Witnessing to a Just Hope:

A Theology of the Child in Contemporary Africa

By: Anthony Adawu

September 30, 2016

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Practical Theology

St. Thomas University
Miami Gardens, Florida

Approved:

Bryan T. Froehle, Ph.D., Professor of Practical Theology, St. Thomas University
Committee Chair

Annemie Dillen, S.T.D., Professor, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Committee Member

Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, CSSp, Th.D., Professor of Theology, Duquesne University
Committee Member

Acknowledgment Form
St. Thomas University

I, Anthony Adawu, understand that I am solely responsible for the content of this dissertation and its use of copyrighted materials. All copyright infringements and issues are solely the responsibility of myself as the author of this dissertation and not St. Thomas University, its programs, or libraries.

Signature of Author — September 30, 2016 Date

Dr. Bryan Froehle (Witness) — September 30, 2016 Date

St. Thomas University Library Release

Witnessing to a Just Hope: A Theology of the Child in Contemporary Africa

Anthony Adawu

I understand that US Copyright Law protects this dissertation against unauthorized use. By my signature below, I am giving permission to St. Thomas University Library to place this dissertation in its collections in both print and digital forms for open access to the wider academic community. I am also allowing the Library to photocopy and provide a copy of this dissertation for the purpose of interlibrary loans for scholarly purposes and to migrate it to other forms of media for archival purposes.

Signature of Author — September 30, 2016
Date

Dr. Bryan Froehle (Witness) — September 30, 2016
Date

Abstract

Many faith and cultural traditions view children as source of hope. This view defines the place and vocation of children in relation to their communities. In its present theological usage, however, the expression "source of hope" has become a stark phrase, a rhetorical device that reflects a certain theological underdevelopment on the theme of childhood. The present usage of the notion of children as source of hope is not only problematic, but also risks taking us in a wrong direction, theologically. More importantly, it risks the lives of children because it shows more interest in children's representative value than in their literal presence and concrete lives. The metaphorical and representational understanding of children reduces children into "ideological subjects" and overlooks the realities of their lives. Such an uncritical application of the notion of children as source of hope can mask and even perpetuate unequal and unjust treatment of millions of children in the world, including millions on the continent of Africa.

For Christian hope to be relevant to all children it must be a *just hope* – that is, a kind of hope that blossoms into acts of justice and of love. The focus on just hope frames practical theology of childhood as a prophetic practice. It calls attention to the challenges children face in contemporary Africa and the need to protect and promote their rights and wellbeing, without overlooking the theological significance of their identities and vocation as children of God. Drawing on empirical data and hermeneutical perspectives, this study examines how a practical theological focus on Christian hope in relation to children might create space for a culture of justice with and for children in Africa and foster a spirituality of just hope on the continent as whole.

Acknowledgments

Doing practical theology has been a wonderful and life-changing journey, and will continue to be so for many more years. I have been blessed on this journey with the support of Dr. Bryan Froehle. I express my heartfelt gratitude to him for being an encourager throughout the process and for directing this research. I acknowledge with thanks the support I have received from my dissertation committee members: Dr. Annemie Dillen and Rev. Dr. Elochukwu Uzukwu. Their deep insights have helped shape this work in very significant ways. I also appreciate the immense contribution of the faculty of the practical theology program at St. Thomas.

I also acknowledge the support I have received from Most. Rev. Michael Jackels, Laurie M. Hamen, J.D., and Sr. Shari Sutherland. Their timely help made it possible for me to complete this program. Thanks also to Fr. Michael Panful for being a listening ear.

I express my gratitude to my families (in Ghana and in the States) and friends who have been on this journey with me. And to my brother and friend, Fr. Richmond Dzekoe: We have travelled this road together; its pains and joys we have shared. *Mbo na edwuma pa! Aseda daapem!!*

Finally, to the many children who continue to shape my life and whose voices encourage me daily: may God richly bless you. You have made all the difference.

Me Yompo, Wo mpampa!

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam! To the Great I AM be all the Glory!

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary
My Queen and My Mother

And to the children of Africa and of the world, especially those who suffer immensely and yet show resilience in hope.

