parent intends for such children to remain a part of the community and will continually receive them back even as they continue to strive towards this end.

In like manner, Francis notes, Luke 7:31-35 significantly “does not contain a criticism of the children that their game failed, nor serve necessarily as an example of foreboding which children's games could sometimes have for adults, but points to a lesson which is drawn from observation of the game.”<sup>537</sup> Discipleship is not about perfect performance either of games or of rules and standards—a feat that Luke's gospel makes clear is inaccessible both to children and adults—but is rather a continued commitment and a willingness to recognize the interdependence of all of God's children upon one another.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Destro and Pesce, 224-225.

<sup>537</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 78.

<sup>538</sup> For a more thorough, albeit somewhat differently nuanced vision of this structure as a “transformation of the values of patriarchy” that traces across the entire New Testament, cf. Francis, *Adults as Children*, 80-84:

- (1) Jesus' sonship => affirmation and transformation of family obligations; proclaiming both a subordination of family ties to the mission of the kingdom (presaged in Lk 2:41-51)
- (2) Roles of subordinates always mentioned first (Lk 22:26: Let the greatest among you become as the youngest)
- (3) 1 Cor 7:12ff – Children already part of the covenantal purpose of God (cf 2 Tim 3:15)
- (4) Distinction between childhood and adulthood continues to exist, but is no longer controlled by social convention but by experience of faith (1 Cor 13:11 and Gal 4:1ff)

## Children Among the Twelve: The Case of James and John

Up until now, this chapter has attempted to retrieve a memory of children in Luke's community from their absence in his literary description. However, when Luke's account is read through a childist lens, otherwise hidden child characters may also exist within plain sight. The combination of Luke's adult bias along with assumptions about his audiences' shared knowledge may have led to the omission of details identifying certain characters as children when they do appear in the gospel account; nevertheless, the shadows of such details remain.<sup>539</sup>

On this basis, I suggest that reading the characters of James and John among Jesus' disciples as non-adult children in Luke's text is both plausible and legitimate. Furthermore, such an understanding of James and John as children ought to be pursued in a childist reading such as this one, because it holds value for readers concerned with the wellbeing of children in the present day church. Identifying with James and John as child disciples offers a positive model for the full inclusion of children in the Christian community and illustrates the ability of at least some children to thrive among Jesus' itinerant disciples.

Jesus' disciples are rarely explicitly identified according to their age. For the majority of common people in the first-century, including Jesus' disciples, it is unlikely that anyone—even the disciples themselves—would have known such a detail with precision.<sup>540</sup> The lack of attention to age is illustrated in the two cases in Luke's account in which an age is mentioned: a

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(5) Paul supports the *paterfamilias* notion, metaphorically father to his churches, but expands this metaphor to include mother and wet nurse as well (1 Cor 3:1-2; 1 Thess 2:7; Gal 4:19; cf. 2 Cor 11:2, 12:14); Paul's language sometimes corresponds to the gospel sayings of Jesus which reverse contemporary values by calling the least greatest (cf Mk 10:42-45 with 1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 1:24, 4:5) ... thus *paterfamilias* may not be wholly adequate to the way in which Paul explores the nature of authority in the metaphorical use of childhood and parenthood

(6) In infant baptism, child was made, for its own sake, a member of the community

<sup>539</sup> Cf. Chapter 3.

<sup>540</sup> Cf. Chapter 1.



girl whom Jesus heals (8:42) and Jesus himself (3:23). In both cases, the age that is given is not an exact number but rather an approximation.

Luke states that the girl and Jesus were Jesus “*about* [ὅσῃ]” twelve and thirty years old respectively (8:42; 3:23). Given the attention to detail elsewhere in Luke’s narrative and the stated goal to provide an “orderly account” (1:1), one would expect precise ages to be given if they were available. Since birthdays were not commonly celebrated in the ancient world as they are today, it is reasonable to infer that Luke did not have access to more precise ages. Notably, this information remains missing even for the main character of his account! As a result, it can be assumed that Luke’s failure to mention age should neither indicate the youth or the maturity of his subject. Instead, the age of each character must be inferred from details elsewhere in the gospel account.

One detail that can help to discern a disciple’s relative age is the place of that individual in his or her household. At least four of the Twelve who form the core group of Jesus’ disciples are located within a family unit. These include James son of Alphaeus (6:16), Judas son of James (6:15), and James and John sons of Zebedee (5:10).<sup>541</sup> Luke also identifies Jesus both as “Son of God” and as “Joseph’s son” (3:23) and John as the son of Zechariah (1:57-80; 3:2). However, especially for Jesus, this identification through sonship is carried past his genealogy and infancy

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<sup>541</sup> In the former two cases the pairs (James/Alphaeus and Judas/James) are connected with the genitive only. Literally it would read, “James of Alphaeus” and “Judas of James” and could thus imply the reverse relationship, that James is the father of Alphaeus and Judas the father of James. If read in this way, it raises interesting questions regarding why the sons of these men are mentioned and may suggest that these boys are themselves also a part of Jesus’ discipleship community. This is a plausible reading and one, in light of the childist lens employed here, worth further exploration at another point. However, here I retain the traditional reading because my focus is on James and John who are clearly identified in the filial role both in 5:10 and in the textual variant of 6:15 present in *codex Sinaiticus Syriacus*, which identifies them again specifically as the *sons* (τοὺς υἱοὺς) of Zebedee. Moreover, this use of the genitive in v. 15 prior to the identification of the remaining two genitive pairs supports the reading of James and Judas as sons of Alphaeus and James and rather than the other way around.

into his youth and adult ministry.<sup>542</sup> This is a result of the household structure described in Chapter 2.

The Roman practice of *pater familias*, some form of which seems indicated in the typical Mediterranean Jewish households with which Luke engages, leaves open the possibility that a “son” or “daughter” of a household could range in age anywhere from a newborn to an older adult, caring for children of his or her own. The qualifying factor seems to be not the individual’s age, but his or her place relative to the oldest living family member. Consequently, one’s place as a son in a household can at most tell the reader that such an individual is not (yet) the patriarch of his household. This leaves open the possibility that such disciples are still children, but by no means assumes it.

A next step in determining the age of Luke’s characters is to search for additional literary clues. For example, because Luke mentions Simon’s mother-in-law, the readers know that Simon is married. Since Simon owns a house, we can assume he is the head of his house (4:38). Both of these details point to Simon as an adult. Likewise, in 5:3 we are told that Simon owns the fishing boat that Jesus boards. This again points to a rank and status within the fishing industry attributable to an adult.

On the other hand, James and John are not identified according to their own holdings (house or boat). Rather, these disciples are identified by their relationships with Simon (their partner) and Zebedee (their father) (5:10). In a positive sense, such identifications do not imply the age of James and John as either a juvenile or an adult.<sup>543</sup> However, in a negative sense, in

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<sup>542</sup> For Jesus as Son of Joseph cf. 3:23, 30; and 4:22. For Jesus as Son of God cf. 1:32, 35; 4:3, 9, 41; 8:28; and 22:69.

<sup>543</sup> This contrasts with Destro and Pesce who maintain: “James and John, sons of Zebedee, are clearly of the intermediate generation with respect to their own father Zebedee. This generational assumption is much clearer in Mark 1:19-20 than in Luke. Mark 1:20 says that their father

contrast to Simon, the details connected with James and John do not rule out their youthfulness either. That neither one is the head of their house nor their fishing cooperative is clear from their connections with Zebedee and Simon. This, at minimum, leaves the possibility open that one or both of the sons of Zebedee is in fact still a non-adult child.

A proper exploration of the plausibility of James and John as child characters requires a reconstruction of the power relationships in first-century Mediterranean fishing associations with which Luke and his audience would have been acquainted relative to these characters' stations vis a vis Zebedee and Simon in the fishing cooperative described by Luke. Absent direct records from such associations, K.C. Hanson provides a useful model, derived mainly from parallel associations evidenced in Egyptian and Syrian societies of the same time period.<sup>544</sup> According to this model Hanson conjectures that Luke has crafted Simon and Zebedee's families as a part of "a small-scale collective cooperative."<sup>545</sup> Hanson reaches this conclusion based upon the interaction between these characters as described in Luke's text.

Similar to the operation of fishing guilds and cooperatives in his regions of study, Luke describes these fisher families as working with partners in nearby boats whom they signal to

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Zebedee was with them and with the wage earners (μισθοί)" 218. Nevertheless, several points must be made. First, Destro and Pesce acknowledge that their own argument is based more on the Markan narrative and thus not directly applicable to Luke's literary adaptation. Second, their rationale for such an assumption even in the Markan narrative is based on their (flawed) assumption that what they perceive as a failure of the young man in Nain to join in as one of Jesus' disciples precludes youth and children from participation in Jesus' discipleship community. This assumption has been questioned at length in my treatment of the Nain story in chapter 2. In any case, what Destro and Pesce are really stating is that it is clear that James and John are *not* householders since their father is still alive, and Destro and Pesce dismissively assume that no one would begin to consider these disciples among the youngest generation. In this much, I concur with the first assessment and will seek in what follows to question what seems too hasty a generalization in the second.

<sup>544</sup> K.C. Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (1997) 103.

<sup>545</sup> Hanson, 105.

assist with a large catch. Additionally, they appear to be family businesses, which, if we assume Luke knows Mark's narrative, may occasionally hire day workers to help with their load.<sup>546</sup>

Hanson explains, "The largest part of the population was composed of peasant farmers, and the family functioned as both a producing and consuming unit. This means that relatives normally worked together, and that kinship ties were fundamental for 'guild' or trade relations."<sup>547</sup> Luke's description of the characters and action in chapter 5 thus align closely with this model, placing James and John as younger family members in Zebedee and Simon's fishing cooperative.

Moreover, the position and interaction of James and John within this cooperative suggest that Luke's audience can plausibly understand them as non-adult children of Zebedee. The participation of such children in first-century Mediterranean fishing cooperatives is affirmed by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen in "Fishing in the Roman World," when he describes the interaction of a slightly larger scale cooperative fishing endeavor. Bekker-Nielsen bases his description on comparisons between ancient depictions of the fishing industry and contemporary observations of modern fishermen using casting nets cooperatively.

To illustrate this practice, Bekker-Nielsen refers to two figures that depict "the casting-net being used from a boat (figures 5-6) in a manner closely corresponding to similar images from the Roman period (figure 2)."<sup>548</sup> While the figures in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman mosaic are

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<sup>546</sup> Hanson, 105-106. Cf. Mark 1:16-20 in which James and John are described as in the company of Zebedee in the boat, along with hired workers [μισθοί]. Given what has already been established around the work habits of children, it is reasonable to assume that these μισθοί may have been adults or children (cf. Horn and Martens, 176). Moreover, in terms of status within the cooperative, if inferences can be drawn from the working relationships in agricultural cooperatives, the non-adult children of boat owners would logically work closely with the paid laborers.

<sup>547</sup> Hanson, 100.

<sup>548</sup> Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, "Fishing in the Roman World," cited in *Ancient Nets and Fishing Gear: Proceedings of the International Workshop on 'Nets and Fishing Gear in Classical*

neutral enough to make it difficult to discern the ages of those in the boats, it is certainly plausible that at least some of the shorter figures may have been intended to portray children. Moreover, the modern photographs that Bekker-Nielsen describes as “closely corresponding” clearly depict young boys, both prepubescent and adolescent.

At minimum, such visual depictions confirm the physical ability of youths to perform the work of fishing as described in Luke’s narrative. More broadly, the application of Bekker-Nielsen’s observations together with Hanson’s model for fishing cooperatives make it not only conceivable, but likely, that Luke and his audience would have expected young boys to participate in the fishing industry. As such, they may also have understood the characters of James and John as representatives not of the intermediate, but rather of the youngest generation—children.

In opposition to the participation of this youngest generation among Jesus’ disciples, Destro and Pesce return again to the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). They explain,

It seems that neither the mother nor the son are disciples of Jesus. After Jesus woke him up, the young man does not show any desire to follow him, nor does Jesus ask him to, perhaps precisely because he is very young (*νεανίσκος*). This may help to clarify that the followers are adult, and autonomous. From the exclusion of a younger generation comes a confirmation that the intermediate generation, or the previous one is the focus of attention.<sup>549</sup>

This dismissal of the young man at Nain has been called into question elsewhere (most notably in the discussion of this text in chapter 3). The case of James and John, among others, further problematizes Destro and Pesce’s heavy reliance on this episode in dismissing the younger generation as a focus of attention among Jesus’ disciples in Luke. Even if it were the case that

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*Antiquity: A First Approach*, edited by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen and Dario Bernal Casasola (Cadiz: 15-17 November, 2007) 191, 193.

<sup>549</sup> Destro and Pesce, 219.

the youth at Nain should not be considered a disciple (a point I contest in chapter 3), this does not preclude the participation of other youths in Jesus' discipleship circle. Indeed, this is certainly not the case when it comes to women (contrast the youth's mother with the women in Luke 8:1-3).

Destro and Pesce's use of the Nain episode in particular is helpful in understanding possible perceptions of James and John since they ground their dismissal of the "very young" on the response of a νεανίσκος.<sup>550</sup> Likewise, in describing the fishing operations in Asia Minor in the second century, which seem not to have changed much from Luke's first-century description, Aelian writes that "each boat has six youths [νεανίας] a side."<sup>551</sup> The term νεανίας, from the same root as νεανίσκος is an adjective meaning "youthful," used here by Aelian as a substantive. Although Bekker-Nielsen translates the same term to mean "young men,"<sup>552</sup> the maturity understood in contemporary English by the term "men" in such a translation is nowhere implied in the original text. It is more appropriately translated in parallel with the term "youth" used previously to translate νεανίσκος in Luke 7 in order to show the correlation between the two terms. The Liddel-Scott-Jones Greek Lexicon describes the adjective νεανίας as one used "frequently with the sense of a *youth* in character, i.e. either in good sense, *impetuous, active* or in bad sense, *hot-headed, willful, headstrong*."<sup>553</sup> In short, those manning fishing boats not only could be among the younger generation, but were typified by such youth—likely because of their strength and stamina.

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<sup>550</sup> In chapters 1 and 3 I have established, in conjunction with Destro and Pesce, the place of νεανίσκοι among the broader concept of "child" as the Lukan narrative constructs it.

<sup>551</sup> Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals*, 15.5. Translation mine.

<sup>552</sup> Bekker-Nielsen, 191.

<sup>553</sup> LSJ 1163.

Such an age difference fits with Hanson’s description of those who mind the nets as lower in the hierarchy of the fishing organization than boat owners—whom one may infer are often their fathers, as in Luke’s narrative. Thus, the role that the two sons play in the fishing cooperative combined with their relationship with Zebedee suggest that, while Luke never uses chronological language to describe their characters, it is a valid reading to understand their characters as νεανίσκοι, or youth.

Such a relation in the hierarchy of the fishing organization can be further extrapolated from the use of the more general term κοινῶνοί to describe James and John in their relationship with Simon (5:10), rather than the technical term μετόχοι used to describe Simon’s relationship with those in the other boat in 5:7.<sup>554</sup> If analogies between agriculture and fishing can be drawn, the technical term μετόχοι should be understood as a financial partner in funding the lease of fishing rights for the association—a householder with financial means.<sup>555</sup> The former term, closely related to κοινωνία, used later by Luke to describe the common fellowship of the entire community of believers in Acts 2:42, 44, suggests a relationship between the three men of community—specifically, in this case, the fishing association. In contrast, the latter term suggests a more technical relationship between Simon and Zebedee as partners in the ownership of the same fishing organization. That Luke does not repeat the term μετόχοι in verse 10, but rather uses κοινῶνοί, a term used nowhere else in his corpus, suggests that the move to distinguish James and John from Simon’s business partners in v. 7 is intentional. James and John are associated with Simon, but are not in rank (or, it seems feasible to assume, in age) his equals.

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<sup>554</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 567: “In the miracle-story of vv. 4-9a the technical term for partners (*metochoi*) is used; contrast the more generic ‘companion’ (*koinonoi*) of v. 10, where the Marcan story is resumed.”

<sup>555</sup> For the application of this analogy cf. Wilhelm Wuellner, *The Meaning of “Fisher’s of Men,”* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967) 23-24.

Reaching across the three synoptic accounts, Horn and Martens draw a similar conclusion:

We hear of Mary, who traveled with her sons James the younger and Joses (Mk 15:40; Mt 27:56; Lk 24:10). The mother of the sons of Zebedee appears in Matthew 27:56 and 20:20-23, pleading the case for her sons' role in Jesus' glory. We should consider that youths, without a wife or children, were precisely the age group who followed teachers like Jesus.<sup>556</sup>

In contrast to the assumptions of authors such as Murphy, Destro, and Pesce, Horn and Martens suggest that the infrequent mention of offspring of Jesus' disciples might stem not from an abandonment of such children at home by a group of followers made up largely of the intermediate generation, but rather by the fact that these disciples are made up in part (if not in majority) by just such children of the younger generation themselves.

The role of James and John as sons and associates in their father's fishing organization in Luke's description suggests that we would do well to understand their characters, at least among the Twelve, as non-adult children from this youngest generation. While this is not the only possible reading of these characters in Luke's account, their location among the Twelve—the inner circle of Jesus' disciples in Luke's narrative—makes such a reading valuable in ascertaining the pervasive presence and participation of children among the disciples more broadly. When read with this lens, Luke's narrative does not paint children at the margins of discipleship, but rather right in the center—active participants at all levels and in all manners of following Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

The lack of specialized vocabulary to indicate the presence of children at each turn in Luke's narrative should no more be taken as a sign of their absence than the lack of explicit

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<sup>556</sup> Horn & Martens, 264-265.



reference to women between Luke 8:1-3 and the crucifixion narrative should be taken as a sign that women did not follow Jesus consistently from Galilee. Luke 23:55ff confirms that, despite the evangelist's relative silence on their presence, the women disciples were with Jesus throughout. The same can be said about child disciples, despite their direct appearance generally only as minor characters in the narrative as well.

Moreover, this chapter has shown the plausible and valid reading of children as present not only among both Jesus' sedentary and itinerant disciples, but even among the core group of Twelve. Horn and Martens write, "How many of Jesus' disciples fit the category of believing children, even older ones or teenagers, is impossible to know. Some of them probably did, since one finds that several of Jesus' own disciples were unmarried and were traveling with their mothers."<sup>557</sup> Jesus' discipleship community in Luke's narrative, like the *koinonia* community Luke describes later in Acts, is a mixed group made up of men and women, adults and children, working together to bring about God's Kingdom on earth. In the following chapter we will explore further the ways in which Luke understood this work to occur and how child disciples integrated themselves into these roles.

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<sup>557</sup> Horn & Martens, 265.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHILD DISCIPLES AS HEARERS AND DOERS OF GOD'S WORD

*“As a corrective to the idea that children play no part in the crowds that follow Jesus we should note that there is good reason to suppose that they eagerly followed him, listened to his stories, and rejoiced in the signs that he did.”*

- Keith J. White, “He Placed a Little Child in the Midst,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge, 362

#### Introduction

Having established the assumed presence of children in the world of Luke's narrative, the next step is to determine the role that such children play as characters in the plot progression. Even when child characters are not specifically named, a dynamic understanding of childhood undergirds their presence in Luke's narrative and actively influences the way in which one reads and understands the story to unfold. This chapter thus examines how a reading attuned to the presence of children as disciples of Jesus can influence one's understanding of Lukan discipleship.

Child characters, when understood within the constructs of childhood in their time, should not be read simply as miniature, perhaps more vulnerable, adults.<sup>558</sup> Luke's use of the concept of childhood as a metaphoric device, alongside similar uses by the other Synoptics and Paul, constructs childhood within these emerging Christian communities as a unique social category separate from adults.<sup>559</sup> The experience of such constructions of childhood influences

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<sup>558</sup> Contrary to Philippe Ariès' once popular thesis that childhood is solely a construct of modernity, since the 1990s the field of Childhood Studies and related research into the varying constructs of childhood in antiquity have made a compelling case for childhood, or more properly childhoods, as a unique, though far from static, category across history. Cf. Allison James and Alan Prout, ed., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*.

<sup>559</sup> On the use of children metaphorically in Paul's letters, cf. Francis, *Adults as Children*, 24.

individual children as well as the communities and environments that surround them. In their new sociology of childhood, Alan Prout and Allison James observe, “Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.”<sup>560</sup> Hence, upon acknowledging children as a part of the Lukan concept of discipleship (Ch. 4), their concomitant influence upon this concept comes to light.

Such influence spreads across Luke’s entire gospel account, which is permeated with the presence of child disciples. To account for the influence that children have on the concept of discipleship requires a re-reading. As a starting place, this chapter applies a childist lens to Luke’s two standards of discipleship: hearing and doing the Word of God. These two components are introduced by the Lukan Jesus in the parable of the sower (Lk 8:4-15), made explicit immediately following the parable through identification of his true family as those who “hear the word of God and do it” (8:21), and repeated again in 11:28.<sup>561</sup> In the world of the

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<sup>560</sup> James and Prout, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood?” 8.