Table of Content

Foreword

Experiences with Children: Unforgettable Faces and Life Changing Encounters

After my ordination in 2003, I was sent to teach in our Minor seminary in southern Ghana and work in the Catholic communities in the vicinity. Here, I joined a group of parishioners who had dedicated themselves to improving the lives of over three hundred children (ages six to seventeen) through Sunday school programs. Our goal was to find different ways to encourage these children to think about doing something positive with their lives. We engaged in different learning activities and spiritual programs, including poetry workshops, summer retreats, sports, and dramatization. These activities often brought the surrounding villages together and inspired hope in these communities, hope that their children could do many things with their lives, no matter the level of poverty and other forms of challenges. The activities and the hope they fostered also inspired the children to realize that they could achieve great things in life if they would set their minds to doing great things. Many of the children who participated in these programs have made great strides in life, particularly in the area of education. For instance, a number of them have pressed on to complete college and other tertiary education. Many of them are also strong in their faith and serve as leaders in youth groups in the local church.

One of the lessons I learned from working with these young people was the constant reminder of the fact that Christian children and adolescents are disciples too. Encouraging them to talk about their faith experiences enabled us to see their "world" through their own eyes. This helped us to understand their experiences from their perspective, and to develop age appropriate, culturally relevant and timely interventions

aimed at nurturing spiritual growth and training in discipleship. The most important lesson, however, was the very presence of these children: their humanness, vulnerability, sicknesses, resilience and hope. Their faces and the specific encounters I had with them live in my soul and continue to transform me. Let me recount two of the many encounters (in Vignettes 1 and 2).

Vignette 1

In Ghana priests wear white cassocks. One day, I came to the parish grounds for a program with the Sunday school children and teachers. As soon as I came out of the car, one of the children (Grace, who was about seven years old at the time) ran toward me, jumped and gave me a big hug. At that moment, all the teachers and children let out a long 'Oooh!' sound and then there was silence, as though we were all frozen in time and space: Grace had been playing in the sand and her hands and feet were covered with black soil. I looked at her, managed a smile and said to her, "Grace, you are making my cassock dirty." She looked up, smiled back and replied in a matter-of-fact tone, "If it becomes dirty, wash it when you get home." At this, we all burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Vignette 2

Marian was 12 years old and had been diagnosed with the cirrhosis of the liver (stemming from a variety of liver disorders). Although she was in a lot of pain, she would join us for programs at Sunday school anytime she had a little respite. I soon learned that Marian had not received First Holy Communion. I therefore worked with one of our catechists to prepare her for the reception of the Sacrament. As she was unable to come to church, we celebrated Mass at their

home and she received her First Communion. Marian and I became very good friends. I visited her and her family quite often to bring her Holy Communion. She was very prayerful and taught me how to pray with and for children – not with many words, but a prayer of silence and of presence. One of the things that struck me was that in spite of the pain and discomfort, she was always peaceful and full of smiles. I never asked her what kept her going, but I had no doubt about her deep and abiding faith. She suffered much, but the light of hope in her eyes never dimmed. Marian went home to the Lord in February 2005. I like to think of her as my young friend in heaven.

I have focused on these snapshots of encounters because of their power in transforming my life and priestly ministry, and in creating the space for me to attend to children's lives and everyday faith experiences. Encountering these children and many like them set my ministry on fire, metaphorically speaking. It was as though a passion for their wellbeing and spiritual growth had seized me. And it was with them and through them that I reached the rest of the community of faith and persons in the vicinity. I soon realized that touching the heart of one child meant touching the heart of specific families, of the faith community, and the entire village. I also became aware of the fact that the children had a kind of transformative power that adults did not have; that in their playfulness, illnesses and other forms of challenges, the children were a powerful spiritual force whose sense of agency and hope began to fill and change the church and the communities. It is this sense of agency, this transformative hope, as seen and encountered in these children, that brings me to ponder a *spirituality of hope* in contexts of vulnerability.

Children's Lives and Faith Experiences as Revelatory Moments

From both Grace and Marian, as from the many other children I encountered, I also learned that if I wanted to be with children, I needed to get my priorities right: think less of my white cassock and more of their hugs; less of myself and more of their presence – joy, pain and all. I needed to begin to see my priesthood through the eyes of these children and learn to be present to them, as they were to me.

I also learned how vulnerable these children are. With regard to Grace, I think of how her love and total self-giving made her vulnerable, even in that brief encounter. My initial response to her loving embrace was to think about my cassock, about myself, and not about how joyful she was to see me or about her warm embrace. I could have turned her away with my response, but for her strong and congenial personality. By persevering in her love, she showed me the face of a God who does not turn away, who pursues in love in spite of my self-consciousness and tendency to push him away. Marian, on the other hand, was vulnerable because of her illness. There were many things she could no longer do as a twelve year old and places she could no longer go. And especially toward the end of her life, her pain was so much that one could almost see it on her face or in the way she moved. Yet, Marian continued to count on the presence of God. Anytime I brought her Holy Communion, her face lit up; she would remain quiet for a while and then would look up and smile. For me, she is an example of how hope and suffering meet to show the face of a God who truly understands our suffering and is present to us.

The lives of these children are a manifestation of a kind of spirituality that holds suffering and hope in creative tension. I have described this as a *spirituality of hope*. Their lives and experiences are revelatory moments, inviting us to find God in the

tensions of our lives. As a practical theologian, attending to such moments, to such spirituality of hope, has enriched my understanding of children and transformed my theological interpretation of their lives and spirituality. In short, their faces, quest for justice, and hopeful experiences are the inspiration behind this study.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSTRUCTING A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETY

Children: Source of Hope?

Many faith and cultural traditions view children as source of hope and of renewed life. This view defines the place and vocation of children in relation to their communities. The Judeo-Christian traditions and African[1] cultural traditions are good examples of communities that hold such a view about children. In the African view, the ultimate purpose of children is to continue with the name and heritage of the family, so that the family does not disappear.[2] In the Old Testament, the notion of children as source of hope relates to God's promises. The promise of many descendants, of becoming a nation and people of God, and of renewed life through the coming of a messiah all depend on the birth of children. Examples include the child promised to Abraham, the children born to Jacob (who would become the twelve tribes of Israel), and the promise of a child to occupy the throne of David. These promises, and the events associated with them, are complex and fraught with ambivalent views about children.[3] The New Testament writers see in Jesus of Nazareth the fulfillment of these promises, particularly the promise made

[1] "Africa" and "African" are generally used in this study as shorthand for the people of south of the Sahara desert, the region often called sub-Saharan Africa. That said, there are also instances where analysis about children's situation on the continent is applied to Africa as a whole, including those north of the Sahara desert. There are obviously different cultural and religious diversities among the people of sub-Saharan Africa. However, there also exists an underlying basic similarity that allows for a study of the people in the region from a much broader perspective.

[2] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra, Ghana: Sankofa, 1996), 83. African cultural traditions and Judaism share similar understandings about procreation and the notion of children as perpetuating their parents and lineage. See for example Elisheva Baugarten, "Judaism," in *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, eds. Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2011), 15-81.

[3] For a complex portrayal of children in the bible as a whole, see Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds. *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

to David. Jesus is given "the throne of David his father [to] rule over the house of Jacob forever."[4] Like Jacob, Jesus also calls twelve apostles to be with him and to carry on his vision and mission of establishing the reign of God in the world. In a strange twist, however, Jesus places children (not the twelve apostles) at the center of God's saving work: those who intend to belong to the reign of God must become like children and learn to accept children as they would accept God. Jesus' attitude towards children is in sharp contrast to that of his contemporaries, who mostly see children as occupying "a subordinate position in society."[5]

Contemporary Christian interpretations of children as source of hope, however, tend to be more metaphorical and more futuristic, as in viewing children as metaphors of hope,[6] as "the hope of their family as well as society and the Church,"[7] and future leaders. Such metaphorical interpretations reduce the notion of children as source of hope into a stark phrase, a rhetorical device that reflects a certain theological underdevelopment. In its present usage, the notion of children as source of hope is not only problematic, but also risks taking us in a wrong direction, theologically. More importantly, it risks the lives of children because it shows more interest in children's representative value than in their literal presence and concrete lives. The metaphorical

[4] See Luke 1:32-33. All biblical quotations are from The New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), unless otherwise stated.