<sup>561</sup> This distancing of the character of Jesus from his mother and siblings has been read as evidence, however circumstantial, of the complete dissolution of families in synoptic portraits of the Jesus movement (cf. E.E Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* [London: Nelson, 1966] 127; to a lesser extent, J.M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* [London: MacMillan, 1930] 118; etc.). Such separation could be read to impact young children negatively. However, Luke, more so than any of the other synoptics, takes pains to see that this is not the case. In Luke’s portrait of the Jesus movement, biology may no longer be the standard, but family—even among members of Jesus’ biological family—continues to thrive. Ibita and Bieringer explain, “By leaving out the identification ‘Here are’ in 8:21 when Jesus states that his mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it, Luke avoids the impression that Jesus’ biological family does not qualify as members of his new, religiously defined family... Luke makes an effort to include the biological family in Jesus’ new family... This opening allows that Jesus’ mother and brothers could be among those who hear the word of God and do it, a possibility that becomes a reality at the end of the Gospel / in Acts” (“Beloved Child,” 125-126). Likewise, Jane Schaberg writes: “Mary the mother of Jesus is often considered Luke’s model of obedient, contemplative discipleship... She is not defined by her biological motherhood but blessed for her belief, as are all who ‘hear the word of God and obey it’” (“Luke” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon Ringe [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992] 279).

narrative, Karlsen Seim explains, “Those who hear God’s Word and do it, become Jesus’ family, the new family of God, and even those biological family relationships that do continue to exist, are integrated in the fictive family and are subordinated to it.”<sup>562</sup> The discipleship community, then, read from a childist perspective, does not shun family, but rather, re-imagines it. This chapter treats each characteristic in turn to consider how children in Luke’s new family of disciples participated in and helped to shape this re-imagination of the whole.

*Discipleship as Learning from Jesus (Hearing the Word, 8:19-21; 11:27-28)*

A childist reading calls for a re-examination of what it means for disciples to hear the word of God. In the context of discipleship, the “hearing” to which Luke’s Jesus references involves not just auditory reception but also a movement towards understanding—*learning* what is meant by the word of God. Esther de Boer maintains, on the basis of Luke 24.6-10, “that not only the men but also the women following Jesus did so first and foremost to learn from him.”<sup>563</sup> Such is the etymology of the term *disciple* itself. Twice, Jesus repeats to his disciples and the crowds, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (Lk 8:8; 15:35). He then goes on to *teach* his disciples. Hearing in each instance thus refers to an understanding of the parable—explicitly taught to the disciples by Jesus in what follows.

To hear the word of God, therefore, means to *learn* from Jesus. While contemporary advertising campaigns, community colleges, and Christian Education programs push for a more complete and accurate understanding of learning as a lifelong enterprise, such activity has been traditionally associated with childhood.<sup>564</sup> Reflecting this understanding of the term in antiquity

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<sup>562</sup> Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 253.

<sup>563</sup> deBoer, 145.

<sup>564</sup> Cf. Francis, *Adults as Children*, 23.

Plato writes, “Education (*paideia*) is the drawing or leading of children to the right principles as enunciated by the law and confirmed by the experience of the oldest and most worthy.”<sup>565</sup>

Education begins in childhood as a part of each child’s socialization—what Plato and other ancient authors understood as the taming of the child’s spirit.<sup>566</sup> Similarly, in the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, following a description of several missteps by the boy Jesus bringing him to the attention of adults in his village, a teacher named Zacchaeus entreats Joseph, “Come, give him [to me], brother, so that he can be taught letters, and so that he can have all understanding, learn to have affection for those his own age, and respect the old and please elders, and so that he can in his turn teach them to have a wish to become like children in the same way” (IGT 6:1-2). Indeed, despite the portrayal of the child Jesus’ atrocious behavior towards his teachers, his father Joseph seeks to have the boy educated on three separate occasions (IGT 6:1-8:2; 13:1-3; 14:1-4).

This second-century early Christian text, while written later than Luke’s account, illustrates a correspondence between classical Greek conceptions of education and early Christian communities in the Mediterranean world, which Luke—although unfamiliar with both individual texts—would have likely shared as a part of the social milieu. Education was understood in these early communities as a means of acculturation and social formation. To the extent that disciples were to “hear the word of God,” they were to internalize Jesus’ teachings in such a way as to allow themselves to be shaped by them. Such shaping, while possible and

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<sup>565</sup> Plato, *Laws* 2.659d.

<sup>566</sup> Given the purpose of education to tame passions and the continual experience of passions throughout life, Plato understood education to be a lifelong goal—albeit begun and with its greatest emphasis in childhood. Cf. Cynthia B. Patterson, “Education in Plato’s *Laws*,” in *Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evan Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 378-379.

present throughout the entirety of one's life, was most frequently associated with the upbringing and socialization of children.<sup>567</sup>

Consequently, even if the sole (or even primary) audience of the Lukan parables may not have been children, the process of instruction itself tacitly puts the disciples in the place of children (cf. Lk 18:17). Moreover, as has been established in chapters 3 and 4, when Jesus proclaims the word of God to both the crowds and his disciples, actual children ought to be assumed to have been a part of both groups. Thus, the instruction of disciples as "hearers" of the word of God both addresses literal children as disciples and metaphorically places adult disciples into the roles of children. To the extent that the latter theme has received more attention in previous metaphorical treatments of children (cf. Francis, *Adults as Children*), this chapter will focus on the literal experience of children as hearers of God's word in Luke's story and how such an experience might reshape both the reader's understanding of child disciples and, in brief, subsequent metaphorical applications to adult discipleship.

#### *Discipleship as Serving Jesus (Doing God's Will, 8:19-21; 11:27-28)*

A childist reading also calls for a re-examination of what it means for disciples to obey the word of God. Again, obedience, while not strictly reserved to the domain of childhood, certainly has its origins there.<sup>568</sup> Returning to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, this is one of the goals that Zacchaeus has in mind when he offers to instruct the boy Jesus (IGT 6:2). This fits with Beryl Rawson's description of the aim of Roman education, with "its emphasis on precedent, tradition, rank, and the role of the great families [which] reinforced principles which

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<sup>567</sup> Cf. Prov 22:6, "Train children in the right way, and when old they will not stray."

<sup>568</sup> Here it is worth noting that the role of "obedience" in the ancient world was also expected of adult children in relation to the *pater familias*, and even more strictly, of household slaves.

underpinned much of Roman society.”<sup>569</sup> The actions of hearing and doing went hand in hand for children, who were taught with the expectation that they would obediently perform the cultural roles that they acquired. Children in the ancient Mediterranean world were expected to do as they were told and this theme carries over among the early Christian authors. Consequently, Aasgaard labels as “striking” the boy Jesus’ disobedience toward his parents in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>570</sup> In contrast, Luke’s account depicts the twelve-year-old Jesus, despite his initial lingering in the temple, returning with his parents to Nazareth, after which point “he was obedient to them” (2:51). Childhood obedience is thus not idealistically painted as perfect in Luke’s narrative, but rather treated as the norm and the ideal.

Such a norm is also assumed by the author of 1 Peter, who readily likens ideal disciples in that community to “obedient children” (1:14) as a category he expects his audience to readily accept and in the household codes of Colossians and Ephesians that exhort children to obedience (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). Thus obedience, while held up as an ideal among biblical authors, is not romanticized as a flawless virtue of childhood. Indeed, it occasionally requires exhortation to effect. Rather, within the strictures of the ancient household, such obedience can be thought of as a common and necessary adaptation. Given the vulnerable state of children, to do the will of the *pater familias* would have been, in a very real sense, equivalent to preserving one’s precarious existence within a system of security and support. Children, particularly the young and the infants, would have had little need to be exhorted to assume the roles (obedient, subordinate) that sustained their very lives.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships.” 20.

<sup>570</sup> Aasgaard, 79.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. Sir 7:23: “Do you have children? Discipline them, and make them obedient from their youth”; 1 Pet 1:14: “Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance”; Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* 3.18.110.2.1.

In this context, the “child like” response upon hearing God’s word is to obediently *do* the will of the Father—to act on the Word of God. What it means to act according to the Word of God, however, is not static in Luke’s narrative. We have already seen how the gospel and its interpretation of God’s word leaves room for both sedentary and itinerant disciples. Likewise, the different roles of the female and male disciples described in Luke 8:1-3 indicates that the Lukan mandate to disinvest in material belongings (14:33; 18:22) may take on different forms within the dynamic discipleship community as a whole.<sup>572</sup> In what follows, I will consider the role of obedient children in Luke’s story as both exemplars of child disciples and models for their adult counterparts.

### **Hearers of the Word of God: Young Children as Students of God’s Word**

Within Early Christian writings more generally and Luke’s narrative specifically, the character of the ideal child is held up largely as an exemplar and desired end. With regards to the real children in his community, Luke presents a more tempered picture in such references as the boy Jesus in the temple and children playing in the marketplace; however, Luke continues to hold children up as ideal disciples (cf. 18:15-17). While scholars continue to debate qualities such as innocence, humility, and the like applied to children, one of the things that children indisputably are is students. Even if they receive no formal education, from birth humans necessarily acquire a large amount of information—from basic skills (e.g., how to sit, stand, and walk) to more complex learning (such as language, culture, and so forth). Children absorb information both through language and the environment around them. They are natural

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<sup>572</sup> This is counter to Schaberg’s understanding that the provision of the women out of their wealth necessarily excludes them from the community of disciples (287). See Chapter 4 on sedentary discipleship for a more thorough explanation of this.



students.<sup>573</sup> As a result, child disciples can be expected to “hear” the word of God presented in Luke’s narrative as natural students of all that is around them.

Moreover, within the Lukan construction of childhood, such young disciples present a unique way of hearing and understanding the Word that is proclaimed. Child disciples, as demonstrated previously, by virtue of their discipleship, share with their adult counterparts an experience of God’s grace through welcome, nurture, and healing in the kingdom of God; however, by virtue of their youth they participate in this community (kingdom) in particular ways. Children, present as a part of Luke’s community of believers, are generally relegated to the background and rarely given voice. In their silence, however, they continue to do what children do very well—observe the world around them and, indeed, observe Jesus’ proclamation of the world to come. More adaptable than their adult counterparts, since their maps of their world have not fully formed, child disciples present for the Christian community, as Luke presents it, a decidedly more open world view—one in which the coming Kingdom of God is understood as real possibility in all its complexity.

Although such children are present among all of God’s children who have received God’s grace through welcome, nurture, and healing, they are also named, on account of their youth, among the “least” in society’s eyes. Typical of Lukan reversal, they are as such lifted up as representatives of Jesus and treasured for their own sake.<sup>574</sup> To them, Luke tells us, uniquely,

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<sup>573</sup> While borne out more recently in scientific and sociological research on the development and plasticity of a child’s brain (cf. Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life* [New York: Picador, 2009] 120), an implicit knowledge of the child as natural student can be seen throughout the Hebrew Bible in its treatment of children as recipients of teaching. Cf. Deut 4:10; 11:19; Ps 34:11; 78:5; Prov 1:8; 3:1; 6:20; Isa 54:13; Sir 4:11.

<sup>574</sup> There is little doubt that childhood was a difficult time in antiquity, both because of a greater susceptibility to disease and because of a lower, subservient status; however, recent research has shown that children were nevertheless valued within the sentimentalities and infrastructures of

belongs the Kingdom of heaven (Lk 18:16). Luke's Jesus demonstrates this unique reception himself as a child student in the temple (2:46-49) and later acknowledges it in prayer to God the Father (10:21) and in praise of the disciple, Mary (10:38-42). The following childist reading of these texts approaches each student in turn in order to re-imagine Lukan discipleship through the incorporation of the unique perspectives of young children.

*Remembering the Boy Jesus (2:46-49)*

When he is found with the teachers in the temple, Jesus is still a child. That this is Luke's intention is made clear by the placement of this story within the infancy narrative, as is established through the parallel narration of Jesus' growth in stature and divine favor (compare Lk 2:40, 52) and Mary's response to Jesus (compare Lk 2:19, 51) in both the temple and birth accounts. The repetition of Luke's narrative in the later *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* further supports this conclusion. Bovon writes,

The view that the child became a 'son of the Law'...at the festival at twelve years of age cannot yet be attested in this era. Unlike a girl, a twelve-year-old boy is not completely grown, but is indeed at least a παῖς. Whoever places Jesus here at the stage of adulthood misses precisely the point: even as a child, Jesus poses the wisdom of the great ones.<sup>575</sup>

Both in physical years—Luke references Jesus' age specifically only in the birth narrative—and in cultural perception, the Jesus of this account remains a child. He attends the Passover celebration in Jerusalem not as a matter of covenantal obligation, but rather out of routine piety, as the reader can assume he has done previously together with his parents.<sup>576</sup>

Agreeing that Jesus is not yet understood by the Lukan author as an adult in this story,

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their time.

<sup>575</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 110-111.

<sup>576</sup> Cf. Chapter 2.

commentators range from seeing in this text a parallel to contemporary *puer senex* stories about the extraordinary childhoods of great men to reading the relatively tame portrait of the young Jesus in this story as Luke's attempt to tame such inventions as the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* illustrates.<sup>577</sup> In either case, most commentators tend to focus on Jesus' precocity and the astonishment of his parents and the teachers at his wisdom.<sup>578</sup> However, while a sense of understanding and wisdom is clear within the text, Fitzmyer sees Jesus' wisdom as primarily that of a student and not a teacher in this scene.

Though Luke later on, in the Gospel proper, portrays Jesus seated as a teacher (5:3), it is scarcely likely that this is meant here. Jesus is rather depicted as a pupil, "a genuine learner" (J.M. Creed, *The Gospel*, 45). That this detail foreshadows his own teaching in the Temple in the latter part of the Gospel, in his Jerusalem ministry, is possible. But he is not yet so depicted here, *pace* G. Schneider (*Evangelicum nach Lukas*, 75) and others.<sup>579</sup>

Indeed, in this episode, Luke portrays Jesus as an ideal student. The boy Jesus serves as the epitome of the kind of discipleship that Jesus the teacher later describes.

From the first time that Jesus' character speaks as a child in the temple (2:49) to his adult self's dying breath on the cross (23:46), Jesus professes obedience to the will of God. This obedience is emphasized in this childhood account, in which the actions of which Jesus is himself the subject (as opposed to the object of his parents' actions) include: his *remaining* behind in Jerusalem (2:43), *sitting* among the teachers (2:46), *listening* to them (2:46), and *asking* questions (2:46). The first of these, remaining, in and of itself is implicit in a child's

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<sup>577</sup> IGT 17:2.

<sup>578</sup> Cf. Bradley Billings, "'At the Age of 12': The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52), The Emperor Augustus and the Social Setting of the Third Gospel," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 60:1 (April 2009) 70-89; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 108-115; Carroll, 185; Karen Chakoian, "Luke 2:41-52" in *Interpretation* (April 1998) 185-190; Valdir Steuernagel, "Doing Theology Together with Mary," in *Journal of Latin American Theology* 8:2 (2013) 239-269; Johnson, 60-62.

<sup>579</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 442.

relationship with a tutor in antiquity, but, as it is done without Jesus' parents' foreknowledge, represents disobedience in this case.

Beyond this, however, each verb directly reflects the proper disposition of a child toward a teacher in antiquity. A student of antiquity describes his day: entering the school, greeting the teacher, taking his seat, copying models, making recitations, asking for dictation, writing, sitting again, and studying his books.<sup>580</sup> Likewise, in Plato's *Praetorium*, Hippias is described as "sitting on an imposing chair as he gives a lecture surrounded by his pupils sitting on benches."<sup>581</sup> Such, it seems, are the basic activities of students engaged in learning—to show submission, attention, and respect.

Moreover, that the teachers are "amazed at his understanding and answers" (2:47) suggests that Jesus demonstrates learning—another expected and appropriate quality of an attentive student. The more parents invested in their child's education, which in antiquity could be a great amount, the more understanding they expected the student to exhibit as a result. Libanius describes the questioning of students by their parents at dinner, during which time parents expected astute answers.<sup>582</sup> Thus, Jesus the great teacher first takes action in Luke's telling as a great student.

Luke's depiction of Jesus in this account exemplifies the actions of a good student in

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<sup>580</sup> Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 15. Such a description is typical of vignettes found in the *Hermeneumata*; thus, written evidence suggests that students sat during the work of their lessons (likely a pragmatic need). Nevertheless, it is striking that in artistic portrayals of the school scene "teachers are always portrayed as sitting, while their pupils—boys and girls—are standing" (Cribiore, 31). In these scenes, it seems, the primary goal is to portray the power of the seated teacher over and against the standing student, often waiting to receive the teacher's correction. Nevertheless, descriptions of the actual passing of knowledge—specifically in lecture and symposium form—continues to occur while the student is seated (albeit in less formidable ways).

<sup>581</sup> Cribiore, 31 fn 67. Cf. Plato *Prt.* 315c.

<sup>582</sup> Cribiore, 109-1110.

antiquity. This is seen in the contrast between Luke’s Jesus here and the apocryphal Jesus of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. In the first teacher account of IGT, Zacchaeus actively tries to engage Jesus as a pupil, “but the child did not answer him” (IGT 6:8). Contrast Jesus’ answers in Luke 2:47. When Jesus later expresses his understanding to Zacchaeus, it is not to the teacher’s pleasure and amazement, but rather serves to baffle him and put him to shame (IGT 6:8-7:4). Then, in the next two teacher accounts the child Jesus shows even more impatience with his teachers, failing even to listen to them, but rather quickly offering instruction of his own (13:2; 14:2). While Jesus poses questions of two of his teachers in IGT (6:9, 13:2), it is not in the calm and respectful manner that one infers from the relative calm in which Jesus’ parents find him seated among the teachers in the temple. To emphasize this, the author of IGT clarifies Luke’s description of Jesus asking questions in his account of the same scene, adding, “he examined (ἀπεστομάτιζεν) the elders and explained the main points of the law and the riddles and the parables of the prophets.”<sup>583</sup> IGT’s Jesus in the temple fits with the portrait of Jesus as a student throughout the account—an intractable and hot-headed divinity who will not be taught because he already knows it all.

In contrast, while Luke portrays the child Jesus as a precocious and sophisticated student who inspires amazement, he remains a *student*.<sup>584</sup> Fitzmyer notes that Jesus “listened and posed

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<sup>583</sup> Aasgaard, 115-116.

<sup>584</sup> This interpretation contrasts with the view that Jesus’ presence among, rather than at the feet of, the teachers places him at equal rank to them (cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 112). While it is certainly possible and legitimate to read Luke’s text in this way, I prefer Fitzmyer’s interpretation for what it has to offer in understanding Luke’s potential portrait of childhood more generally through the teacher/student relationship. Moreover, while Bovon contrasts the communal posture of 2:46 with Luke’s portrait of Paul as a student at the feet of his tutor (Acts 22:3), this reading does not fit with the use of the term “among” (ἐν μέσῳ) throughout the rest of Luke. Rather, Luke’s use of ἐν μέσῳ reflects a general locative sense, meaning in the same location, with enough variety to leave room for the individual located among the others to be of equal, lesser, or greater rank with the others (cf. Lk 8:7; 10:3; 22:27; 24:36; Acts 1:15; 2:22; 17:22; 27:21). The term is used both

questions...as a pupil would.”<sup>585</sup> At this point in the narrative, Luke portrays Jesus with all of the normal dependencies one would expect from a child of his age. When Luke describes Jesus’ birth, the newborn needs his mother wrap him in swaddling clothes (Lk 2:7), as an infant he must be carried (2:22), and as an adolescent Jesus must also be taught (2:46). Fitzmyer appropriately interprets the scene as “emphasizing the training of the young Jewish male.”<sup>586</sup> Although there is no historical evidence that such training took place in the temple, in the world of Luke’s narrative the temple serves as a central location for teaching about the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; Acts 5:21, 25, 42). Writing after the destruction of the temple, it is likely that Luke conflates the temple location with local synagogue practice for the purpose of the story. While the temple is by no means the only *locus* of learning, Luke’s audience must accept that throughout the narrative real instruction does occur at the temple.

Moreover, the reaction of the teachers to the understanding that Jesus shows is markedly different between Jesus as a child in 2:46 and as an adult in 19:47. That the teachers seem pleasantly amazed in the first account and “kept looking for a way to kill him” in the second account indicates a drastic change in relationship. The chief priests and leaders at this latter moment in the story are upset because Jesus threatens to usurp their role. To assume that Jesus as a child is already acting as the teacher, as he does when he returns to the temple, is thus discontinuous with the respective reactions of the temple leaders that Luke describes. While the ambiguity in the text leaves open multiple options, the simplest reading of the text therefore

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to describe Jesus acting as a servant as he washes his disciples feet (Lk 22:27) and, on the other hand, of Peter and Paul as teachers in Acts. Likewise, in Lk 9:47, Jesus places a child “by his side” (παρ’ ἐαυτῶ) not to imply equality of stature or that the child (or he) have nothing left to learn, but instead, to connote community—the child is *with* him, accompanying him in his service.

<sup>585</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 442.

<sup>586</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 438.

suggests that Jesus is listening to and answering the teachers as a student—a role quite familiar, either formally or informally, to children across the centuries.