[5] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Jesus as Child and his Praise of the Child," *Communio* 22 (Winter 1995): 625.

[6] See for example Jürgen Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope." *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (2000): 592-603.

[7] The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum* [Final List of Propositions of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops], October 23, 2009, Vatican.va, 49.

and representational understanding of children reduces children into "ideological subjects" and overlooks their "proximate, living reality."[8]

In the ecclesial and theological context of Africa in particular, the metaphorical and representational understandings overlook many complex and real questions that face children here and now, even as we think about their future, including their eternal future. For instance: Does the expression "source of hope" apply equally to *all* children, regardless of the circumstances of their lives? If it does, will that be a fair application, practically and theologically speaking? Do *all* children inspire the same hope in their families and in society? Do children with no access to quality education offer the same hope as those who receive the support for a meaningful education? Do girls who drop out of school to attend to family duties offer the same hope as their brothers who go on to finish their education? Do girls who suffer female genital mutilation or face servitude through unjust cultural practices in some African cultural contexts offer the same hope as their friends who do not undergo such acts of injustice? How about children who are kidnapped, trafficked, and used as cheap labor and/or sex slaves; or children who face rejection because of their physical or intellectual disabilities; or those accused of witchcraft and, as a consequence, are rejected, abused, and allowed to waste away through starvation; do these children have the sense of hope for a meaningful life, and do they offer any hope at all - to family, church, and society?

These and similar questions reveal the unequal childhoods present in our world.[9] The realities of these unequal childhoods challenge our theological understandings of

[8] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Children and Religion in Public Square: 'Too Dangerous and Too Safe, Too Difficult and Too Silly,'" in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, eds. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 31-44.

children as source of hope. Without the challenge, our views on children as source of hope risk becoming unjust identity markers for children. Such uncritical application of the notion of hope to children can mask and even perpetuate the unequal and unjust treatment of millions of children in the world, including thousands of children on the continent of Africa.

Christian hope must be a *just hope*, if it has to be relevant to *all* children, including those in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Just hope frames Christian hope in the light of the notion of justice as right relationships[10] and of justice as grounded on inherent rights.[11] Justice as right relationships reflects a state of affairs in which we relate to God, to our neighbor, and to the rest of creation in a way that honors God and supports human flourishing. In relational justice, people are fundamentally concerned about maintaining "the quality and mutual worth of their relationships."[12] Justice as rights complements relational justice. "Rights are normative social relationships … A right is a right *with regard* to someone."[13] Recognizing the inherent rights of others strengthens the relationship ties that individuals in society seek to develop.[14] In traditional African thoughts and practices, relationality or communalism is not at variance with individual

---

[9] See Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Lareau uses the term "unequal childhoods" to describe differences and similarities across class, race, and family life in the American society. I apply the term to all forms of inequalities and discriminatory acts against children in different parts of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

[10] John A. Humbach, "Towards a Natural Justice of Right Relationships," in *Human Rights in Philosophy and Practice*, eds. Burton M. Leiser and Tom. D. Campbell (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 41-61.

[11] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

[12] Humbach, "Towards a Natural Justice of Right Relationships," 42.

[13] Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 4-6.

[14] Humbach prioritizes justice as right relationships over justice as rights. "Rights are at best a means to right relationships, a way of providing background conditions in which right relationships can be established and developed." Humbach, "Towards a Natural Justice of Right Relationships," 41.

rights. "It is indeed the exercise of individual rights [...] that enhances cultural development and ensures the material and political success of the community."[15]

The focus on just hope frames practical theology of childhood as a prophetic practice. It calls attention to the challenges children face and the need to protect and promote their rights and wellbeing, without overlooking the theological significance of their identities and vocation as children of God. It also creates space for children's own vocation as witnesses of a just hope, realizing that the nature and success of such witnessing depend on the quality of support children receive from the family, church, and society, and the extent to which these institutions are willing to listen to children's own voices and honor their everyday experiences of hope.