In the character of Jesus, Luke therefore demonstrates the first trait of discipleship: listening to the word of God. While the adult Jesus has moved beyond this point of quiet reception to teaching and reproach within the temple walls, Luke’s dynamic portrait of his maturation highlights the unique contribution of Jesus’ twelve-year-old self to a Lukan understanding of discipleship. While learning occurs throughout the entirety of one’s life, children are uniquely suited to it. The amount of information that they must acquire in a relatively short span of time would be overwhelming for the average adult. This is due to what Alison Gopnik describes as “The evolutionary imperative for babies is to learn as much as they can as quickly as possible.”<sup>587</sup> As a result, children tend towards a natural receptivity and attention.<sup>588</sup> This is the “work” that God the Father has given the child Jesus to do (2:49).<sup>589</sup> Only when the reader can appreciate listening and learning as a child does can one fully understand what is meant by the adult Jesus’ insistence that disciples *listen* to the word of God.

Child disciples are not only better disposed to hear Jesus’ message, they also listen in a

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<sup>587</sup> Gopnik, 123.

<sup>588</sup> Cf. Lise Eliot, *What’s Going On in There?: How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999): “...hardware improvements [in the brain at around the age of six] explain why children, for all their lack of cognitive sophistication, are so much better at learning than most adults. What grown-ups can catch on to the latest computer game or memorize the words to a new song after just a few tries? Children’s brains are programmed to learn, and when you add their plasticity to their steady improvement in neural speed and efficiency, it’s a little less surprising (though no less wonderful) to discover that your twelve- or fifteen-year-old can speak a foreign language, do calculus, or solve a Sunday crossword puzzle.” (416).

<sup>589</sup> A difficult phrase to translate, τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου literally means “the things of my father,” but is often translated as “my father’s house” (NRSV, NASB) or “my father’s business” (NKJV). I translate it as “work” above to reflect both the shared quality of purposeful activity across generations, while highlighting the unique activities at which children are most suited to work. For more on the activities of childhood as work, cf. Maria Montessori, *Discovery of the Child*, trans. by M. Joseph Costelloe (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967).

decidedly unique way that contributes to the overall picture of discipleship as it is practiced together by both children and adults. While adults and older youth generally are capable of higher level thinking and reasoning skills that foster the growth and functioning of the Christian community, infants and young children are likewise more capable of attentive listening and reception at the core of developing the community according to Christ's vision in the first place. This is due to a trait that Gopnik calls "lantern consciousness," seen in infants and children, as well as in highly trained spiritual individuals who engage in rigorous meditation.<sup>590</sup> She explains that people in such consciousness, "are immersed in the almost unbearably bright and exciting novelty of walls, shadows, voices."<sup>591</sup> With little to no preconceived notions of what the world is "supposed" to be like, infants and young children are uniquely receptive to a new picture of what the world *can* be like, as revealed through Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In this way, young disciples perform a vital function in the work of discipleship and the up building of the Kingdom of God.

#### *Revelation to Infants (10:21)*

Luke puts praise of this unique perspective into the mouth of Jesus himself in Luke 10:21. Offering thanksgiving to God the Father, Jesus prays: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Lk 10:21). At the literal level, children, specifically infants (*νηπίοις*), are thus described as uniquely possessing something that their "wiser" adult counterparts lack. John Carroll equates this unique revelation

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<sup>590</sup> Gopnik, 129-130.

<sup>591</sup> Gopnik, 129-130.



with knowledge of the spirit active in Jesus' ministry.<sup>592</sup> This is supported by the description of Jesus as rejoicing "in the Holy Spirit" ([ἐν] τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ); however, such a general revelation does not specifically clarify what activity of the Spirit Jesus celebrates as having been revealed to *νηπίοις*. Literally, this term refers to human babies—infants before they are weaned. Joseph Fitzmyer translates accordingly: "persons incapable of proper human speech."<sup>593</sup> Biologically speaking, then, the *νηπίοις* of Luke 10:21 represent the most vulnerable—and, as a result, the most attentive of all life stages.

Luke's connection of this prayer to the return of the Seventy (Lk 10:17-20) "at that same hour" (Lk 10:21) offers further insight. Bovon suggests, "By linking the prayer to the vision of the fall of Satan (v. 18), Luke not only displayed evidence of literary finesse...it is also certain that Luke wished to make a thematic connection at this point. What he had in mind here was emphasizing the change of persons who receive God's revelation."<sup>594</sup> Worldly wisdom—that knowledge that comes only from lived experiences, often encounters with the evil of this world—is displaced by the advent of the Kingdom. Satan falls down from his throne and the "wise" no longer hold a monopoly of experience over their younger, less initiated counterparts. Instead, Jesus celebrates that it is the *infants*—those with the least worldly experience imaginable—to whom God has given a new revelation.

The context in Luke's narrative makes clear that Jesus' revelation is not reserved only for infants in the literal sense. The apostles who returned in the previous verses, while depicted as one segment of a larger mixed group of children and adults, did not include these smallest among

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<sup>592</sup> Luke's "world of stunning reversals is well captured in 10:21, where Jesus thanks God for disclosing strange wisdom (i.e., concerning the Spirit active in Jesus' ministry not to those who are already wise but to infants (*nepioi*) instead" (Carroll, 190).

<sup>593</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 873.

<sup>594</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 42.

them. Infants would have been unable to perform the commissioned functions of walking and talking. However, the generational mix of disciples continues throughout Luke's gospel account and Acts. To assume that this saying does not address actual infants at all too quickly bypasses the unique contribution that infant disciples *can* make.<sup>595</sup> François Bovon explains,

These 'little ones' are to be understood in the proper sense of the word as well as in the figurative sense. They were characterized by their dependence, their ability to listen, and their welcoming attitude. The definition of who they were depended in this case less on contemporary usage than on how Jesus looked on them. Jesus had children in mind, but he also took into consideration the metaphorical category that the term represented. Children and believers, these 'little ones,' have their own identity and their relational reality.<sup>596</sup>

While Bovon speaks from the point of view of a historical critic and with an uncorroborated certainty, his premise—when the agency is shifted from Jesus to the Lukan author—is well founded. As we have already seen, technical definitions of the terms that define childhood are both plentiful and gratuitous to the identities of actual children in Luke's narrative. Luke's use of the term *νηπίοις* should no more be dictated by literary conventions of metaphor and analogy

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<sup>595</sup> This is in contrast to the typical adultist leap of made by most exegetes to immediately metaphorize the term "infants" to mean that Jesus' adult disciples are to be understood as "lowly and simple" (Johnson, 170; cf. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 41; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 873). Such a move insults both the adult and infant disciples alike by diminishing the particular group of adults described in the gospel as necessarily possessing these characteristics, diminishing all infants in the same way, and finally, ignoring the presence of actual infants and children among the diverse group of disciples who follow Jesus in Luke's account. Moreover, it is a small step from such interpretations that oppose the entirety of Jesus' disciples to the entirety of the Jewish wisdom tradition to a supercessionist reading that dangerously declares the Christian experience of revelation to be superior to that of our Jewish sisters and brothers (cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 869). Rather, White suggests that the contrast between those who receive this revelation and those who do not is within the group of Jesus' followers themselves. He writes: "They may symbolize young followers/disciples, but they also understand as children much that the disciples and the learned miss or reject."<sup>595</sup> A reading that pays attention to the intergroup dynamics at play within the group of Jesus' followers within the narrative by whom the prayer is heard better promotes the dignity of all—child and adult, Jewish and Christian.

<sup>596</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 42.

than it should by biology.

Rather, *νηπίοις*, for the reader of Luke, is a term dependent upon the broader context in which it is employed. The Gospel of Luke is a context in which infants and children are present among the followers of Jesus (cf. Ch. 4), in which Jesus signals the importance of an actual child (Lk 9:47-48), and in which Jesus will later beckon even younger babies (*βρέφοις*, Lk 18:15-17) to himself as models of discipleship and inheritors of the Kingdom of God. Such a pattern suggests a reading of Luke 10:21 that first treats the referents of Jesus' speech as actual infants and then, through them, those adults who model themselves accordingly. Horn and Martens write, "It seems that in Jesus' initial teaching children, as children, became the model for other disciples. Adults had to imitate not simply their humility, vulnerability, or weakness. Rather, children themselves, as actual members of the community, were the models for how the community had to receive God and the kingdom."<sup>597</sup>

Infants are expert listeners. It is at this phase of development that we as humans are most attuned to our environment than at any other point in our lives. Alison Gopnik explains that, while babies and young children may lack the same sophistication in their mental processing as adults, "they may be better at picking up incidental information" because "...rather than determining what to look at in the world, babies seem to let the world determine what they look at. And rather than deciding where to focus attention and where to inhibit distractions, babies seem to be conscious of much more of the world at once."<sup>598</sup> In short, infants are expert listeners. This posture of listening—of absorbing God's revelation because it has been given to us and not because of any power we've demonstrated on our own (cf. Lk 10:20)—is both the gift that infants bring uniquely into our communities and the model they set for adults and older children.

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<sup>597</sup> Horn & Martens, 260-261.

<sup>598</sup> Gopnik, 119.

Such a model fits within the Lukan theme of reversal.<sup>599</sup> Luke begins his account with Zechariah prophesying that John will “turn the hearts of parents to their children...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (1:17; cf. Mal 4:6; Sir 48:10). In Luke 10:21, Jesus broadens this prophesy, even as he declares its fulfillment, turning the hearts and minds of adults towards infants as they seek to receive the revelation of God. Although infants are not the only followers of Jesus to receive a revelation from God in Luke’s narrative,<sup>600</sup> Jesus’ prayer in 10:21 celebrates their unique experience of *this* revelation. Namely, due to their profound capacity to listen to and absorb all that surrounds them, God’s Spirit is revealed to infants.

Such a heightened capacity for learning in infants, of course, does not mean that adults cannot learn.<sup>601</sup> Such an assertion would run counter to the basic premise of Luke’s narrative—instruction of disciples about Jesus’ revelation of God’s Kingdom (Lk 1:1). Nevertheless, that which comes easily to young disciples—namely, the observation of and consequent response to the world—is commended to their adult counterparts (Lk 18:17). Bovon notes, “They [the disciples] have been eyewitnesses to the Son’s unique revelation: his preaching, his activity, his personal impact on human beings, and now of his relation to the Father.”<sup>602</sup> With children

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<sup>599</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 42; Johnson, 170.

<sup>600</sup> cf. 2:26, 32; 8:12-15; 10:22; 12:3; Acts 2.

<sup>601</sup> Studies have shown that certain basic functions, such as language acquisition, are markedly easier for infants and young children for adults; however, adults *can* learn them: “Soliciting responses from 2.3 million immigrants from Spanish and Chinese backgrounds, [Professors Kenji Hakuta of Stanford University and Professors Ellen Bialystok and Edward Wiley, both of York University in Toronto, Canada] asked whether the age of immigration made any difference in the ability to master the English language. They found that across all ages, immigrants who arrived in the United States earlier had better language proficiency than those who arrived later. Yet they report that there is no ‘critical’ age after which the new language *cannot* be learned” (Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children REALLY Learn and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less* [Emmaus, PA: Rodale Inc., 2003] 31).

<sup>602</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 869.

witnessing this impact together with adults, as has been previously demonstrated, it would be inappropriate to assume that it is left only to the adults to respond.

Because babies are more attuned to everything around them in their effort to make sense of the world, Gopnik reasons that they are also more readily able to adjust to a new sense, or map, of the world. She summarizes, “This [difference in brain function] lets babies and children construct new maps, and change their old ones, much more quickly and easily than adults do.”<sup>603</sup> Such change in one’s perception of the world is precisely what is demanded by Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom of God. As such, the infants and young children, through their experiences in relation to Jesus, albeit not necessarily through any work of their own merit (cf. 10:20), thus absorb the message of the Kingdom and model for their elders how to receive such a revelation for themselves.

*(Re)imagining Mary and Jesus’ Exchange (10:38-42)*

We have already seen how Luke highlights the profound listening and learning capacities of his child characters in Luke 2:46-49 and 10:21—both as dynamic (as in the case of the child Jesus) and flat (as in the case of the generic *νηπίοις*).<sup>604</sup> Since such listening is a key characteristic of discipleship in Luke’s gospel (Lk 8:21), children in Luke’s narrative thus become a model for how all disciples are to receive the Kingdom (Lk 18:17). The hearts (and minds) of parents are turned to their children. The character of Mary in Luke 10:38-42 offers another example of this reversal of expectations, as she, through her listening, is said to model

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<sup>603</sup> Gopnik, 119.

<sup>604</sup> There are always exceptions to such generalizations and this statement is intended as a classification of Luke’s literary treatment of children, not a description of all children in reality. However, it is worth noting that even children who are diagnosed in our contemporary society with extreme learning disabilities absorb and learn at a lightning-fast rate compared to later adult acquisition of language and knowledge in a conventional way.

“the better part” (10:42).

Mary’s age is never specified in the gospel account. It is generally assumed and plausible that Luke envisioned her as a fully mature adult sitting at the feet of Jesus, the great teacher. Precedence for this is set as the woman (*γυνή*) who kneels at Jesus’ feet and washes them with expensive ointment and her own tears is almost certainly an adult (Lk 7:37-39). However, it is also plausible that Luke envisioned Mary as a child or young adolescent, sitting at the foot of a teacher in her sister’s home. In this case, her posture might be read as relating more closely to that of the children who come to Jesus in Luke 18:15-17 and the boy Jesus seated among the elders (Lk 2:46) rather than the woman in the former account.<sup>605</sup>

Careful attention to the treatment of Mary in the text extends the possibility that her character is not yet an adult. Although female characters in general are infrequently given speaking and acting roles in Luke’s narrative, the centrality of children—particularly, girls—in the text is even more rare. In light of Luke’s reticence to put words in the mouth of children, the subordination of Mary’s character despite the central role of her activity in the narrative begins to make sense. Reading Mary as a child fits neatly into the pattern established by Luke of talking *about* children without giving them voice, as seen with Jairus’ daughter (Lk 8:40-56).<sup>606</sup>

The social expectations of Luke’s audience are that children are to learn and not teach; therefore, when presented as characters among elders in the story, they remain largely silent.

Alexander elaborates further on Luke’s semantic patterns:

These patterns serve to foreground Martha as the active partner with Jesus in the scene. Mary is a background character, of whom are told (in a relative clause) only the bare minimum necessary to explain the dialogue that forms the culmination of the scene...

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<sup>605</sup> Cf. Chapter 4 on Discipleship for a childist reading of 2:46 that takes seriously the typical aspects of childhood portrayed in this scene despite Jesus’ acknowledged divinity.

<sup>606</sup> Cf. also Lk 9:41-43, 46-48; 18:15-17 and elsewhere.

What we have, then, is not a three-cornered-scene but, as so often in the gospels, a dialogue between two characters, Jesus and Martha; Mary's actions provoke the dialogue, but she does not herself speak or appear on stage.<sup>607</sup>

If one were to attempt to reconstruct a historical scene from this narrative, Mary would almost certainly regain direct action and speech. Most notably, emphasis may shift to Mary's conscious choice to sit at Jesus' feet and the dialogue with or silent resistance to Martha that might have precipitated this scene. Yet, within the world of the story, these things fade into the background. Instead, Thimmes notes, "Luke's choice of silence for Mary renders her character and her 'position' defenseless and powerless in a world of 'speech.'"<sup>608</sup> Thimmes reads this as a literary act to undercut Mary's authority as a disciple by placing in her in a position of subordination in relation to Jesus.

However, reading Mary's character as a subordinate child from the start shifts the relationship of power. Instead, Mary, whose oral speech may never have held the same power or privilege in her sister's house, speaks through the language of posture—positioning herself in the posture of discipleship at the feet of Jesus. This posture is then validated and affirmed when Jesus speaks in favor of Mary in response to her sister's critique. Such affirmation has the effect of potentially empowering Mary in whatever future speech she takes on—oral or physical—as she continues to live into the discipleship she has chosen; and certainly, of empowering child readers to claim their place alongside Jesus, even, when necessary, in resistance to whatever competing claims their adult guardians might make upon them.

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<sup>607</sup> Loveday C. Alexander, "Sisters in Adversity: Retelling Martha's Story," in *Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield, 2002) 206.

<sup>608</sup> Pamela Thimmes, "The Language of Community: A Cautionary Tale (Luke 10:38-42)," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Press, 2002) 239.

Such a reading of Mary as child is further supported by a closer comparison between the text in question and its closest parallels in Luke's narrative. Although typical adultist interpretations might presume a closer parallel between Mary and the woman who pours oil on Jesus' feet in 7:37, several key differences suggest the alternate possibility of favoring Paul's reference to his relationship with Gamaliel in Acts 22:3.

Focusing first on the differences between the two texts involving females, it is worth noting the purpose that each person shows in sitting at the feet of Jesus. In Mary's case it is to learn, while her unnamed counterpart in 7:37 takes on a posture of service. Given their respective acts of service and common identification as *γυνή*, the unnamed woman actually shares more in common with Mary's sister Martha than with the character of Mary herself. Second, Mary is identified in the story only as the sister (*ἀδελφή*) of Martha (10:39). Martha, on the other hand, is described as both a woman (*γυνή*) and the owner of the house (10:38). The term *γυνή* suggests Martha's adulthood in contrast to the more juvenile identifiers of girl (*παιδίσκη*; *κοράσιον*)<sup>609</sup> or even young woman (*παρθένος*).<sup>610</sup> In contrast, nothing is said of Mary. Third, Martha holds the position of householder,<sup>611</sup> whereas Mary is not identified as such. Mentioned first in the text, Martha seems to have acquired this position either through marriage or inheritance (both adult means). Textual variants in Luke 10.38 specify that Martha received Jesus *into her home* using

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<sup>609</sup> The latter, being a term more typical of Mark, never appears in Luke's writing; however, the former term appears four times in Luke Acts (Lk 12:45; 22:56; Acts 12:13; 16:16), often translated as "slave-girl or maiden."

<sup>610</sup> Lk 1:27; Acts 21:9.

<sup>611</sup> That Martha, a woman, would hold such a position would likely have been easily accepted by Luke's audience. Thimmes notes, "In Lukan narratives, women householders are not an unusual phenomenon since Luke also rooted the origin of the Philippian community in Lydia's house (Acts 15:11-40)" (236).



the first person singular pronoun.<sup>612</sup> Thus, Luke portrays the two sisters as different not only in their tasks and response to Jesus but also in their parts or roles in the household.<sup>613</sup> Martha is the responsible householder who receives Jesus. Mary also receives Jesus, but as a subordinate in her sister's house.

Such subordination does not exclude Mary from participation in Jesus' ministry together with Martha, just as Luke does not exclude other subordinate members of large households from participation in the ministry of Jesus elsewhere in Luke-Acts.<sup>614</sup> Hence, I concur with Carter's assessment that "Mary, like Martha, is among those who receive Jesus. This response suggests that the term 'sister' points beyond a relation of kinship with Martha to denote their joint participation in the community of the disciples of Jesus."<sup>615</sup> However, while Carter goes onto identify Mary and Martha as "partners in this leadership and its tasks,"<sup>616</sup> a childist reading cannot ignore the different status accorded to each sister by the evangelist.

While Luke's Jesus may declare Mary to have chosen the better part, the narrative

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<sup>612</sup> Reid persuasively makes the case that these variants are original due to both a common sense reading of the text (without which it seems abruptly incomplete) and in light of later redactions to blur the role of women as heads of house churches (Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 149-154, summarized in Veronica Koperski, "Women and Discipleship in Luke 10:38-42 and Acts 6.1-7: the Literary Context of Luke-Acts," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 184. Cf. also Bovon, *Luke 2*, 71.

<sup>613</sup> This is in contrast to D'Angelo's thesis that Mary and Martha represent an equal partnership, preferring instead the traditional hierarchy (though in a different light) with which the sisters are commonly portrayed in other accounts. (Cf. Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene, in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. by Ross S. Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 107-108.).

<sup>614</sup> Cf. The participation of women and children disciples discussed in previous chapters of this work and the baptisms of whole households in Acts.

<sup>615</sup> Warren Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen: Luke 10.38-42 Again," in *Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002) 218.

<sup>616</sup> Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 222.

constructs Martha's character as possessing the position of power and status in the household. For this reason many feminist interpreters have lamented this text as an example of Luke's androcentric tendency to limit the leadership of women by preferencing Mary's passive response to Martha's more active role.<sup>617</sup> A childist reading complicates the relationship between Martha and Mary with the acknowledgment of another social marker—namely, age.

By so doing, I do not seek to ignore or downplay the injustices perpetrated against women as a result of androcentric readings of this text. Rather, I hope that this complication is read as another step in Schüssler Fiorenza's call for "sociopolitical contextualizations" to reframe how the text is heard today.<sup>618</sup> Just as re-imagining Mary in a lower social class in which the audacity to sit idle from work has a liberating effect,<sup>619</sup> so too can re-imagining Mary as a youth empowered to pursue discipleship by her sister's ministry and Jesus' teaching provide a liberative alternative to the androcentric narrative of passivity in which the text has historically been read.<sup>620</sup>

The text leaves open this possibility of reading Mary as a youth by placing her at the feet of Jesus. The closest parallels to this usage occur in the account of the Gerasene demoniac (Lk 8:35) and Paul's autobiography (Acts 22:3). Luke uses the term "at the feet" in several other accounts,<sup>621</sup> but these are the only two in which Luke describes one person "at the feet" of

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<sup>617</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 54-76, esp. 66: "Luke plays down the ministry of those women leaders of the early Church whom he has to mention because they were known to his audience. Martha and Mary are a case in point."

<sup>618</sup> Veronica Koperski, "Luke 10.38-40 and Acts 6.1-7: The Literary Context of Luke-Acts" in *Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 173.

<sup>619</sup> Koperski, 173.

<sup>620</sup> For a discussion of such androcentric interpretations cf. Alexander, "Sisters in Adversity," 200.

<sup>621</sup> Cf. Lk 7:38; 8:41; 17:16; Acts 4:35; 5:2, 10.

another for the purpose of *learning*. While the Gerasene demoniac is clearly described as an adult male, Paul refers in Acts 22:3 to having been “brought up” (ἀνατεθραμμένος) at the feet of Gamaliel. This term, which also can mean to nourish or educate, is used elsewhere by Luke only in Acts 7:20, 21 with reference to Moses as a young child.

Moreover, Luke 2:46 describes Jesus as a child sitting among the elders for the purpose of learning (cf. Chapter 4 on Discipleship), but it does not specify that he is sitting at the teachers’ feet. Pervo and Johnson speculate that this distinction occurs because Jesus is presumed equal to the teachers in the temple, while the term “at the feet” implies subordination to authority.<sup>622</sup> Given the use of substantive chairs to represent the authority of a teacher in antiquity,<sup>623</sup> this would be the inevitable posture of students when not standing before their school master. This posture was still maintained in small Middle Eastern schools into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>624</sup>

Nevertheless, as noted already in Chapter 4, such a reading of Luke 2:46 unnecessarily presumes a level of maturity on the boy Jesus that need not be assumed by the text. If this text is then taken as third parallel to Mary, two of the three other mentions of learning at the feet of a teacher in Luke involve youthful characters—Paul and Jesus. Mary, then, if read as a child, would fall into the majority usage of this theme.

Although the elevation of passive learning can be understood as oppressive to the active participation of an adult woman, it is more in fitting with the traditional role of a child as discussed above. Moreover, considering Mary’s story from a child’s perspective opens up the

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<sup>622</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 563, fn 35: “Lit. ‘at the feet of,’ an indication of subordination. See Luke 7:38; 8:35, 41 (*v.l.* in 10:39); 17:16; Acts 4:35; 5:2, 10. Note also *Act. Paul* 3.10.” Also, Johnson, 173: “Throughout Luke-Acts sitting at the feet indicates acknowledgment of authority (7:38; 8:35, 41; 17:16; Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2; 22:3).”

<sup>623</sup> Criboire, 28-34.

<sup>624</sup> Cf. Criboire, 66 fn 10.

experience of learning from an entirely different point of view. To assume that learning needs to be a passive enterprise is already to engage in an adult centric understanding of learning akin to Paulo Freire's description of oppressive education. Such an assumption fails to acknowledge the engaged and active role of the learner. On the other hand, children, in their primal quest to discover the "how" and "why" behind the information they receive are naturally drawn to more relational and experiential learning that engages them in this way. To this end, the word learner itself needs to be problematized in so much as it implies what Freire describes as a "fundamentally *narrative* character."<sup>625</sup> Such narrative learning assumes "a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" wherein "the contents...tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified."<sup>626</sup> Given the active and exuberant engagement with which children naturally come to the task of cultural interpretation, when not otherwise hindered by oppressive pedagogies, such narrative teaching is to be avoided.

This is particularly true of the oral culture in which Luke's account was produced, which knew little of the narrative kind of education predominant in Western education today. In oral cultures learning occurs through a dynamic interchange of ideas involving both the teacher and the student. Scholar of orality, Tex Sample, explains, "traditional/oral people do not learn by 'study,' but through apprenticeship."<sup>627</sup> Relationship and experience dictate meaning in an oral culture rather than critical evaluation. Boomershine writes,

In the medium of performance, the meaning of the story did not consist, as it often does today, in the critical assessment of the...text as a source of referential information about the actual

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<sup>625</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman (New York: Continuum, 1970) 71.

<sup>626</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman (New York: Continuum, 1970) 71.

<sup>627</sup> Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living With Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, & Minnie Pearl* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 14.

historical events it purports to record and of a highly nuanced set of theological ideas. The hearing of the story is an experience more analogous to watching a great film... Indeed, it is an experience of suspense and anticipation of events, of hope and disbelief, of closeness to or alienation from the characters rather than an experience of contemplation of a set of theological ideas or an evaluation of historical reports. Thus, the alternative to “meaning as reference” can be called “meaning as experience.” And “meaning as experience is dependent on the willingness of audiences to enter fully into the story and identify with the characters of the story.”<sup>628</sup>

Giving the experiential meaning production typical of such oral cultures, Mary’s character understood as a learner—whether adult or child—need not be read as passively receiving from Jesus. Rather, in such a pedagogical interchange, Mary is actively engaging in meaning production as she experiences Jesus’ teaching.

In modern pedagogical discourse Freire describes this type of interchange as “dialogics.”<sup>629</sup> Speaking to his contextual aim of political liberation, Freire insists, “It is to the reality which mediates men [sic.], and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people, that we must go to find the program content of education.”<sup>630</sup> In short, for learning to truly occur, as Jesus seems to insist that it does with Mary in Luke’s narrative, the subject must be relevant to those to whom it is proclaimed—an audience which, as we have seen, is frequently teeming with children, and in Mary’s case, may well have been an audience of one.

Moreover, for the learner, in this case, Mary, to internalize this message and commit herself to the Word as the call to discipleship clearly demands, she must receive God’s Word in a “transformative process”<sup>631</sup> in which both learner and teacher are “actors in

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<sup>628</sup> Thomas Boomershine, *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark’s Passion-Resurrection Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) 12.

<sup>629</sup> Cf. Freire, 125.

<sup>630</sup> Freire, 96.

<sup>631</sup> Freire, 126.

intercommunication”—actively in dialogue with one another, reflecting and acting on the realized needs of their context.<sup>632</sup> To this end, contemporary disciples have much to learn not only from the character of Mary as she participates in such an interchange within her oral culture, but also, from all young children both then and today, who in their pre- and nascent literacy, tend naturally to engage much more dynamically in the production of knowledge.

Historically, Israelite tradition understood learning and listening in this more active sense as well. The commandment to “hear and obey the word of the Lord” (1 Sam 4:9-10), akin to Luke’s definition of discipleship, was understood as one in the same action. Freire’s action-reflection axis bears echoes of this. So Bovon explains, “Seated at the feet of the Master, she [Mary] takes on the role of a disciple; with her whole being, she listens to what is being said by Jesus, who quotes and comments on God’s word.”<sup>633</sup> While feminist scholars are right to resist the passivity that some contemporary churches have demanded from women on account of their reading of this text, Mary’s action of listening at the feet of Jesus need not be so defined.<sup>634</sup> Indeed, while such a passive reception of Mary’s learning is both possible and dangerous, a reading that uplifts Mary and Jesus as engaged in an intercommunicative dialogue not only removes Mary from the role of a passive vessel, but suggests the positive influence and unique contribution that children are capable of bringing to the Jesus movement as a whole.

As such, I prefer what Schüssler Fiorenza labels as “the apologetic feminist interpretation,” which “celebrates Mary’s role as a rabbinical student or disciple, seated at the feet of Jesus the rabbi” in opposition to what Jane Schaberg labels the “extremely dangerous” in

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<sup>632</sup> Freire, 129.

<sup>633</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 70; Cf. Alexander, “Sisters in Adversity,” 198.

<sup>634</sup> This is counter to Koperski, 192: “Whether Martha’s *διακονία* involves preaching or practical hospitality, there remains a strong sense that Lk 10:38-42 in the literary context of Luke-Acts validates a passive role for women rather than an active role, even if the passive role is an apparently sublime one.”

her appropriately cautionary, but overly passive interpretation of women in Luke's text.<sup>635</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza critiques residual polarities between Mary and Martha in such an apologetic interpretation, while later feminists, notably Loveday Alexander, point to the important role that Martha, for her part, continues to play.<sup>636</sup> However, by shifting the focus from the interchange between Mary and Martha to that between Mary and Jesus, the revolutionary character of their dialogue can be discerned. In addition, by noting the status differences between Mary and Martha rendered by age, a childist reading challenges the ability to treat Mary and Martha simply as polar opposite depictions of a woman's role, when it is possible to conceive of Mary as not yet a woman. Such a reading of Luke's account allows each person's discipleship to stand on its own merit.

Although it is true that Jesus holds up Mary's actions in the particular moment of the text as preferred, this does not necessitate that he is dismissing the importance of Martha's discipleship. Carter notes that in the context of the narrative as a whole,

[Martha] appears as a model disciple in contrast to those in the previous verses who do not receive Jesus' messenger (Lk. 9.52-53; 10.10). Moreover, what is appropriate to Martha at this point is shown in Lk 10.39 to be applicable also to Mary. She is presented as 'listening' to Jesus' teaching. The verb used to denote her listening (ἤκουεν, 10.39) appears in Lk. 10.16 as an antonym for 'rejecting' the disciples, Jesus, and God, and hence, as a synonym for 'receiving' them. It also appears in Lk. 10.23-24 in Jesus' blessing of disciples who 'see' and 'hear'.<sup>637</sup>

Both sisters are to be understood as model disciples in the sense that they receive Jesus.

However, Jesus draws particular attention to Mary's posture of listening, after it is critiqued by

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<sup>635</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'A Feminist Critical Interpretation,' 28, summarized in Paula Thimmes, "The Language of Community: A Cautionary Tale (Luke 10:38-42)," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Press, 2002) 235; Schaberg, 275.

<sup>636</sup> Alexander, "Sisters in Adversity."

<sup>637</sup> Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 218.

Martha from her superior status as an adult householder. Read as such, this encounter between Jesus and the two sisters foreshadows the encounter between Jesus, his adult disciples, and the children being brought to him in Luke 18:15-17. In both instances, all involved appear to be held up by Luke as disciples of Jesus—followers who receive both him and his Word. The adults—Martha (Lk 9) and an unnamed grouping in (Lk 18)—attempt to prevent the gathering of children around Jesus. In both instances, Jesus lifts up children, or a child as in Mary’s case, as model disciples. The adults are not dismissed, but are encouraged to turn their hearts and their minds towards children.

Much speculation has been made with regards to Luke 18:15-17 on what it means to receive God’s Kingdom like a little child. I have argued previously that such modeling cannot and should not be reduced to any one characteristic. Nor should Mary’s part be reduced to simple listening, as critiques of the text’s value of passivity seem to do. Rather, Bovon describes an active listening that both internalizes and engages what is being said. For a child, this is the difference between simply acquiring information and acquiring a trade—the latter of which was the goal of all but the most elite of educational programs in the first-century. Just as Paul learns to be a Pharisee at the feet of Gamaliel, Mary learns to be a disciple at the feet of Jesus.

Within the structure of the story, it can be assumed that Mary *will* engage in the other tasks of discipleship soon enough. Carter explains, “Mary’s listening is appropriate to the specific moment, and it is good as far as it goes, but there is no commendation of her as a perpetual listener. Listening requires that she also do, or keep, the word.”<sup>638</sup> This is the active, embodied nature of hearing *and* obeying God’s word as it is modeled throughout Luke’s account

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<sup>638</sup> Carter, “Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen,” 230.



(Lk 8:15, 21; 11:28).<sup>639</sup>

According to Luke, hearing is only good insofar as it inspires obedience to (and thus action with regard to) God's Word. This is the relationship outlined in the parable of the sower earlier in Luke's account (Lk 8:4-15). As such, Bovon rhetorically asks, "Once trained, was she [Mary] not going to share her knowledge of the good news with others? Did her 'part' not also involve assuming responsibilities, a ministry of the word, just as Martha felt herself to be charged with a ministry of service?"<sup>640</sup> The merit of such an interpretation is that it opens up the role which Jesus commends in Mary as entailing much more than mere attention and passivity. While the interpreters of the story, and perhaps even Luke as author himself, may have used this account to ascribe submission to women in the church, Bovon helpfully proposes an alternative in which Mary's role in the story remains pointedly more open.

Nevertheless, even this "ministry of service" as Bovon describes it remains ethically problematic. It is worth celebrating the participation of women and children in the early church. However, if their roles are limited to attention, obedience, and service, then little has been done to liberate such characters (and those in Luke's audience who identify with them) from the hegemonic power of an adultist patriarchy. Rather, in Mary's "obedience" to the Word of God spoken to her in her sister's house, a childist reading brings out the potential for Mary's full participation in the proclamation and promulgation of the Kingdom that Jesus' Word proclaims—a ministry in which she engages *as a child*. Neither Mary nor Martha is expected to dutifully listen or serve for the duration of their ministry; nor are they expected to minister in the same way. Unique to their status, age, and individuality, Mary and Martha are each called to respond to God's Word and engage creatively and constructively in the up-building of God's

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<sup>639</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 892.

<sup>640</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 75.

Kingdom. Such engagement, for the Lukan Jesus, exemplifies obedience far more than a rigid observance of a hierarchical order set by any individual or set of authorities.<sup>641</sup>

Moreover, for Luke, such true obedience can only come *after* one hears the Word of God—as Mary does, seated here at Jesus’ feet. Bovon continues, “Jesus was not anxious to punish Martha...All he did was propose a doctrinal hierarchy of values and actions. Priority should be given to listening to the word of God, to taking time out, to the act of sitting down; it consists in not wishing to precede the Lord, in accepting to be served before serving.”<sup>642</sup> This is the natural progression for infants and children who learn primarily through observation. Children acquire language only after it is repeated to them over a period of time. They learn to perform a task, like fastening a button or unrolling a rug, by observing someone else do it first. A childist reading of Mary’s encounter with Jesus suggests the same—that Mary learns discipleship, the task of sharing the good news of God’s Kingdom, by first allowing Jesus to pass the same good news onto her.

However, again we cannot simply stop here. For while Bovon’s generous reading of Jesus’ praise helpfully suggests room for more expansive response to God’s Word than any one action or sensibility would entail, he nevertheless retains the adultist, patriarchal hierarchy that suggests women and children must sit and listen before an adult male. To do so undermines the power of acknowledging the agential participation and embodied proclamation of those children whom we have thus far uncovered from the shadows of Luke’s text. Just as the infant John responds in a free and uninhibited manner when he encounters the Christ, so too should Mary

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<sup>641</sup> For examples of such creative response to God’s word in Luke’s account, see Jesus’ praise for the women who creatively and elaborately anoints him with oil as an embodied expression of her love (Lk 7:36-50), Stephen’s great deeds and preaching despite his appointment by the apostles to a far more limited role (Acts 6:5-10), and Jesus’ exhortation that in preparation for the coming Kingdom sheer obedience is not sufficient (Lk 17:7-10).

<sup>642</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 77.

and all children who would learn from her, be given such opportunity. Therefore, while acknowledging the clear merits of a reading that emphasizes Mary's posture of learning before Jesus, a childist reading must at the same time resist such a posture as the only or primary attribute of the interchange that Luke describes.

Consequently, for the sake of the liberation of children from beneath adultist hierarchies of order, I invite childist readers to consider the mutuality inherent in this interchange. In pursuit of such mutuality, one must interrogate how Mary got to be positioned at the feet of Jesus to begin with? How did Jesus respond? Was there, perhaps, an invitation by Jesus for this child to engage in the stories with him? Or, as children can be prone to do, did Mary scoot her way forward on the rug until eager and enthusiastic, she was inches from Jesus' face, her very presence demanding both that his teaching continue and that it do so in a lively and engaging manner? Did Mary demand a story of Jesus—or “just one more”? Did her presence influence the topic of his teaching? Did her response dictate his manner and his tone? The fantastic work that has been done recently in gospel performance criticism suggests that such audience response and engagement would not only have been a possibility, but would have been par for the course. So David Rhoads writes, “Meaning is negotiated between the performer, the composition, and the audience. We cannot separate audience from performance. They are in an interwoven, symbiotic relationship.”<sup>643</sup> At the feet of Jesus, therefore, Mary does not merely listen to the Word that Jesus proclaims—she helps to shape it.

Moreover, reading Mary's interaction with Jesus in this way shifts what could be taken as a narrative portraying a subservient woman or child powerfully into a dynamic illustration of the mutuality and interdependence inherent to the Kingdom of God. Mary's interchange with Jesus,

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<sup>643</sup> David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Biblical Studies—Part I,” in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36:3 (2006) 11.

particularly in light of Martha's request that she help work instead, takes on a liberative quality of its very own. Koperski notes, "Calmly sitting and relaxing in the company of a guest can be viewed as a creative choice, particularly while someone else who is possibly in a superior position is anxious."<sup>644</sup> Children in the first-century were rarely granted the privilege to sit and listen in the presence of a guest. They certainly would not have possessed the same free range of play typical of 21<sup>st</sup> century Western children while their parents tend to tasks of hospitality at home. Martha is thus within her place both socially and culturally to demand that Mary help. Mary's character instead remains at the feet of Jesus—(presumably) by her own choice—and is defended by Jesus. Re-imagining the interaction in this light turns a stale and oppressive call for women to sit silently into a liberative encouragement for children to exercise their autonomy and to participate in the life of discipleship—learning from and engaging with the performance of the master himself.

### *Conclusion*

Luke represents children as learners through the character of Jesus himself at the temple, the generic infants of Jesus' prayer, and the characterization of Mary as silent but affirmed at the feet of Jesus. In typical Lukan fashion, such representations carry on a great Hebrew Bible tradition, in this case, of understanding a primary role of children as that of learning (as expressed particularly in Proverbs and the Psalms, cf. above). However, such a role is not only characteristic of children (both in the first-century and today), but in fact is uniquely suited to them.

Because of the unique way in which children are known *to learn*, attentive to new

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<sup>644</sup> Koperski, 195.

possibilities and actively engaging and responding to what they hear, these young students serve an important role in Luke's narrative. They bring together Jesus' call for disciples to hear and obey the word of God, modeling proper response for their adult counterparts, and interjecting into the discipleship community their unique mode of reception and response through which they inhabit the coming Kingdom of God in the present as possessors (Lk 18:17) in a way that is difficult for the adult learner to easily replicate or even comprehend.

Such a reception not only proliferates Jesus' message to a wider audience, but through the interaction with it, actually helps to shape the message and Jesus' presentation of it as well. The presence of children at the feet of Jesus, their ability, enthusiasm, and commitment to hearing the Word of God, thus not only shapes their own experience of the Kingdom, but that of the entire community through Jesus' response and adaptation as a performer with children in his midst.

### **Doers of the Word of God: Young Children as Evangelists**

While children are fantastic learners, and such learning has the powerful potential to shape the broader education of the whole Christian community, the role of children as disciples does not end in the (Sunday) school room—at least not in Luke's narrative. In the ancient world, learning almost always had a purpose. This would have been particularly true for the lower-class audience to whom Luke addresses himself. Moreover, as discussed above, listening to the word of God implicitly assumes obedience to the word of God (cf. Jer 22:21). To receive Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom without becoming a part of the proclamation would be to miss the point and hence not to have received it at all. As such, Luke's narrative contains not only references to children as present among those whom Jesus taught, listening and receiving his

Word as disciples, but also children who actively engage in the act of proclamation themselves.

Luke portrays different children engaging the task of proclamation differently throughout his gospel narrative. Beginning in his infancy narrative with Gabriel's prophecy and John's response to the unborn Jesus in utero (1:17, 39-55), Luke portrays children as embodied agents of proclamation. At the same time, despite the infrequency with which they are given actual voice within the text, children in Luke's narrative emerge as implied agents of vocal proclamation as well. This is seen through listening to the roles of children omitted from Luke's direct text, and yet retained in both the narration of their remembered speech and the proclamation of groups of collective characters of which children were a part.

### *Children as Agents of Embodied Proclamation*

Throughout Luke's gospel account, God's Kingdom is proclaimed in both word and deed (8:1-3; 9:3, 11; 10:1-9; 18:16). Child characters are no exception to this practice. Drawing from Malachi's prophesy (Mal 4:6), the Lukan author situates John the Baptist as one who will "turn the hearts of parents to their children," implicitly realizing the Kingdom through the action of turning that such children incite. Moreover, even before his birth, John embodies a proclamation of God's Kingdom, celebrating the presence of the unborn Jesus by leaping in his mother, Elizabeth's, womb.

#### 1. Infants Inspiring Response (1:17)

Luke's gospel narrative hinges on the theme of reversal, or turning. Mary's Magnificat, or Cantic of the Turning,<sup>645</sup> celebrates God's preference of the lowly and anticipates a reversal

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<sup>645</sup> Rory Cooney, "Cantic of the Turning," GIA Publications: 1990.

of power as early as 1:46-55. While this prophecy may be better known, the theme of reversal actually begins earlier in the angel's canticle to Zechariah in verse 17. Anticipating what is to follow, the angel prophesies about Zechariah's soon-to-be-born son: "With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before [the Lord], to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Contrary to conventional wisdom about wise parents and disobedient children,<sup>646</sup> Luke's parallelism connects parents with the disobedient and children with the wisdom of the righteous. Both of the latter appear in the 'a' position of the prophecy and the former in the 'b' position. This anticipates Luke 10:21 in which a preference is expressed of children over and against adults, traditionally considered by society to be wise. The roles of parents and children are hence reversed.