Children: A Much Needed Site for Practical Theology in Africa

Several significant events coincide to provide a rationale for the focus on the theology of childhood in contemporary Africa: children's living reality on the continent, the message of hope from the two African Synods (1994 and 2009), the two-phased Synod on the Family (2014-2015), and the conspicuous absence of children in African theology amidst recent and persistent focus on new understandings of the church in Africa.

The Reality of the Child: A Continent of Children and of Hope

We speak of the child in concrete terms, in the language of praxis. Anthony Kelly refers to the child as an event, as a saturated phenomenon that manifests both vulnerability and a power to affect all that the child touches.[16] The notion of the child as an event or a phenomenon draws attention to the realities of children in our midst. The

[15] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 151.

[16] Anthony Kelly, CSsR, "Hope for Unbaptized Infants: Holy Innocents after All?" in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 218-222.

child as an event encourages a practical theological approach to understanding and relating to children as real human beings rather than as metaphors for adult Christian appreciation of faith. This study focuses on the concrete experiences of children in contemporary Africa. It calls for an appreciation of their vocation, wellbeing, and rights.

Africa is a continent of children. It is the youngest continent in the world. The ten countries in the world with the youngest population are all from Africa. Forty-one percent of Africa's population of just over one billion people is under the age of fifteen.[17] The demographics are even projected to change dramatically in the near future. In 2050, around forty-one per cent of the world's births and thirty-seven per cent of all children under 18 will be African.[18] This projection shows a massive shift of the world's child population towards Africa.

Most of these children live dangerously and in vulnerable conditions. Children in Africa continue to battle poverty, high mortality rate, HIV AIDS, malaria, and many other illnesses. Civil wars continue to destroy and displace children and families. Kidnapping and trafficking of children are an ongoing plague and a cause of grave concern for families and states. In the midst of these challenging circumstances, most children in Africa remain incredibly joyful and hopeful. People who meet African children soon become aware of the joy-filled lives these children possess. Their sense of hope in the face of untold sufferings is exemplary and contagious. Similarly, individuals who do ministry with and among children in Africa also come to an appreciation of the fact that Christian children on the continent are disciples too and that their faith and

[17] The percentage for sub-Saharan Africa is forty-three. Population Reference Bureau, "2011 World Population Data Sheet," 2-6, accessed August 4, 2015 http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf

[18] Danzhen You, Lucia Hug, and David Anthony, *Generation 2030: Child Demographics in Africa* (New York: UNICEF, 2014), 1-15.

participation in the church go a long way to inspire hope in their communities. Developing a theology that sees their faces and hears their voices creates opportunities for attending to their vulnerabilities and hopefulness.[19]

Africa is also a continent of hope. Benedict XVI describes the continent as a "spiritual 'lung' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope"[20] and invites the church in Africa to remain "an ever greater blessing"[21] for the African continent and for the entire world. For a continent with "many scars,"[22] this vision of hope is both refreshing and challenging. It encourages Africans to see the hope they bear and can share with the world. Africa can stand up and tell her stories of hope to all who are willing to listen and to stand in solidarity with her. However, the vision of hope also challenges Africa to take hopeful actions toward addressing her many difficulties. For the church in Africa, and indeed the entire people of God on the continent, this call to hope is an inspiration to continue witnessing to the "Christian apology of hope."[23] Christians in Africa witness to hope not *in spite of* their suffering. Rather, they do so *because of* their many challenges, thereby holding suffering and hope in creative tension.

Children are a major reason for this sense of hope in Africa. The shift in demographics cited above is behind the energy and vitality of the church in Africa. Children are at the center of the exponential growth of the church, as they are of the

---

[19] See Chapters two and three of this study for more detailed discussions on the hopes and challenges of children in contemporary Africa.

[20] Benedict XVI, "Homily at the Opening Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops," Vatican City, October 4, 2009, Vatican.va.

[21] Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace], November 19, 2011, Vatican.va, 17.