Children occupy the seat of wisdom (σοφία). This is further confirmed by Luke's description of Jesus' maturation, in which he states of the infant Jesus that he "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom" (Lk 2:40) and of the twelve-year-old Jesus that he "increased in wisdom and in years" (Lk 2:52). This is the same wisdom that Jesus promises that he will give to his disciples in preparation of the last day so that they may make their defense before those who persecute them (Lk 2:12-15). Moreover, every time that the term wisdom is used by Luke in Acts it is in support of the act of proclamation (Acts 6:3, 10; 7:10, 22). Consequently, to connect children to wisdom is to connect them with proclamation. Wisdom in God's Kingdom, as Luke employs it, supports one's ability to proclaim the Kingdom.

Hence, while the angel's prophecy does not explicitly describe children in the act of proclamation, it implicitly points to such a role. In this way the angel anticipates both the action

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<sup>646</sup> On the wisdom gained with years, cf. Ps 90:12; on disobedience, cf. the biblical theme of Israel as disobedient child of God.

of Luke 18:15, in which parents, with their hearts turned toward their children, bring their children to Jesus that he might touch them and Jesus' response that it is to such children to whom the Kingdom itself belongs (Lk 18:16). Children then, without ever speaking a word in either of these texts, embody such proclamation through the wisdom and possession with which they receive the Kingdom of God.

Already in Luke 1:17 the infant John, who will later go “into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3), inspires the beginning of this proclamation in the mouth of an angel of the Lord. The angel's prophecy is in direct response to the conception of John (cf. Lk 1:13 “your prayer has been heard,” εἰσηκούσθη in the aorist passive, completed past). John brings about this act of proclamation while still in utero due to the anticipation of his birth.

Even for parents who do not receive an angelic visitor and whose child is not destined to prepare the way for the Messiah “with the spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17), anticipation of the birth of a child is often an anticipated event. It inspires action, preparation, reflection, and, indeed, at times, proclamation. This is both experienced in contemporary society (even when such actions are not always celebratory in nature) and testified to in the Hebrew Bible. Take for example the response of Hannah when she learns that her prayer has been answered and she will bear a son (1 Sam 1:19ff). Children, through their very existence, then, can embody a proclamation of the Kingdom through their ability to inspire such positive response.

The ability of young children to inspire such a response is further emphasized by a comparison of this prophecy with its Septuagint parallel. In typical Lukan fashion, the angel's words are actually a quotation of a Hebrew prophet—in this case, Malachi 4:6. Notably missing from Luke's version, however, is the latter half of the angel's prophesy, that Elijah will return to



“turn the hearts of parents to their children *and the hearts of children to their parents*” (Mal 4:6a, emphasis added). Instead, Luke more closely parallels the apocryphal prophecy that Elijah will return “to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob” (Sir 48:10). Without speaking a word, children expected to bring about change in their parents. This is an act of embodied proclamation.<sup>647</sup>

## 2. John Leaping in his Mother’s Womb (1:39-55)

Such embodied proclamation of the very young continues even more explicitly as Luke’s telling of John’s birth and infancy progresses. When John’s mother, Elizabeth, was in her sixth month of pregnancy, Luke narrates a visit by her cousin Mary and her unborn son, Jesus. He writes: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (1:41).

The verb “leap” (σκιρτάω) literally refers to an “exuberant springing motion.”<sup>648</sup> It is associated with the excited movement of young animals.<sup>649</sup> It is used three times in the New Testament, all by Luke. The first two instances occur in this episode, with the final use in Luke’s beatitudes. In both other uses the verb is paired with a sense of celebration. First, Elizabeth declares, “For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy

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<sup>647</sup> This role of children (even unborn children) inspiring proclamation through their embodied presence is present in Luke’s gospel account; however, it is not at the forefront of the text. Rather, this role must be recovered from the more ostensibly adult centric narrative that the Lukan author crafts. As a sign of such a narrative, it is worth noting, for example, that, by omitting the latter half of Malachi’s prophecy, Luke misses an opportunity to make children the *subject*, rather than solely the objects, of the prophetic action. Surely, as the prophecy indicates, children in Luke’s Jewish context, as adults, would have been understood as both subject and object of such Messianic prophecies. The Messiah—Jesus—comes for everyone, adult and child, and *everyone* responds.

<sup>648</sup> BDAG, 930.

<sup>649</sup> Ps 114:4, 6. Cf. Gottfried Fitzer, “σκιρτάω,” *TDNT* 7 (1971) 401-2.

[ἐσκήρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει, lit. leaped with gladness]” (Lk 1:44). Then, Jesus commands those listening to “Rejoice!” (χάρητε) and “Leap!” (σκιρτήσατε), translated by the NRSV: “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven” (Lk 6:23a). Throughout Luke’s usage σκιρτάω takes on a meaning of celebratory exuberance.

The verb σκιρτάω also appears seven times in the Septuagint. The first use, in Gen 25:22 (LXX), refers to the movement of Jacob and Esau in Rachel’s womb. Every other use reflects celebratory movement, with five of the six remaining usages referring to celebration on the eschatological Day of the Lord.<sup>650</sup> Following Septuagint patterns Luke’s usage further reflects a celebration of the advent of God’s Kingdom. Luke Timothy Johnson terms calls this “eschatological recognition,” concluding that John, at this young age, “is thus shown to be a prophet in accord with the angel’s prediction.”<sup>651</sup> Luke narrates John leaping in utero at the arrival of Mary and Jesus in order to prefigure his later role as a prophet preparing the way for the coming of Jesus the Lord. Within the context of the story, however, such a prefiguration accepts as normative the movement of infants in utero (both John and, by allusion, Jacob and Esau<sup>652</sup>) as acceptable means of celebrating and proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God.

John’s action is itself an embodied proclamation of the incarnate Christ in Mary’s womb and also the source of two further moments of proclamation. These latter two moments are similar in tone to the proclamation of the angel that Luke has already attributed to John’s

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<sup>650</sup> Cf. Ps 114:4, 6; Wis 17:18; Joel 1:17; Mal 3:20 (LXX). The remaining reference comes from Jer 27:11 and refers to the celebration of the prophet’s adversaries in the past tense.

<sup>651</sup> Johnson, 40; Cf. also Bovon, *Luke 1*, 58-59 and Tannehill, *Luke*, 52.

<sup>652</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 358. For further parallels between John/Jesus and Jacob/Esau see Esther M. Menn, “Child Characters in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Samuel 16-17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1-19),” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s, 2008) 330: “The deference of John the Baptist to his younger relative Jesus, from the womb (Luke 1:39-45) to the baptismal scene at the Jordan (Matt 2:1-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:15-22; John 1:19-36), is an adaptation of this same pattern [of the ascendancy of the younger son].”<sup>652</sup>

conception in 1:17.<sup>653</sup> Since the latter type of proclamation has already been addressed in the previous section, this section focuses on John’s initial moment of proclamation—his physical leap as an unborn child in Elizabeth’s womb.

Language consists of much more than spoken word. Science has shown that “Nonverbal communication forms a social language that is in many ways richer and more fundamental than our words.”<sup>654</sup> For example, in one study participants were able to detect the basic emotions of actors based on nonverbal cues alone.<sup>655</sup> To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, likewise, does not always require verbalization. Citing predictions made in antiquity about children based on circumstances surrounding their birth (such as a young infant smiling before the fortieth day), Bovon affirms: “God makes use not only of words but also of body language.”<sup>656</sup>

Such embodied speech is what Luke uses to portray John’s proclamation of the joy of Christ’s presence. As an infant within his mother’s womb, John first attests to this truth with a celebratory leap. Luke then narrates how Elizabeth is empowered to interpret this speech act as a gift of the Holy Spirit, which Elizabeth finally vocalizes for Mary and the readers. John’s action,

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<sup>653</sup> This is to say nothing of the very explicit proclamation of Mary in vv. 46ff., who is described in 1:27 as a *παρθένος*, or young maiden—little more than a young girl herself. I omit Mary’s role as a disciple here and elsewhere, while acknowledging its significance, due to the fact that she is pregnant when this role begins in Luke’s narrative. As highlighted in Chapter 1, it is difficult if not impossible to peg down exact ages as to when 1<sup>st</sup> century (or 21<sup>st</sup> century!) childhood might be understood to end or begin; however, there are certain milestone moments that mark such transitions. While child and teenage pregnancy are real and societal concerns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, whatever age one might have been, pregnancy was one of the social markers of entry into adulthood.

<sup>654</sup> Leonard Mlodinow, “How We Communicate Through Body Language,” in *Psychology Today* 29 May 2012. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/subliminal/201205/how-we-communicate-through-body-language>

<sup>655</sup> Mlodinow.

<sup>656</sup> Bovon, *Luke I*, 58.

therefore, serves as the impetus for the subsequent dialogue,<sup>657</sup> including Mary's Magnificat, thus anticipating the central theme of reversal in the Lukan narrative. Given Mary's initially reserved response to the angel's proclamation (Lk 1:32, 38), it is possible even to say that her encounter with John in this youthful exuberance even influences her to take on his joy in an almost contagious way, as she in turn proclaims to both John and Elizabeth a newly celebratory response (Lk 1:46-55).

Already from the womb John thus serves both as Jesus' precursor and an agent for the proclamation of Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God. Most commentators who attend to John at all within this episode acknowledge this role.<sup>658</sup> However, while traditional scholarship acknowledges the prefiguration of John's role in relation to the rest of the narrative, they do not linger on the active role of John already as an infant in his mother's womb. Consequently, Bovon writes, "But when John leaps in his mother's womb, showing himself already to be a prophet and a precursor, the narrative turns toward Mary."<sup>659</sup> Not only does the narrative turn quickly to Mary, however, but commentators turn equally if not more rapidly to Mary's proclamation, ignoring John's contribution as a result.

Fitzmyer points to Mary's proclamation in the Magnificat as a demonstration of Luke's

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<sup>657</sup> In contrast, by focusing on the dialogue (in particular, the Magnificat) with little or no attention paid to the act of the infant, commentators can unwittingly dismiss the role of one of "the least" for whom Mary proclaims that through Jesus God is now lifting up. For an example of such an interpretation that dismisses John's character by its inattention, cf. Johnson who, ignoring John's action concludes, "There is no significant action [in the scene] (Mary goes and returns)" (43). Likewise, he fails to credit John in Elizabeth's revelation about Mary's pregnancy, commenting: "Notice how Elizabeth knows (and reveals to the reader as she speaks to Mary) dimensions of Mary's condition and Jesus' status previously undisclosed" (43). By focusing only on the adult participants in the scene, John's unborn character is trivialized and the central action, along with its significance for such unattended to populations such as children and the unborn, is lost.

<sup>658</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke I*, 55; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 358; Tannehill, *Luke*, 52.

<sup>659</sup> Bovon, *Luke I*, 55.

intention to portray her as a disciple from the beginning of his account;<sup>660</sup> however, the same inference could easily be drawn about John himself.

In his context, amidst emerging feminist interpretations of Scripture, Fitzmyer's reading of Mary as a disciple was and remains an important one. Nevertheless, liberating readings of Scripture cannot end with women. Mary's individual discipleship opens the possibility of other female disciples within Luke's narrative world. So too does the embodied proclamation of John here open up possibilities for other young disciples both within and outside of the text, as reflected by Luke's narrative world.

Moreover, to the extent that John's proclamation influences Mary's Magnificat, this childist reading illustrates the potential for child proclamation to stir and encourage joy and praise in their audience.<sup>661</sup> Since the hesitation and doubt that characterizes Mary's initial response to the angel is often attributed to over intellectualization characteristic of older youths and adults in contemporary parlance, the pure joy expressed by John in utero represents a marked contribution that is uniquely, albeit not exclusively, fitted to infants.<sup>662</sup> The uninhibited way with which John shares such joy, unaware of or unconcerned about external responses it might elicit, allows the sheer experience of emotion to overtake Mary and to move her further in her discipleship journey, even as John continues to move forward in his.

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<sup>660</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 358.

<sup>661</sup> Not all childist interpreters understand the character of Mary as an adult (cf. Betsworth, 101-106); however, given the operative social definition of age presented in chapter one of this work, I read Mary's character as interacting at the level of an adult at this point in the narrative given the fact of her pregnancy.

<sup>662</sup> This is not to suggest, as have previous interpreters, that all infants are characteristically joyful. Indeed, anyone who has spent anytime with a hungry infant knows this not to be the case. Nevertheless, joy is one among many traits of infancy broadly conceived and one from which adult disciples might do well to learn.

### *Children as Agents of Verbal Proclamation*

Children also serve as agents of *verbal* proclamation in Luke's gospel account. Despite their already limited roles in the text and even more limited speech, when children *are* given voice within Luke's narrative, proclamation often results.

The direct speech of a specific child is only recorded three times in Luke's narrative: the boy Jesus at the temple (2:46-51); the resurrected youth at Nain (7:15); and the servant girl in Caiphas' courtyard (22:56). In the first two cases, the majority (or entirety) of each child's speech is described, but not recorded, leaving the possibility for the reader to infer, within the context, that some or all of the speech contains proclamation. However, as members of larger group characters among the shepherds, disciples, and crowds, children participate in proclamation of God's Kingdom throughout Luke's account.

In addition to these direct references, Luke's Jesus employs the speech of children in his teachings three additional times: comparing the current generation to children calling out (7:31-32), comparing the disciples' prayers to children asking of their parents (11:10-13), and in the parable of the prodigal son (15:11-32). Each of these instances illustrated the accepted role of child's speech within Luke's community.

While perhaps not valued at the level of an adult's speech, the speech of children was both heard and remembered in such a way that it can be called upon as an example. Moreover, in so much as Jesus uses this speech to further his own proclamation, it is put to service in favor of the Kingdom in its own right. However, since the purpose of this section is to re-member the direct proclamation of child characters in Luke's account, I do not dwell on the impact of such proclamation here.

Drawing on this acknowledgment of the existence and knowledge of child speech, in this

section I seek to re-member the proclamation of children in Luke's narrative world that has been hidden over the course of centuries through authorial elision of content and behind collective characters respectively. To do so I first return to the characters of the boy Jesus and the youth at Nain, discussed earlier, in order to re-imagine the proclamative nature of their speech. Next, I return to the category of collective characters: considering first those groups of which I have already established that children were a part—the crowds and the disciples; finally, retrieving children from the shadows of the very first human carriers of the gospel message—the shepherds outside Bethlehem.

#### 1. Jesus in the Temple (2:46-51) and the Youth at Nain (7:15)

The boy Jesus in the temple and the resurrected youth at Nain, together with the servant girl who briefly identifies Peter at the end of Luke's narrative, are the only remnants of direct speech attributed to child characters in Luke's gospel. Both of these children, although their words are elided, speak in relation to the power and action of God. While Luke considers the content of their speech insignificant enough to skip over (perhaps because they are children), the respective contexts of each episode suggests that their speech could plausibly and reasonably point to the glory and power of God.

Jesus' speech is narrated at least in part. Specifically, Luke recounts Jesus' response to his parents, asking: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49). Here Jesus is proclaiming himself Son of the Father. Irenaeus "claimed that here Jesus had wanted to introduce his rather un insightful parents to the unknown God."<sup>663</sup> By declaring his place in God's house to his earthly parents, Jesus is identifying his place within

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<sup>663</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 1.20.2, cited in Bovon, *Luke 1*, 113.

God's household and reminding Mary of the good news of his role proclaimed to her already by the angels. This is divine proclamation.

Hearing this proclamation, even though she does not fully understand, Mary thus responds as she has upon receiving previous proclamations—by treasuring all these things in her heart (2:51; cf. 1:51; 2:19). In this way she begins to fulfill the prophecy cited by the angel Gabriel that the hearts of parents will be turned to their children (1:17).

Although I have already emphasized Jesus' role in this temple scene as a student, learning from the teachers, such a role does not preclude the parallel characterizations of teacher and proclaimer of the good news. This was the model of a typical grammar school in antiquity in which "older and more able students also discharge some teaching functions."<sup>664</sup> Due to the expectation that children are continually learning, while also sharing what they learn within the classroom, this overlap is perhaps most easily seen among such characters. The ease with which the child Jesus slips between the roles of student and teacher of the Kingdom can serve as a valuable example for contemporary Christians—both youth and adults—living into their roles as disciples.

It is therefore fitting within such a reading to assume that the speech Luke does not narrate—the questions and answers supplied by the boy Jesus while sitting among the teachers—need not be understood as all inquiry or all proclamation. Rather, given the dynamic nature of both learning and proclamation, it is most likely that Luke elides within this exchange some combination of both. That Jesus' speech within this unnarrated exchange can be assumed to include at least some quality of proclamation is further implied by the amazement with which his words are met (2:47).

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<sup>664</sup> Cribiore, 42.



Likewise, the youth at Nain, while not possessing the divine qualities of the child Jesus, can also be read as proclaiming the good news of God in at least a portion of his unnarrated speech. Luke tells us, simply, that the young man “sat up and began to speak” (7:14). In response to all that they have witnessed, the crowd then “glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his peoples!’” (7:16). While we cannot know what Luke intends for his audience to understand the boy’s speech to include, we can make reasonable inferences from what follows in the narrative.

The boy’s speech represents a literary gap between these two moments—Jesus’ resuscitation of him on the funeral bier and the crowd’s proclamation of God’s power. This gap is otherwise filled only with Jesus’ return of the boy to his mother in v. 15. In Chapter 3 on Restoration, based upon this action of returning the boy to his mother, I suggest that at least part of this gap might be filled with this child’s frightened and disoriented cry for his mother. The crowd’s response that follows, however, leaves room for at least one more plausible response—that the boy himself gives glory to God upon having experienced this miracle.

Such a response of glorification or praise is in keeping with typical Lukan responses by those who receive Jesus’ healing.<sup>665</sup> That such a response occurs immediately upon receiving Jesus’ healing is demonstrated in such episodes as the bent over woman in 13:12, who “immediately stood up straight and began praising God” (13:13). Within the geographic and cultural context, with mourners identified and no special note otherwise, Luke seems to understand the youth at Nain as within the Israelite faith, as with the bent over woman. For the youth to immediately connect his miraculous recovery to God’s work, then, would have been a typical if not expected response. So the Psalm says of the faithful, “The Lord sustains them on

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<sup>665</sup> Cf. 5:12-15, 25; 8:38-39, 47; 13:12; 17:15-19; 18:43.

their sickbed, in their illness you heal all their infirmities” (Psa 41:3).

Thus, in both the case of Jesus in the temple and the youth at Nain, the unidentified content of their speech can plausibly and legitimately be assigned (at least in part) to the category of proclamation. Moreover, in the case of the boy Jesus in the temple, Luke directly attributes to him the act of proclamation in his encounter with Mary and Joseph. In terms of consistency with this proclamation and with other responses to Jesus’ acts of healing throughout the gospels, and with an eye toward lifting up contributions of children as disciples who both hear and *do* the word of God in Luke’s gospel account, it is therefore worthwhile to re-member the speech of these children in terms of their proclamative value.

## 2. Children in the Crowds and Among the Disciples

In a generic sense, Luke’s gospel account is full of words of proclamation from the mouths of children. It is necessary only to peel past the adultist layers of interpretation that have obscured children from these acts in order to hear them. Remembering all that has been said up to this point to establish the presence of children within the crowds and disciples whom Luke describes, it must suffice at this point to note that, unless the context or the text point otherwise, children are to be assumed in such gatherings.

Upon assuming children among Luke’s crowds and disciples, their frequent participation in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and God’s Kingdom is reclaimed. The crowds gathered around Jesus frequently participated in the act of proclaiming God’s Kingdom in response to Jesus’ good works and miracles. This is seen, among other instances, in the crowds’ response to the resuscitation of the youth at Nain cited above (7:16). Such responses, however, begin after Luke first records Jesus working miracles in Capernaum (4:37) and continue

throughout Luke's narrative.<sup>666</sup> The crowds consistently perform the narrative function of spreading word about Jesus throughout the countryside, often also glorifying God because of what Jesus has done.<sup>667</sup>

More explicitly, as participants within the group identified as Jesus' disciples, children also can be seen to engage in proclamative speech throughout Luke's narrative. This can be read into such summative descriptions as Luke 5:10-11 and 8:1-3; however, in as much as dwelling on such episodes merely employs a tautology in demonstrating the unique contribution of children as disciples of Jesus, I will not dwell on such episodes here.

Instead, it is worth noting that when Luke ascribes such acts of proclamation to the collective characters of the crowd and Jesus' disciples, one should not assume that it is only certain individuals (perhaps only the adults) who engage in such acts. Rather, Luke makes clear that public acknowledgment of Jesus is a prerequisite for *all* among those who follow Jesus: "And I tell you, *everyone* who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but *whoever* denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God" (Lk 12:8-9, emphasis added). With the stakes so high, to assume that the description of a group act excludes members of that group without explicit acknowledgment is not only presumptuous, but destructive. Hence, in as far as children are a part of the crowds

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<sup>666</sup> Cf. 5:26; 7:17; 8:34; 9:11, 19; 13:17; 18:43; 19:36-39; 23:27, 48.

<sup>667</sup> It is worth noting that this changes after Jesus' arrest. Here, too, children must be assumed to be a part of the crowds, but no longer are they glorifying God because of Jesus, now they are engaged in public outcry condemning Jesus (cf. 23:1, 18). Although there is strong historical evidence to suggest that it was only a small group of leaders who sought Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, Luke's narrative presents this guilt in a communal quality. The point is not to condemn any one subsection of the population, either Jews or adults, but rather to acknowledge a communal complicity among Jesus' disciples. Although all (adults and children) glorify God because of Jesus earlier in the narrative, all (adults and children) also ultimately fall short. Theologically, it is only with such recognition that contemporary disciples can move forward in efforts to continue to proclaim the Gospel despite our own shortcomings (including ageist discrimination that continues to occur in our churches).

and disciples and in so far as the crowds and disciples glorify God and proclaim Jesus, children ought to be assumed to engage in these roles.

### 3. Shepherds (2:8-20)

Finally, reading Luke's gospel with an eye towards the roles and participation of children in everyday life reveals a third collective character group in which children can be assumed to have taken part, if not, in fact, dominated in this case. This group is the shepherds—the very first people in Luke's account to proclaim the good news of Jesus' birth after the angels proclaim it to them.

The connection of children with the shepherds is different from that described above with relation to the crowds and the disciples. Children are connected with shepherds in Luke's narrative not as a result of collective communal participation (cf. Chapter 2 with relation to the crowds and Chapter 4 with relation to the disciples), but rather, due to their social and physical roles and through the application of biblical tradition.

Although Philippe Ariès was premature to argue for the nonexistence of childhood before the Renaissance on account of child labor, he was right in noting child labor as a routine part of existence in the first-century world. Indeed, it remains a routine part of childhood in many places across the world today. While most children in the first-century Mediterranean world would have at least worked within their homes (cf. Chapter 2), children who belonged to agricultural families—either as offspring or as slaves—were often given the task of caring for smaller livestock, like sheep, goats, and swine<sup>668</sup> who did not require significant herding.<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> Cf. Lk 8:34; 15:15-16. Following the suggestion made in Chapter 3 that swineherds fall into this same category of simple pastoral workers among whom children would have been prevalent, the role of the foreign swineherds in spreading the news of the exorcism performed by Jesus in

Affirming the early age at which slave children in particular were put to work in the first centuries of the Mediterranean world, Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen cites Varro, noting that among other farm jobs, “Both boys and girls could also be employed as shepherds, Varro informs us (*RR* 2.10.1). These children, just like Daphnis and Chole in Longus’ novel, must have been quite young. Young men would be responsible for the bigger cattle that grazed on the pastures away from the farm, while boys and girls would look after the smaller ones that were taken in every night.”<sup>670</sup>

Evidence from both agricultural practice and advice and from literature point to children serving as shepherds in the time and context out of which Luke was writing. Moreover, in the centuries immediately following, John Moschus describes shepherd boys “‘playing Eucharist...after their midday meal’ (*Prat. Spir.* 196).”<sup>671</sup> In traditions akin to the ‘boy who called wolf’ in modern literature, child shepherds seem to have been a part of the culture of the time.

Moreover, slaves were not the only children who served as shepherds. Jack Vancil notes that within the biblical tradition, “The work [of shepherding] might be delegated to the owner’s children; Rachel looked after Laban’s sheep (*Gen* 29:6), and David, though the youngest of Jesse’s sons, was given this responsibility (*1 Sam* 16:11; 17:15).”<sup>672</sup> Such ancient Israelite

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8:34 may also fall into the category of children engaging in proclamation about the Kingdom—doing the work of discipleship.

<sup>669</sup> Anecdotally, while staying with a family on a communal farm in Northern Namibia in the winter of 2002, I experienced this reality still at work first hand. During my stay, one of my tasks was to assist (rather ineptly, compared to his prowess) four-year-old Gneo in his daily tasks of herding and milking the family’s goats.

<sup>670</sup> Sigismund-Nielsen, 290.

<sup>671</sup> Blake Leyerle, “Children and ‘The Child’ in Early Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs, et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 562.

<sup>672</sup> Jack W. Vancil, “Sheep, Shepherd,” in *ABD* 1187.

precedents seem not to have changed much in the centuries intervening the two testaments, as Lena Larsson Loven and Agneta Stromberg conclude that in the first-century BCE “many poor Roman families relied on their children for agricultural work.”<sup>673</sup>

It is thus highly likely that Luke and/or his audience would have assumed or accepted the presence of children among the shepherds outside of Bethlehem in the infancy narrative. Such an assumption is further supported when one considers Luke’s concern for connections with the biblical tradition—a tradition that includes, as noted above, young David the shepherd boy.

Commentators agree that neither the setting of Jesus’ birth nor the occupation of the first people to greet him are coincidence in Luke’s telling. Fitzmyer explains, “In the background of the story is the association of David as a boy with his father’s sheep in a district near Bethlehem (1 Sam 17:15).”<sup>674</sup> Since the setting outside of Bethlehem, the city of David, recalls the story of David the shepherd boy, an acceptance and understanding of shepherding as a child’s task is written into Luke’s narrative.

Contemporary readers often miss this connection between shepherding and children both because of a forced blindness toward child labor in much of the academy and because scholarship has, over the centuries, painted Luke’s shepherds in a harsher, adult light that is difficult to resonate with children. This comes from certain rabbinic writings, mostly from the Babylonian Talmud, that speak of shepherding as a shameful profession. However, most recent scholars acknowledge, “The rabbinic texts critical of shepherds are not weighty enough to cancel out the positive evaluation of shepherds in biblical literature.”<sup>675</sup> Following the same logic, it is difficult to disconnect the positive evaluation of shepherds in biblical literature from the role of

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<sup>673</sup> Larsson Lovén and Stromberg, 56.

<sup>674</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 408-409. Cf. Bovon, *Luke I*, 87; Johnson, 52; Vancil, 1190.

<sup>675</sup> Bovon, *Luke I*, 86. Cf. Brown, 673; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 396; Tannehill, 65.

children in shepherding that the same literature also presents.

Luke's description of the shepherds' actions further supports the assumption of children, behaving in ways typically ascribed to children, among them. The shepherds' initial terror (2:9), while perhaps not unexpected from children or a group of mixed children and adults, does not weigh either for or against any assessment of their age, given the shared fear exhibited by both Zechariah (in his old age) and Mary (in her relative youth) when the angel Gabriel first visits them. However, following the angelic message, the shepherds exhibit unquestioned trust, saying among themselves, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place" (2:15), in sharp contrast to the initial disbelief of Zechariah and even, to a lesser extent, Mary.

The function of the shepherds, Bovon notes, "is showing the spontaneous trust in the heavenly message, which results in their hastening to the child. It is an example of the kind of spontaneous faith of which the Lucan Gospel is full."<sup>676</sup> Such trust is not typical of that which is commonly ascribed, albeit not always to be assumed, with relation to children. If one reads this early episode in Luke's gospel as a demonstration of the lived faith of a group of children, Jesus' later exhortation in Luke 18:17 to "receive the Kingdom as a little child" takes on a greater depth of meaning.

Most immediately, however, as it concerns the place of children as disciples, it is noteworthy that the shepherds represent the first human messengers of the good news of Jesus' birth. Not only do they respond to the angels' message in faith and relay this message to Mary and Joseph, but Luke writes, upon seeing the Christ child, "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (2:20). Tannehill explains that in this way, "The shepherds become earthly messengers of the heavenly

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<sup>676</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 397.

messengers, enabling others to understand the full meaning of this birth (Cf. Coleridge 1993, 148).<sup>677</sup> When read with children at the forefront, this episode becomes not only the first instance as children as proclaimers of God's Kingdom, but easily the most powerful proclamation attributed to children in Luke's account.

### *Conclusion*

Luke's gospel thus can and should be read to include children as present among Jesus' disciples. However, a childist reading of Luke's narrative must go further than this. Children ought not be treated as mere passive observers of the work of God's Kingdom. Their role was not nor should it be one of simple absorption of information. Rather, careful attention to child characters both explicit and implicit in Luke's text illuminates the role of children as active disciples, both receiving and proclaiming the word of God's Kingdom.

Such participation begins in the infancy narrative through the embodied acts of John in Elizabeth's womb and the faith-led verb proclamations of the Bethlehem shepherds, including those children among them, upon Jesus' birth. By re-membering children in the crowds and among the disciples, the proclamation of children continues to permeate Luke's account. This proclamation comes to a head when one child notes the speech of another, even when Luke deems the content of their words (perhaps because of their age) not worth recording.

### **Conclusion**

A childist reading thus serves to reclaim and re-member the presence of children among the disciples in Luke's gospel account. It shows both the feasibility and value of reading Luke's

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<sup>677</sup> Tannehill, 67.



gospel account in such a way as to take note of and learn from such children. Lukan discipleship is defined by hearing and doing, and both of these actions are not only engaged in by child characters in Luke's account, but also influenced by child performances of them.

From Jesus sitting among the teachers and Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, readers learn to treat listening and learning as an active rather than a passive task. It is the task of the disciple not merely to hear the words of the Gospel but to engage with them. Again from the child Jesus, but also from the shepherds who proclaimed his birth, readers learn to respond to God's word with faith and trust. While from Gabriel's prophecy as it is lived out in intergenerational acts of proclamation, ranging from Elizabeth's response to John's leap in her womb, to shared acts of proclamation and glorification among the crowds and disciples, the reader learns the importance of interdependent collaboration among the generations.

In Luke 18:17 Jesus instructs his disciples to receive the Kingdom as a child. Throughout the rest of Luke's narrative, both before and after, Luke narrates the dynamic ways in which child disciples engage in the work of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, adult readers have too frequently either overlooked or metaphorized the role of children in these episodes. In order to reclaim the richness with which children themselves can and should participate in the Kingdom and all that they have to contribute to their adult counterparts in the process, it is necessary to reclaim their part.

## CHAPTER 6

### (RE)MEMBERING CHILDREN, AND THROUGH THEM, CHRIST’S CHURCH

*“I believe that the short answer to [the question of why we tell children Bible stories] is to help children understand who they are and who they are becoming within the ongoing story that starts in the book of Genesis and that is yet to be finished in the book of Revelation. We tell children Bible stories to help them take their place in that great story...”*

- Sharon Warkentin Short, “The Story that Grew”<sup>678</sup>

*“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”*

- Romans 12:4-5

#### Introduction

This project has been one of *remembering*—of looking again at familiar texts and reimagining their meaning(s) through a childist lens. Through a literary critical reading of Luke’s gospel account, I have sought to bring out of the shadows children too often forgotten both by contemporary biblical interpreters and perhaps by the Lukan author himself. Grounded in socio-cultural evidence from the first-century Mediterranean world, I have demonstrated the prominent place of children both within Greco-Roman households, cities, and agricultural farms and within a Jewish understanding of the household of God. Thus reclaiming a subject-oriented biblical childhood, I have traced the presence of children in Luke’s description of Jesus’ ministry of restoration, among Jesus’ disciples, and finally as disciples themselves. Such remembrance serves to bring children into the light of interpretive study.

Yet, in another, more profound sense, this project has also been one of *membering*—

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<sup>678</sup> Sharon Warkentin Short, “The Story that Grew: The Metanarrative of Scripture as Recounted by Storytellers in the Bible,” in *Understanding Children’s Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin E. Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012) 57.

giving flesh and blood to children within, behind, and in front of Luke's gospel account. Through such (re)membering we have heard these children back into existence, or perhaps into existence for the first time, as embodied members of the discipleship community that Luke describes and towards which his gospel account points.

This combined act of (re)membering falls within the Christian liturgical tradition of *anamnesis*. Used to describe the liturgical remembering of Christ's death, resurrection, and return, *anamnesis* comes from the Greek noun ἀνάμνησις, which connotes an embodied kind of remembering. The word is used only three times in the New Testament—in Luke's description of the Last Supper, during which Jesus breaks and distributes the bread saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me [εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν]” (22:19); in Paul's description of the same act (1 Cor 11:23-25); and in the book of Hebrews with reference to the material “reminder [ἀνάμνησις] of sin” performed through the act of sacrifice (Heb 10:3). With regards to the Eucharist, *anamnesis* is the way in which Christians across time and place actively engage in and become a part of Christ's body offered and received. Such (re)membrance is an active, embodied response in which an entire person and, indeed, an entire community is engaged. It is the process by which worshipping Christians *become* community.

To (re)member children in Luke's account, therefore, cannot remain a static academic exercise concerned only with children as characters within Luke's text. It must, at the same time, give flesh and bone to the real children behind and in front of these characters. As such, we now turn to the (re)membering of children within the broader Christian community that Paul calls the “Body of Christ” (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-31) and, through them, the broader (re)membering of the discipleship community as a whole.

## **(Re)membering Children as a Part of the Body of Christ**

Children were not merely *present* in Luke's description of Jesus' early disciples and those for whom he practiced a ministry of restoration—children were a vital part of the singular body that these followers evolved into over the first two generations of Christian witness. Celsus, the first pagan author to write about Christianity, confirms this with his scornful account of Christianity as a religion. Towards the beginning of the second century he writes that Christianity was only attractive to “the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children.”<sup>679</sup> What Celsus takes as a point of reproach, Paul uplifts a century earlier as a point of distinction. Exhorting the Corinthian congregation against competition among themselves, Paul writes,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ...Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many...the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12:12-25).

This is what it means to practice mutual love. Children, though they held varying degrees of inferior status within the Roman household system, are lifted up among the disciples of Jesus as those treated with equal—even greater—respect and honor as their free male heads.

Luke does not use the same “body” language that Paul does; however, he expresses this relationship of interdependence in the language of “Kingdom” (βασιλεία), or more specifically, the Kingdom of God. Youngmo Cho observes, expressions for the proclamation of God's

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<sup>679</sup> Cited in Meeks, 53.

Kingdom “...are used only by Luke among the other New Testament writers and occupy up to one quarter of the total references to the kingdom of God in Luke-Acts. Its proclamation by Jesus and the disciples is the means by which the kingdom of God becomes a present reality.”<sup>680</sup> In Luke’s gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim a Kingdom whose proximity is not primarily a physical reality to be experienced at a later date, but rather is revealed in the present through the Spirit. Jesus explains, “For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you [*entos humon estin*]” (17:21). Like Luke’s metaphor of the body, the Kingdom of God as Luke understands it is relational. It is the living out of the prophetic proclamation of good news for the poor and the restoration of parents to their children. It is manifested in Jesus’ concrete ministries of restoration, as seen in the preceding discussion of the lives of the children whom Jesus touched.<sup>681</sup>

At the same time, however, such elevation and restoration is not expressed in Luke’s gospel as the mythical “level playing field” of contemporary American culture. To do this would be to obscure all of the ways in which children and other marginalized people in the first-century Mediterranean world required support and protection, as well as all of the unique gifts that children bring to the Christian community *as children*. In the characters of Mary, John the Baptist, and James and John, we have begun to see the possibilities for such contribution.

True restoration occurs through relationship—the interdependent living of people alongside one another. To this end, Jesus grants children, along with all the marginalized poor, the greatest honor imaginable in his fledgling eschatological movement as Luke describes it—declaring, “it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs” (Lk 18:16; cf. 6:20). Children

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<sup>680</sup> Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005) 171.

<sup>681</sup> Cf. Chapter 3.

are not only *a* part of the body of Christ—or, in Luke’s words, God’s Kingdom—children are an *integral* part of it. A childist reading of Luke’s gospel opens up the ways in which an awareness of and sensitivity towards children changes the ways in which the community interacts, learns, receives God’s word, and expresses praise. Children introduce a dialogical and enthusiastic reception of the Kingdom that catapults adults from faith paralyzing intellectualization and encourages instead active and exuberant *response* to the Word of God—and through it, to one another.

Given the reconstructed place of children within the community that Luke describes for which this project argues, it is worthwhile to (re)member such children not only as characters in a story but also as the physical, embodied people to whom Luke addresses his gospel. Although Luke’s gospel has had many diverse audiences across the centuries, I focus for the sake of clarity upon the real children implied by the text that would have been a part of Luke’s first-century ideal audience and the 21<sup>st</sup> century children, particularly in my Western context, whom the gospel continues to address.

### *Young Children in Luke’s Ideal Audience*

Up to this point this project has treated the children in Luke’s gospel account purely as literary characters. I have sought to reclaim them as characters from adultist interpretations that have read these child characters as static and one-dimensional. Such interpretations find children in Luke’s text useful primarily by way of analogy, or simply as background or objects to move the story along. In contrast, I argue that both the children mentioned directly and inferred beneath the surface of Luke’s text are dynamic characters. These children receive and respond to Jesus’ preaching and restoration in dynamic ways. Moreover, they live together with and as

disciples both among those sedentary in households and those itinerant disciples who follow Jesus on his way to the cross.

These characters, however, were crafted to speak to a real audience. While such an audience cannot ever be deciphered from the text, nor should we assume it to be a solitary unity, it is possible to mine Luke's writing for clues about the intended community or communities that his "most excellent Theophilus" represents (Lk 1:3). Given the widespread presence and acceptance of children in most all corners of life—including the religious—argued for previously, it is hard to imagine that their presence would not also have been assumed in Luke's ideal audience.<sup>682</sup> Even if Luke did not write specifically with children in mind, he would have almost certainly expected that children would, together with their caregivers, receive his account. However, in light of Luke's attention message of double reversal and use of specialized language and categories of childhood, it is likely that Luke intentionally authored his gospel account with children in mind—at least as a segment of his audience together with adults.

### 1. Double Reversal as Attractive to Young Children

Luke's gospel bears a message of hope to those at the margins of society, who, as I have argued, include children. The core of this message is contained in Luke's repeated use of the theme of double reversal. John York, in his book *The Last Shall Be First*, argues persuasively that Luke's narrative is characterized by a succession of bi-polar (double) reversals.<sup>683</sup> Thomas Hoyt points to the Lukan form of the Beatitudes as illustrative of this on account of "antithetical parallelism between blessings and woes (6:24-26) which are unique to Luke: poor/rich;

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<sup>682</sup> Cf. Chapter 2, "Young Children Included in the Household of God."

<sup>683</sup> Contra: Paul Borgman, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 43 fn 4; Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 59-60; 650.

hunger/full; weep/laugh [double reversal],” concluding, “eschatological reversal is more dominant in Luke: Jesus’ message was a message of hope for the downtrodden.”<sup>684</sup>

Such reversals set up a divine value system in opposition to that of the world, in which the poor and disabled (shamed or shameless) are honored—the first reversal—and those who seek self-aggrandizement are put to shame—the second reversal. Such reversals are first anticipated in Mary’s Magnificat (1:46-55),<sup>685</sup> but they continue throughout the narrative.

Within this system of values, York sees Luke’s healing narratives as *chronos* enactments of the *kairos* reversals both anticipated and being lived into in Jesus’ inauguration of God’s Kingdom.<sup>686</sup> Unfortunately, York fails to see the rejection of Jesus’ disciples’ dismissal in favor of the reception of children in Luke 18:15-17 as a double reversal. However, he does draw out the theme of reversal implicit in Luke’s allusion to children in Luke 9, noting that the need to rely upon God for salvation is “solidified by use of the child metaphor” in Luke 9.<sup>687</sup> While I would stretch York’s resistance to move beyond the child as metaphor in these texts, what is clear is that both the paradigmatic child stories of Luke 9 and 18, framed as they are within a larger narrative of poverty and wealth, are intertwined in Luke’s theme of double reversal.

Furthermore, York’s perceptive link between the theme of double reversal and Luke’s healing narratives further solidifies the place of children on the positive end of this theme. As we have seen, children are enmeshed in Luke’s narratives of healing and restoration, and as such, can be understood as living into the promise of reversal already in the present. This, together with the established marginal status of children within the household implicitly connects them with the honor side of Luke’s reversals. The Magnificat, referencing the continuity of God’s

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<sup>684</sup> Hoyt, 31-41.

<sup>685</sup> Cf. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 59-60.

<sup>686</sup> York, 166.

<sup>687</sup> York, 154-155. Cf also York, 102; 170; 171 fn 3; 185 fn 2.



mercy across the generations, assumes such inclusion (1:50).

The inclusion of children on the honored end of Luke's double reversals is seen even earlier in the text when Gabriel announces John's vocation "to turn the hearts of parents to their children" (Lk 1:17). Luke uses the verb ἐπιστρέψαι, meaning literally "to turn, return, or reverse." Moreover, by leaving out the latter half of Malachi's prophecy that "the hearts of children" will also be turned "to their parents" (Mal 4:6), Luke turns what Malachi intends as a single reversal—a leveling of playing fields, in effect—into a *double* reversal in which children are honored by the attention of their parents, while parents are put to shame by the failure to require similar attention from their children in return.

Looking towards the up-building of the entire Kingdom of God, inclusive of all members, however, the end of such reversal for adult disciples cannot be simply to experience shame. I propose that the reversal occurs, rather, in the place of privilege given to each side of the adult/child dyad. In terms of their ability to contribute to the meaning and character of the community, adults must therefore listen seriously to children. Pam Moore, a Christian educator who works closely with children, has chosen to engage in this reversal with regard to what it means to educate all Christians—young and old. As such, she writes of the need to "listen to God with children."<sup>688</sup> She explains, "When we are attentive to children...we see that they take us right to the core truths of the Christian faith. Even though adults are the ones who make the initial proclamation, children get right to what is most essential. The result is mutual blessing."<sup>689</sup> Although Moore's affirmation, written for the sake of her adult audience in this context, falls short in continuing to assume that there are certain immutable truths of the Christian faith—

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<sup>688</sup> Pam Moore, *Taste and See: Savoring the Child's Wisdom* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011) 1.

<sup>689</sup> Moore, 1.

presumably determined by adults—she gets right the truth of the richness of children in their own faith, perception, and interpretation. Such insights are the unique gifts that they bring to their adult counterparts in Christian community when we allow such mutual interaction as described by Moore to flourish and thrive.

Through liberative readings of Luke’s gospel account that take seriously such reversals and begin to imagine how to embody and live them out in God’s in-breaking Kingdom, there is sufficient cause for hope. Nevertheless, multiple feminist scholars rightly caution against a naïve application of such hope that assumes the Lukan author always (or even frequently) had such noble intentions in mind.

Illustrating this point with reference to Luke’s presumed reversal of the roles of women, Turid Karlsen Seim counters, “Even if Jesus makes a reversal of established value in [the woe to mothers expressed in] 23:28ff...this is not determined positively by the relationship to the word or by the all-consuming dominance of discipleship, but by the fact that the turbulence and horror of the coming time of tribulation render normal life impossible.”<sup>690</sup> In pronouncing woe on mothers, Luke’s Jesus is thus not so much reversing societal expectations and norms that attach status—and even freedom—with childbirth. Rather, he is lamenting for these mothers and for their children as what Karlsen Seim describes as “victims of the catastrophe.”<sup>691</sup>

This is an important critique because it cautions against associating contemporary idealist hopes for a message of liberation in Luke’s gospel account with the author’s likely intent within the confines of his ancient cultural context. François Bovon similarly reminds, “The New Testament itself, by virtue of the meager place it allots children, is a witness to those ancient times that neglected boys and girls and did not think of them except as a mass to shape into their

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<sup>690</sup> Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 206.

<sup>691</sup> Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message*, 207.

adult state through education and the inculcation of obedience.”<sup>692</sup> While I have earlier taken issue with the one-dimensional portrait of ancient treatment of children that Bovon assumes, his overall point, that the New Testament *by itself* is insufficient for the liberation of children, is an important one. Karlsen Seim’s analysis also bears out this sense of the necessity of mindful interpretation both with regard to women and, implicitly, their children.

Fortunately, as in any interpretive act, it is impossible to take the New Testament texts *by themselves*. Texts are by their very nature always read, and, as such, interpreted. Moreover, such interpretation is conducted, whether or not the interpreter acknowledges it, with a particular audience and a particular interpretive agenda in mind. Consequently, Karlsen Seim, reading at a time of crucial liberation of (primarily white) women in both the home and the workplace, laments that Luke’s Jesus does not separate women from the expectation of childbirth and motherhood in 23:28-31. On the other hand, reading in hope of a nascent liberation of children and childhood in the United States, I read the same text through a different lens.

I concur with Karlsen Seim’s assessment that v. 29 does not represent a *de facto* rejection of child bearing and nursing, but rather a lament of the pain of caring for such vulnerable lives in the midst of crisis and calamity. We differ, however, in that for me such a lament bears a cautious word of hope. We live in a broken and pain filled world—a world that wrongly oppresses, marginalizes, and demeans so many people for so many reasons, including women and children in all their intersectionalities. This is a fact of life; one with which Jesus, on the road to his crucifixion, was painfully aware. This is not news for children, or women, who continue to fall victim to such realities. However, Jesus’ lament for, and consequently his naming of such victimization, is a kernel of hope in the midst of the horror.

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<sup>692</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 559.

The first-century Roman order celebrated and rewarded the bearing of citizen children as a means of growing and institutionalizing their cultures and value. Jesus, on the other hand, anticipates and shares in their lament of such procreation. Significantly, Jesus is not merely speaking generally in terms of the merits of procreation, but rather addresses himself specifically to the weeping “daughters of Jerusalem” (23:28)—his own followers, the ones whose children would have presumably similarly built up and institutionalized his teachings. In so doing, he effectively reverses the Roman expectations of mothers and children as cogs in an imperialist machine, acknowledging them instead as hurting persons—victims of that same imperialism.

Was such overt critique of Empire intended by the original Lukan author? Did Luke’s original audience recognize the content of such critique? These are questions worth pondering; yet, more significantly, it is undeniable that critique of Empire is present in the text. Was Luke specifically thinking about children when he crafted a message of double reversal? Would he have immediately applied emphatic and consistent liberation to children in his own community even if he was? Again, these questions can be debated in perpetuity. Nevertheless, the evidence of children teeming among those at the margins in Luke’s likely context and that of his audience, as well as the links to their consistent up-building throughout Luke’s text, suggest that such possibilities should not be ignored. Such interpretations are both plausible and legitimate within Luke’s context and lend themselves favorably to an embodied reading of the lives and personhood of children and all people in the communities Luke addresses.

## 2. Language and Categories of Childhood

Within such uncertainties, moreover, the narrative structure of Luke’s gospel account gives further pause for the consideration of children as an original audience implicitly assumed

by the text itself. Luke uses language, characterization, and narrative structure to draw out multiple layers of childhood that might both have appealed to an ancient child audience and have lent complexity to child characters in his account.

Luke uses six independent terms for child or children, in addition to more generic terms such as υἱός (son) and τῶν μικρῶν τούτων (these little ones, Lk 17:2).<sup>693</sup> The richness of this vocabulary, paying attention to particular developmental stages of childhood, suggests that Luke may have had at least a rudimentary sense of the diverse and various moments of childhood and perhaps even the richness and diversity among children themselves. To treat child characters akin to objects, important only in so far as how they cause the other more “developed” characters of the story to respond does not require such sophistication. Rather, Luke’s attention to the diverse vocabulary of childhood, while often obscured in English translation, suggests a vibrant and dynamic engagement with children as characters within the account.

Furthermore, while oftentimes child characters in Luke’s account may often be concealed in the background or treated ostensibly as vehicles to move along the plot, at least several children explicitly emerge as active and dynamic characters. Although children, even more so than women, fall victim to the Lukan author’s patriarchal tendency to deprive them of names and speech in the gospel account, a closer look at their characterization reveals dramatic changes and shifts in their characters as a response to Jesus. Such shifts are seen most clearly in the individual children whom Luke describes receiving Jesus’ ministries of healing and restoration, discussed in depth in chapter 3.

Perhaps the most dramatic examples are the two children whom Luke describes responding to Jesus’ call back to life (7:11-17; 8:40-56). In response to Jesus’ call for them to

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<sup>693</sup> Cf. Ch. 1 for a more thorough discussion of Luke’s vocabulary for childhood including: βρέφος, παιδίον, παιδίος, νεανισκος, τέκνον, and παρθένον.

“get up” (ἐγέρθητι in 7:14; ἔγειρε in 8:54), the status of these children shifts not only in relationship to the narrative but also in relationship both to God and their communities. They are actively restored to participation and included in the family of God. They morph from inactive, unable even to request help for themselves, to active, responding *immediately* to the call and command of Jesus. Similarly, after Jesus’ healing of a young slave (7:1-10) and expulsion of a demon from a boy (9:37-45), both these children are restored to and reaffirmed in their place in God’s Kingdom.

The parable of two brothers and their experience of forgiveness (15:11-32), however, is the most dynamic example of the characterization of children in Luke’s gospel account. Within this short story, Luke utilizes both static and dynamic child characters—the former in the case of the slave child who relays message of the father’s actions and the latter in the case of the two brothers. The younger brother who is, together with his father, one of the two primary actors in this parable, begins as an entitled and demanding son (15:12). Through his experiences of both surplus and hardship, he shifts first to a disposition of repentance (15:13-19). Finally, following his unexpectedly warm restoration by his father, the boy’s character shifts again to an experience of full restoration in his father’s household (15:24). The elder brother’s change and subsequent restoration to relationship remains a gap for the reader to choose whether or not to fill in (15:31-32).

This dynamism, centered on the two brothers, is in sharp contrast to the static role of the father as a loving and forgiving constant in the story. God does not change in God’s relationship to humanity. However, in response to God’s entry into humanity and restorative healings, blessings, and reversals through Jesus, God calls humanity to change and return to God. This is the consequence of the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom in Luke’s gospel account, and it is

experienced as profoundly by Luke's child characters as it is by the adults. Through these characters, children in Luke's audience are being called, together with adults, to respond to Jesus.

Finally, the narrative structure, particularly of Luke's prologue, suggests at least some possible attention to children in an ideal audience. Scholars have noted similarities between the Lukan prologue and ancient biographies or hero stories. The Lukan prologue shares with this genre a concern for noble origins of a respected figure; however, it is here that the similarities end. In contrast to such biographies, more similar in this regard to the non-canonical account of Jesus' childhood recorded in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the child Jesus in Luke's prologue does not perform any miraculous deeds.<sup>694</sup>

In ancient biographies, Tony Chartrand-Burke states, "The primary purpose behind childhood tales of great men (common throughout the world) is to foreshadow the adult career of their protagonist."<sup>695</sup> To this end, child characters in ancient biography, whose intended audience seems to be primarily adults concerned with the enduring character of great figures in history, are relatively static. In contrast, Luke describes both the child Jesus and the child John as growing and gaining in strength of spirit, wisdom, and divine and human favor respectively (1:80; 2:40; 2:52).

Although Luke recognizes the special character of these children as distinct from

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<sup>694</sup> Tony Burke argues that *IGT* should be considered a part of the ancient biography genre of literature on this account (cf. Tony Burke, "'Social Viewing' of Children in the Childhood Stories of Jesus," in *Children in late ancient Christianity*, Cornelia Horn and Robert Phenix, ed.. [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009] 29-43); however, I find Reidar Aasgaard's conclusion that *IGT* represents a unique genre not so easily collapsible into the categories of ancient biography more persuasive (cf. Aasgaard, 49-50).

<sup>695</sup> Tony Chartrand-Burke, "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas," in *Non-canonical Gospels* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 134. Cf. also *Childhood and Personality in Greek Literature, in Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 235-240.

ordinary children, he does not portray them as simply miniaturized versions of the men that the narrative knows them to have become. Rather, as these children grow in years and physical capacity, this is matched by shifts in their spirit, wisdom, and relationships. Neither does Luke portray John and Jesus in their childhoods as embryonic forms of the same men later in the narrative, patiently developing until they reach a point that they can fulfill their divine potential.

Both children are celebrated *already* as bringing God's promises to fulfillment both in utero and when they are newly born.<sup>696</sup> However, the way in which they fulfill God's promise as children in Luke's account is *distinct* from the ways in which they continue to fulfill the same promises as adults. This change—I avoid the word development in order not to assume that one moment of Jesus' ministry is superior to another—in Jesus' character over the course of his lifetime is reflected in his ministry with relation to the temple.

As an infant, Jesus acts to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise in the temple through receiving the embrace of Simeon and Anna (2:25-38). Jesus' ministry at this moment in Luke's narrative is one of presence, granting peace in a way that cradled infants are uniquely able to do. As an adolescent child, when Jesus returns to the temple his ministry is one of listening, answering, and being listened to. He engages in a two-way dialogue with the teachers at the temple that is mutually beneficial and reveals in a new way the in breaking of the Kingdom of God (2:41-51). Lastly, as an adult, Jesus enters the temple with a new sense of authority, driving out those who were selling things there and proclaiming God's Kingdom (19:45-48).

In antiquity, there was no sharp distinction between adult and child audiences. Reidar Aasgaard explains, "The generations lived closely together and cultural traditions were handed over in multi-age settings, in which stories would float back and forth being transformed in the

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<sup>696</sup> Cf. Lk 1:15-17; 24-25, 42-45, 46-55, 67-79; 2:10-14; 2:28-32.



process.”<sup>697</sup> Nevertheless, Aasgaard argues persuasively that within this context there were certain tales exchanged with the interests of children in the audience particularly in mind—much as families have engaged in the telling of fairy tales in more recent times. In light of this tradition, Aasgaard suggests that the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* “can offer a special glimpse into ancient child pedagogy, and in particular into how early Christian communities communicated religious beliefs to their children.”<sup>698</sup> Aasgaard bases this claim on a number of literary elements in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* that correspond to ancient stories directed at children. These include, among others, content, chronology, characters, and theology expressed in the text.

Although I concur with Aasgaard that the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* contains more content and form directed explicitly at children, applying some of his same criteria can suggest at least a peripheral attention to children in the audience of Luke’s gospel account as well. Theologically, we have already seen this to be the case with Luke’s emphasis on double-reversal, with a preference for the poor and marginalized—including children. The focus of content, chronology, and characterization can be seen particularly in chapters 1 and 2 of Luke’s gospel account—the materials typically identified as the prologue, but which I have argued are integral to the narrative as a whole.

First, with regard to content, Luke’s prologue, similarly to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, pays attention to child heroes *as* children. Aasgaard notes, “IGT is unique among antique biographical stories in that it is restricted to telling only about the childhood of its hero.” Although Luke’s account moves on from the childhoods of John and Jesus to narrate their adult lives and ministries, it does so not in the sense of a traditional *puer senex* novella that portrays these characters as static throughout their development, but rather with attention to the unique

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<sup>697</sup> Aasgaard, 196.

<sup>698</sup> Aasgaard, 212.

characteristics of each character as a child, as illustrated above. Through Luke's attention both to the unique moments of childhood and to the lived experience of the heroes of his narrative account *as children* rather than miniature adults, his account may well have been uniquely appealing to children from among the canonical gospels. By thus presenting the two main characters of his narrative in ways that are, over the course of the story, relatable to both children and adults, Luke seems to assume a broad audience that includes both groups.

Similarly, Luke's attention to the development of these two characters in particular shows an astute regard for chronology that adheres well to general ancient concepts of the socialization and growth of children. The narrative begins with John described in utero as τὸ βρέφος (the infant, Lk 1:41, 44); this same term is used to describe Jesus when he is first born (Lk 2:12, 16). Shortly after birth, following each child's official acceptance into his respective father's family, the language shifts from that of neonate to child (τὸ παιδίον).

For John, this acceptance is first voiced by the narrator and his father Zechariah on the eighth day after his birth in conjunction with his ritual naming and circumcision (Lk 1:59, 66, 76), thus following Jewish custom. For Jesus, this custom is broken by the narrator who describes Jesus as τὸ παιδίον shortly after his birth, connecting this developmental shift not with his circumcision (an earthly rite), but rather with the shepherds' confirmation of the divine inclusion of Jesus as the heavenly child proclaimed to them by the angels—messengers of his heavenly father (Lk 2:17; cf. 1:32). The same language is then applied consistently with regard to both characters throughout the prologue, finally with reference to their childhood growth (Lk 1:80; 2:40), until Luke resumes narration with them as adults.

Likewise, Luke applies similar vocabulary to babies and young children whom Jesus encounters in his adult ministry. Although Luke does not use the intermediary terms (such as

νεανίσκος) to describe the stage between young childhood and adulthood with relation to Jesus or John, he does so with regard to youth whom Jesus encounters in his ministry. Such attention to the nuances of childhood suggests both an awareness by the Lukan author of real children as well as an application of this awareness to his narrative in such a way that would be likely to resonate with children across the developmental spectrum described.

Next, with regard to characters, we have already seen the steady presence of children both implicitly and explicitly within Luke's text. Such a presence, while bolstered by Luke's unique attention to the childhoods of John and Jesus, does not end there. Rather, Luke's Jesus receives, addresses, and heals children throughout the narrative account. Even when the pace of the narrative picks up and the scope narrows as Jesus approaches the cross, Luke describes Jesus pausing before the woman of Jerusalem, lamenting with them the turmoil that remains for them and for their children (23:28).

Luke's picture of discipleship is not always an easy one for children to be involved in, but it remains consistently inclusive of them nonetheless. Indeed, children in antiquity were not afforded the luxury of protection from the harsh realities of life. As such, an expectation that discipleship must be easy for children is as misplaced as is the assumption that discipleship must be easy for adults. Rather, the focus, for good and for ill, is on the mutual inclusion of all members of God's family as a part of the body of Christ that comes to be known as the Christian Church.

### *Young Children in Luke's Contemporary Audience*

Adults and children in the first-century Mediterranean world make up only a small portion of the gospel's audience when one considers that Luke's account has been passed on as

Scripture in Christian communities ever since. Regardless of whether or not one accepts the presence of children in Luke's first ideal audience, since their initial reception of the text (if it was ever received as such), this gospel account has been passed across continents and centuries. As such, it has come to reach a diversity of audiences beyond what its original author could have wildly imagined. This audience, of which contemporary Christians are a part, continues to receive and appropriate the gospel narrative according to our cultures, circumstances, and ethical dispositions.

In light of the place of children among Jesus' first disciples, I contend that contemporary children are also, or at least *should be*, a part of this expanded audience. Moreover, returning to chapter one's discussion of the broad language for and various definitions of children and childhood both in ancient and contemporary terms, I contend that *all* contemporary children—including infants and the very young—ought to be treated as a part of this gospel audience.

The fact that children are not, and have not been, universally assumed to be a part of Luke's contemporary audience can be seen in trends such as “children's bibles” and “children's church,” which began with the invention of the printing press and have proliferated throughout modernity.<sup>699</sup> While the purposes of these practices and publications are multitudinous, they represent, at least in part, a general anxiety among Christian adults that the text (both written and spoken) of canonical Scripture should not be received directly by children. As such, a question that must be answered before proposing an audience of contemporary children for Luke's gospel account is, “Can Luke's gospel account speak directly to children today?”

The practice of recording simplified versions of favorite Bible stories as devotional

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<sup>699</sup> Ruth Bottigheimer traces the origins of collections of Bible stories written specifically for children to the beginnings of the printing press, with Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* (15<sup>th</sup> C) and Martin Luther's *Passional* (16<sup>th</sup> C). Cf. Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Guttenberg to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 14-37.

literature for “the young and simple” dates back to before the Protestant Reformation.<sup>700</sup> These texts have shaped the religious imagination of generations of Christians, often serving in the not so distant past as both a religious and secular grammar, as children learned to read and write from their pages. Their appeal exists both in their narrative simplicity and in their engaging illustrations. However, as Bottigheimer astutely notes, whereas the meaning in Bible stories remain “‘open’ texts,” subject to interpretation, Children’s Bibles and similar devotional literature, in both their text and illustrations, involve “choice and affirmation of particular interpretations of an inherently polysemic text.”<sup>701</sup> Such texts do the work of interpretation for their audience.

In contrast, recent work on the religious capacity and vocations of children suggests that children are both capable of and benefited by engaging in their own interpretations of polysemic biblical texts. Although there may be certain portions of the narratives better reserved for devotional focus until particular moments in a child’s development, exposure to narratives within the biblical texts themselves, with all their meaning potential, allow children to engage with the texts most deeply. Sofia Cavalletti’s international catechesis program, developed for children from age 3 to 12 based entirely on her translations of the Greek and Hebrew scriptures, gives children the space to hear and respond to actual biblical texts. She contends that such a presentation of Scripture together with the space and respect for the child’s own interpretation responds “to the child’s silent request: ‘Help me to come closer to God by myself.’”<sup>702</sup>

Cavalletti’s religious education program, the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, is aimed at cultivating wonder and excitement in the youngest child as he or she experiences God.

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<sup>700</sup> Bottigheimer, 12.

<sup>701</sup> Bottigheimer, 57.

<sup>702</sup> Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, trans. Patricia M. Coulter and Julie M. Coulter (Chicago: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 1992) 45.

Selected Bible stories are explicitly “presented” rather than “taught,” with the goal of giving each child the space to creatively interact with God, through the biblical text and accompanying devotional materials, and to ponder God’s presence in their lives. Such an encounter necessarily relies on adults, or older children, as presenters in order to pass on the communal stories and faith that younger children have not yet had the opportunity to hear. However, at the same time, it encourages children to ask their own questions and come to their own realizations about God and their spirituality—to develop in children the capacity for what Paulo Freire calls “moral courage,”<sup>703</sup> the ability to critically assess and respond to a situation from one’s own being in contrast to acting according to a pre-defined moral compass.

Consequently, it is not only possible to conceive of contemporary children as an audience of Luke’s gospel account; to do otherwise would be to deprive children of a great encounter with God as God reveals God’s self through their reading of the text as Scripture. One catechist of young children describes the process of hearing and internalizing the words of the ancient Scriptures for a young child as “learning our church’s secret handshake”—an exercise of inclusion in which many young children across a variety of contexts are eager to engage.<sup>704</sup> Adults are not the only ones revealing secrets in this exchange, though, through the multifaceted experiences and emotions that children uniquely bring to these texts, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, they alter the conversation entirely, bringing new insights to the adults who present the stories and helping adults to learn the stories anew. Sometimes exchange brings about entirely new revelation, sometimes it changes the character of the reading, sometimes it stirs a new way of thinking, and sometimes, as described again by Moore in another experience engaging in

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<sup>703</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>704</sup> Joanna Williams, *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Level I Formation Seminar*, St George Episcopal Church (Nashville, TN) November 2012.

dialogic learning with primary grade children, a child may simply ask the adult, “Can we read more?”<sup>705</sup> This quest for more—this hunger and passion for that which nourishes us together in community—is but one of the many gifts that such mutual relationship entails.

Given the power of such dynamic interchange when adults and children together engage in mutual learning of Christian sacred texts, I am convinced that explicitly child-centered materials should not replace the primary role of Scripture, including Luke’s gospel account, as a proclamation of the Word of God for all Christians—adults and children—to hear and do.<sup>706</sup>

Lutheran theologian, Marcia Bunge summarizes, “Christian understandings of children...could all be strengthened by...developing theological conceptions of children that acknowledge: their strengths and gifts as well as their vulnerabilities and needs; their full humanity as well as their need for guidance; and their spiritual wisdom as well as their growing moral capacities.”<sup>707</sup>

Moreover, given the experiential quality of liberative education, to deprive children from encountering these texts and communally lived expressions of them in Christian worship is equally dangerous. To this end, Cavalletti’s pedagogy is set up to present Scriptural texts alongside liturgical action in the Christian Education environment. However, if we are truly to follow Freire’s proposal for freedom, even this does not go far enough. Children learn what it is to be the community of Christ—and indeed, adults learn it too—by *being* this community together. In all the aspects that such community entails. This means that there is something

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<sup>705</sup> Moore, 59.

<sup>706</sup> There is, of course, is a place for additional devotional literature and practices directed at children, just as there is for such materials and practices for adults, but true and mutual inclusion in the Christian community demands that as our primary source all disciples begin with the sacred texts.

<sup>707</sup> Marcia Bunge, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices” in *Understanding Children’s Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed Kevin E. Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012) 6.

unique about experiencing the words of Luke's gospel read in a communal worship setting among children that does not exist when all of the community's children are sent away to the nursery or a separate children's church (and that, likewise, would not exist for children in such settings apart from adults). Such accommodation may require in many contemporary churches substantial revisioning and reworking of how such worship is engaged; however, to do so is necessary if we are to take seriously the mutually interdependent relationship we have as disciples together with one another. Moreover, I would be excited to see the ways in which the flexibility and creativity inherent in children may contribute to such revisioning.

Such changes are important and ethically necessary because to exclude children from the reception of Luke's gospel account as a core piece of our faith heritage in these ways fails to take seriously their full humanity and, indeed, their full participation in the divinity revealed to the Christian community through Scripture. To exclude children from the liturgical service of the same community based on these Scriptures is equally, if not more, dangerous. Such exclusions effectively dismembers them from the body of Christ. By taking seriously the place and role of children both as disciples in these Scripture texts and as disciples receiving these texts, a childist reading presents the possibility of (re)membering children into this body as Luke's narrative clearly places them as possessors of the Kingdom of God.

### **(Re)membering the Body of Christ in Light of Children**

It is to that broader Kingdom family, embodied in Christ, to which we now turn. The goal of a childist biblical interpretation is dually for the liberation of children and for the liberation of all wo/men through an inclusive reading of the text. As such, the preceding reading of Luke's gospel account only holds value in so much as it is able to accomplish both tasks.



Having established the presence of children and adults together in Luke's audience(s) both in antiquity and present day, I therefore turn to the impact of my childist reading on these communities. Specifically, I argue that reading Luke's gospel through a child-centered lens emphasizes a unique perspective on interdependence, which, while, perhaps, more necessary in an ancient Mediterranean context, remains valuable for a reconceptualization of the Christian family today.

### *Young Children as Interdependent Agents*

The first inclination of a liberative reading for any minoritized group is often to assert the independence and self-agency of the members in that group. Children are unique in this regard in that they (particularly at the youngest end of the spectrum) are often incapable of fully exercising this independence on their own. As a result, the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* affirms the protection of basic human rights for children alongside rights of protection from abuse and exploitation.<sup>708</sup> To this end, John Wall observes, "The task of transforming social norms through the lens of children's experience 'is already under way' ... The clearest example can be found in studies of children's citizenship, where some now argue for a 'children-sized citizenship' based on the idea of broad human interdependence instead of on the idea of adult autonomy."<sup>709</sup> Children are at the same time intensely independent and capable of acting for themselves from a very young age and intensely dependent and in need of protection. Wall and others engaged in Childhood Studies and the vocation of childhood, however, argue that such a dual relation with the world is not a hindrance, but rather a great asset that children bring to intergenerational communities.

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<sup>708</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989.

<sup>709</sup> Wall, "Childism," 70.

The unique characteristics of childhood open children up to a unique experience of the world—one from which both children and the adults who engage with them can benefit immensely. Quoting theologian of childhood David Jensen’s definition of vulnerability as living “on the edge, open to the world’s profound beauty and its threatening violence,”<sup>710</sup> Bonnie Miller McLemore contends, “In a sense, children and aging adults both ‘live on the edge’ of life, more exposed than others to its precariousness and perils.”<sup>711</sup> Such exposure opens children up to vulnerability, but also to beauty. It requires of the adult both protective diligence and respectful attentiveness.

As such, when considering what it means to liberate children, Duanne explains, “Rather than arguing for moving children over to the empowered side of the equation, childhood studies offers new ways of engaging interdependence as a social reality and offers new frameworks for thinking about how to negotiate the obligations incurred across the very real gaps of power that do, and will, exist.”<sup>712</sup> Children are in need of the respect of both their self-agency and their vulnerability. Indeed, this is characteristic of *all* humans—it is simply most intensely witnessed in the persons of the very young. Duanne further explains:

Foucault’s now-classic assertion that subjects are created through power acting on and through them and Judith Butler’s argument that identity—particularly gendered identity—is created through performance are just two of the revolutions in thought that reveal the extent to which we are all humans-in-the-making, perpetually in flux, continually responding to authoritative forces beyond our own minds and bodies. There’s arguably no better way to understand this form of subjectivity than through the child, a term often used uncritically as a placeholder for the dependence and malleability we still seek to partition off from adult autonomy.

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<sup>710</sup> David Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005) 47.

<sup>711</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Childhood: The (Often Hidden Yet Lively) Vocational Life of Children,” in Kathleen Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds., *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation across the Lifespan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2017) 16-17.

<sup>712</sup> Duanne, 7.

Rather than denying the child's fragility, we insist that bringing a critical eye to childhood will teach us to better conceive of a realistic human subject.<sup>713</sup>

It is at this point of constant malleability that stage theories of development fall short.

Theorists of child development such as Jean Piaget or of child spiritual development like James Fowler present helpful paradigms that enable us to identify moments and types of engagement in a child's life. However, by naming these moments as stages they create the illusion of a linear progressive model of human and, specifically, Christian life that does not match up completely with lived experience, and even less with such experience as lived in the Christian notion of *kairos* time.<sup>714</sup> Miller-McLemore laments, "Stage theory tends to value where one is headed more than what one leaves behind. One result of this Christian inheritance today is a continued struggle to regard children as active participants in and contributors to the Christian life, a problem that resurfaces when we start talking about vocation."<sup>715</sup>

In contrast, Miller-McLemore suggests "a Christian view of childhood" that is not bound to the constraints of *chronos* time. She writes, "Children have a vocation grounded in God's own childhood that is as essential to Christian life, if not more so, than our purpose as adults. Their task or 'claim upon us all' that we must help the child perform is to help us become the children we began to be in our own childhood, again *not* metaphorically but in reality. For in childhood, our 'first intimations of God are attained.'"<sup>716</sup> Such attainment involves not only the reclamation

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<sup>713</sup> Duanne, 6-7.

<sup>714</sup> Koepf-Taylor explains, "Indeed, contrary to assumptions of cognitive deficiency, children and youth are adept at learning new technologies, and children acquire physical and linguistic competencies much more quickly than adults do, but are still seen as lacking" (11).

<sup>715</sup> Miller-McLemore, "The Vocational Life of Children," 6; Cf. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Whither the Children? Childhood in Religious Education," *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (October 2006): 635-657.

<sup>716</sup> Miller-McLemore, "The Vocational Life of Children," 13, citing Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," pp. 48, 50.

of the liminal, “edge” existence that Jensen describes, but indeed, a rebalancing of both power and relationships in line with the *interdependence* that full life in God’s Kingdom entails.

Duane observes, “By engaging the liminality of childhood, we are pushed to a more nuanced understanding of and engagement with dependence and the way such dependence can generate unequal distributions of power.”<sup>717</sup> Instead of seeing children as deficient adults, waiting to reach an imagined nadir point of full humanity, a childist reading of Luke’s text demands that we respect the full humanity of both children and adults at *whatever* moment or context of life they might find themselves. To do this, however, means encountering the uncomfortable power dynamic that accompanies typical adult-child relationships in contemporary Western culture, whereby we as adults believe that by pandering to children as less than ourselves we are doing them a charitable service when, in fact, we are often more concerned with exerting our power over them.

Such power dynamics have existed across history, and to some extent are necessitated by the vulnerability and dependency of children named previously. Nevertheless, they have become more dangerous in contemporary Western cultures such as the United States, where we have refused to pass the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, precisely in order to protect against perceived violations of this dogged control.<sup>718</sup> To (re)member children and their rights within the context of such an individualistic culture threatens individualism at its core. To own the unnamed oppression of children in the midst of a society that celebrates its protections of freedoms is to call into question both what it means to be free and what it means to be human. It is to acknowledge, against the grain of American individualist culture, that freedom can exist

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<sup>717</sup> Duane, 7-8.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. Karen Attiah, “Why Won’t the US Ratify the UN’s Child Rights Treaty?” in *Washington Post* (21 November 2014) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/11/21/why-wont-the-u-s-ratify-the-u-n-s-child-rights-treaty/>.

within relationships of mutual dependency and that as humans we are all, to some degree, interdependent—in relationship with one another.

### *Interdependence in the Ancient and Contemporary Family*

The ancient Mediterranean family, while it was heavily entrenched in uneven power dynamics brought on by the structures of the Roman household, nevertheless understood human interdependency in a way that Western history too easily forgets. Susan Dixon explains, “The evidence surely indicates that [early Roman] children were indeed viewed as different from adults and valued for these differences, as well as for the functions they could perform within the family in maintaining the name, the religious rites, the general concept of community, the family property, and so on.”<sup>719</sup> Marilou Ibita and Reimund Bieringer label this an “intergenerational interdependent cycle.”<sup>720</sup> Similarly, writing on the ancient Hebrew family, with whom it has been previously established that first-century Palestinians retained many similar ties, Laurel Koepf-Taylor concludes, “The ancient family would have been far more likely to be interdependent, with each member of the ancient family depending upon the subsistence activities of the others. This familial interdependence lies behind the motivations described in the ancestral and other narratives, as well as the exilic and postexilic rhetoric of (in)fertility.”<sup>721</sup> In short, given the realities of ancient subsistence, agricultural, and even small town environments, families *needed* one another across the generations in ways that are foreign to the typical 1 ¼ generation families in America today.

In contrast, the contemporary American family, while it prides itself, almost to a fault, on the degree of care shown to children, often in contrast to the perceived care shown to children in

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<sup>719</sup> Dixon, 102.

<sup>720</sup> Ibita and Bieringer, “The Beloved Child,” 12.

<sup>721</sup> Koepf-Taylor, 126.

the past, rarely takes seriously the contribution that such children make to the family themselves.

Critiquing this perception, Christine Gudorf writes,

The perception of parenthood as primarily sacrificial ‘serves as ideological support for patriarchy’. When women and children are characterized as innocent and good, they are also characterized as needing, and therefore justifying protection and control by husbands and fathers. The assumption that parental power is used in the interest of children...disguises the extent to which parental power is used in the interests of parents rather than children.<sup>722</sup>

Freedom is only freedom for those whom the ideology recognizes as fully human and thus, deserving such freedom. When parental power is exerted over against a child not for the protection of their child’s well being but rather to serve the parent’s interests, the humanity of both parties is curtailed.

The loss, however, is not just for children and women alone, but for all wo/men—all of us in our common humanity. While a child’s rights are the ones most immediately violated, an adult, by centering their purpose solely internally with disregard for their child as “other” in such a situation of power differentials, diminishes their humanity as an interrelated being as well. Touching on just a small piece of this, Gudorf asks, “Why, if parenting is essentially sacrificial, so many people universally desire it and find it a joyful and life-enriching experience... in parenting there are great rewards to be had.”<sup>723</sup> Miller-McLemore adds, “Children form adults in countless ways... They compel us to move at a difference pace... remind adults about life’s limits and mortality... they remind us of the significance of bodily care... Children also form people in larger communities.”<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> Christine Gudorf, 153 cited in Thatcher.

<sup>723</sup> Gudorf, 153.

<sup>724</sup> Miller-McLemore, “The Vocational Life of Children,” 29-30.

Children are not simply the next generation whom we must propel forward and protect, they are a part of *this* generation, moving and being in a world and in communities in which they are vitally a part. (Re)membering children in Luke's community thus opens for us, as Christians, the possibility not only of envisioning an ancient body of people differently than we may have in the past, but also of *embodying* a different way of life in our families and communities that takes seriously the bodies of *all* persons in our midst.

#### *Adults (Re)membered Through Interdependency with Children*

The gains for children in such a practice of (re)membering by this point might seem obvious; however, what is the experience for everyone else? Although Luke sets the stakes for discipleship high and elevates the position of the marginalized within the Kingdom through a series of double reversals, the gospel account continues to paint God's Kingdom as an expansive and inclusive place. Luke's Jesus says, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (Lk 18:29). As a result, although the Kingdom *belongs* to those who are poor and who are children, there remains a place in Luke's conception of it even for rich adults, although to claim their place requires reconfiguring their relationship with the world and one another—the content, I suggest, that lies behind Luke's unique series of woes (Lk 6:24-26).

At the core of this reconfiguration is acceptance of the reality that everyone in God's Kingdom is interdependent. Whether or not it was ever a historical actuality, this is the concept that lies behind the idealized community of common goods that the Lukan author describes in Acts 2:42-47. However, where this community is often misinterpreted is in the assumption that, because they "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44), these early Christians engaged in a community of complete equality whereby the same expectations and protections were assumed

of everyone. Reading Luke's texts through the lens of children shines light on the deficiency of such a model.

Commenting on Jesus' exhortation to be like little children in Matthew's Gospel, Warren Carter affirms, "As children, disciples participate in an egalitarian, not hierarchical, way of life... Disciples are called to a permanently transitional existence of dependency on God the Father until Jesus returns."<sup>725</sup> Carter thus notes, importantly, the shift in the power differential in the synoptic picture of the emerging church as "family." Within this fictive household, the role of patriarch does not fall upon any single member but rather upon God. Such an organizational shift, indeed, rebalances the power differentials in this new household.

However, the consideration of actual children (παιδιάς) among the broader body of children (τέκνα) of whom God is Father does not allow a purely even distribution of power and control. While we are called to place our trust and existence in the hands of God as parent, a childist reading compels Christians to take seriously also those among us who are thus siblings—across generational and other differences as they intersect. In light of the dependence that such realities demand of our brothers and sisters, particularly the youngest among us, the way in which that is lived out in the contemporary world often means relying on communities of support—such as the family, or new "fictive family" that the Christian community provides, which must thus be re-visioned.

(Re)membering children into the body of Christ makes clear the insufficiency of terms like "egalitarian" in defining Christian existence. Rather, Christians are called to care for one another in the midst of our diversity. Carter begins to acknowledge this shift when he concludes, "This metaphor [of disciples as children] views dependence differently. Over against the societal

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<sup>725</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 91.



emphasis that urges children to leave behind their dependency and weakness to become adults, this metaphor creates an anti-structure existence in which dependency is a norm for disciples.”<sup>726</sup> (Re)membering children into the body means reconsidering the entire way we think about the body—and, indeed, ourselves.

In families, the workload and return on it are rarely distributed equally. Neither, however, at least in a well-functioning family, do certain members give over their rights in favor of the absolute power of another. This would be a sign of unhealthy codependency. Rather, there is a time and a season for each person’s participation in the family life. This is what the apostle Paul describes through the metaphor of the body: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). This is the interdependency that a childist reading draws out of Luke’s gospel account. As members of one body—citizens of one Kingdom—Christians, indeed all of humanity, need one another.

Appropriately, it is those to whom the Kingdom belongs—those who are children and those who are impoverished—who help us to notice and live into this reality of interdependence. John Wall observes, “Childism suggests that there are flaws in contemporary conceptualizations of ethical love...children require a certain superabundant regard which...contains a fundamental element of decentering self-excess...[but] children are not merely recipients, but active givers of love themselves.”<sup>727</sup> By living into the decentering that regard for children necessarily entails, we not only (re)member the place of children within the larger body, but, in fact, both make the body whole and, by extension, make whole each adult as an individual member. For such members, through children, come to experience power and relationships in a more holistic form.

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<sup>726</sup> Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 114.

<sup>727</sup> Wall, “Ethics of Responsibility,” 258.

J.M. Francis writes, “The literal and metaphorical role of children and childhood in the New Testament has much to tell us of the role of power in this particular context where so much of who we are is shaped and fashioned, and where our imaging of the divine is also formed.”<sup>728</sup> Reading through a childist lens, all power—even God’s power—is transformed to be seen no longer as a privilege to be exerted over another, but rather as a tool to be used for the care of one another. Living into such a norm requires a radical restructuring of expectations, but offers the radical promise of liberation to all wo/men who take seriously the full humanity of one another—regardless of any physical, mental, or emotional distinctions, including chronological age.

### **Conclusion: An Invitation to (Re)imagination**

In this chapter, I have suggested that childist readings of Scripture, in general, together with my childist reading of Luke’s gospel in particular, hold great potential for (re)membering both children and adults into God’s Kingdom, as we come to accept and affirm the full humanity of all of God’s children. To holistically embody God’s Kingdom in the way that such a reading demands is both an exciting and daunting prospect. It involves not only a new way of *reading* written texts, such as Luke, but a new way of *living into* the multiple texts and contexts that define us and our identities as disciples of Christ. A project such as this one is only a small beginning to such a radical reorientation of both Christian and family life. The (re)membering of the Church cannot happen through one, or even several, new readings of scripture. It takes time and requires an openness to both (re)imagine our relationships with and engagement with one another as “other” and yet, as intimately, intertwined.

Appropriately, while (re)imagination is the final step in Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical

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<sup>728</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 85.

emancipatory paradigm, *imagination* is one of the most celebrated characteristics of childhood in contemporary Western culture. As we (re)imagine how we might live into God's Kingdom in light of a childist reading of Luke's gospel, therefore, an acknowledgment of the role of children in the gospel concomitantly invites us to make room for children in this process. As adult readers, we must take seriously the generative energy, engagement, and creativity with which children of all ages approach Luke's text. We must accept their invitation for us to listen and, at the same time, invite children into our conversations.

Unfortunately, such dynamic engagement with the full expression of the Church as Christian body has not been possible in the confines of this project, which has necessarily engaged largely in a setting of the scene. The obvious pitfalls of any such interpretive endeavor, such as childist criticism, is the compulsion both to continually defend its own existence and, as a result, to engage in sweeping, generalized overviews in order to trace larger trends. Such justification is the first step towards a holistic engagement together as a (re)membered Kingdom body, but it cannot be the last.

By engaging Luke's gospel account in its particularities, I have sought to both refine and narrow the scope of my project. Nevertheless, I am aware that the length of Luke's gospel itself and the range of child characters within it still requires much generalization. As such, it remains to delve deeper, taking into account more explicitly the diversity of childhoods, both ancient and modern—particularly among the most marginalized, such as slave children. I am confident that such explorations will yield even more specific applications for children across the contemporary world who continue to be marginalized and oppressed. These are voices that I hope we will continue to invite to the table.

In the meantime, I present this reading of Luke's gospel as an invitation to

(re)imagination. Through engagement with child characters in Luke's account and a vision for these characters within the broader discipleship and Kingdom community, this project sets forth an agenda of promise and hope both lived out in Luke's narrative world and the contemporary Christian world into which it is now received. Acknowledging the value, both for children and adults, of engaging God's Kingdom with an awareness of our shared humanity, fully embodied from the youngest to the oldest amongst us, I invite us to be vulnerable to one another. Such vulnerability, in the way of a child, ought not be forced or feigned. It is, rather, a true acknowledgment of the ways in which we as human beings continually rely upon, indeed *depend*, upon one another in ways we rarely admit or often notice.

To take seriously the place of a child in our midst and, indeed, our own place as children in the Kingdom of God, "complicates," as Duanne notes, "how we process knowledge about the human subject."<sup>729</sup> It means acknowledging that, while children may require adults to write critical essays on the role of children in the Bible, adults also require children to engage our minds and imaginations to consider hitherto unthought-of ways of reading both the texts of the Bible and the texts of our lives. It means inviting children into the fabric of our lives, not only in a personal sense of love and affection, but in the full sense of giving power over to another in order that we may learn from them.

In her list of "best practices" for doing theology for and with children, Marcia Bunge incisively suggests, "The more we can keep in mind and hold in tension the many paradoxical strengths and vulnerabilities of children expressed in the Bible and the Christian tradition, the more likely we are to learn from children, to carry out our many obligations to them, and to

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<sup>729</sup> Duanne, 2.

enrich our understanding of children and of child-adult relationships.”<sup>730</sup> In this way, through my survey of the inclusion, participation, and power of children witnessed to in Luke’s gospel account, I conclude with an invitation to listen. To reorient our adult-child relationships in families, religious communities, and, more broadly, to take seriously our interdependence upon one another as both human beings and citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Sharon Warkentin Short observes, “The greatest test for a fully humanized society is the degree to which it welcomes the innovative participation of the least within it.”<sup>731</sup> When we as Christians begin to live into such reversals of power, (re)imagining our relationships with one another through the eyes and experiences of those children in our midst, God’s Kingdom reveals itself among us. In the words of Jesus as he dined at the Table with his disciples—the young and the old, our Christian celebration of community commands us: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:24).

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<sup>730</sup> Bunge, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices” 6.

<sup>731</sup> Warkentin Short, 258

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