[22] Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 1-10. Uzukwu describes Africa as "a face with many scars," referring to the many challenges facing the continent of Africa. He also highlights different "signs of hope" inherent in African cultural and religious thought and practices as new starting point for the continent's integral wellbeing.

[23] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 23-45.

entire continent. Their presence is significant and valued. Trained in the cultural ways of their people, children in Africa contribute significantly to the upholding of the values that breathe vitality into the lungs of the continent, even amidst poverty and conflict. These values include the religious sensibility of the African people as well as the cultural values of family, community, respect, and hospitality.[24]

Children, the Synods of Africa, and a Culture of Just Hope

The notion of children as source of hope, as investigated in this study, emerged from the 1994 and 2009 African Synods of Bishops. The two Synods, as a result, provide the starting point for the discussion on hope in relation to children. The discussions also draw on a number of other church documents that make a similar connection between children and hope.[25]

Both Synods use hope as an interpretive lens. At the end of the First Synod in 1994, the bishops of Africa send a message of hope to the church and people of Africa and to the world, describing the Synod as "the Synod of Resurrection, the Synod of Hope."[26] The bishops reference the example of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who encountered the Risen Lord and brought the message to their friends. The bishops also refer the experience of John who at difficult times received prophetic messages of

[24] Peter Henriot, SJ, "The Joys and Hopes, Sorrows and Anxieties of Africa," in *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years After Gaudium et Spes,* ed. Erin Brigham (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 177-187.

[25] See for example Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* [The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World], December 7, 1965, Vatican.va, 1, 50-52; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* [The Apostolic Exhortation on The Role of Families in the Modern World], November 22, 1981, Vatican.va, 26; The Pontifical Council for the Family, *Children: Springtime of the Family and Society*, October 11-13, 2000, Vatican.va; Alphonso Lopez Trujillo, "The Family: Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity," Vatican City, accessed October 24, 2015, Vatican.va.

[26] Bishops of Africa, *Message of the Synod: First Special Assembly for the Church in Africa*, May 6, 1994, Vatican.va, 2.

hope for the People of God.[27] Following these examples, the bishops of Africa announce a message of hope to Africa at a time of fratricidal hate resulting from political unrest in many parts of the continent, crushing devaluation of currency, and the burden of international debt.[28]

The basis of the expressed hope is the Resurrection, which breathes life into the present difficult situation of the people of Africa even as it beckons them toward the fulfillment of all things in Christ at the end of time. The joy experienced at the Synod and expressed through African songs, instruments, and dance, therefore, marks a "rhythm of the struggle between life and death." But hope will prevail because "Christ our Hope is alive, [and] we shall live!"[29]

The Synod itself focuses on evangelization – that is, on witnessing to the Gospel. The African bishops' message, therefore, is a witness to hope. It calls upon the church in Africa to witness to hope through the proclamation of the Christian message, inculturation, dialogue within the church and among religions, justice and peace, and the means of social communication. The vocation to witness to hope belongs to all – lay faithful, men and women of the consecrated life, women, young people, and the clergy.

However, the discussions do not make any explicit reference to children's participation in the church's evangelizing mission. There is mention, however, of the traditional viewpoint that calls on parents to take seriously the Christian education of their children.

---

[27] Luke 24:13-35; Revelation 1:1-20

[28] The unrest was in reference to the wars in Rwanda, Sudan, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and parts of Central Africa. There was also tribal conflict between the Nanumba and Konkomba of northern Ghana.

[29] Bishops of Africa, *Message of the Synod*, 6.

The second Synod of Bishops for Africa in 2009 also echoes the theme of hope, describing Africa as a spiritual lung for a world that needs hope. This time around, there is explicit mention of children and of their need for protection and special care. The Synod members highlight different challenging situations where many children are particularly vulnerable, including those involving: children killed before birth, unwanted children, orphans, albinos, street children, abandoned children, child soldiers, child prisoners, children forced into labor, children ill-treated because of their physical or mental disability, children said to be witches or warlocks, children sold as sex slaves, and traumatized children without any future prospects.[30]

These children, in effect, are those the Second Synod refers to as source of hope. They are God's gifts to humanity and bearers of newness of life: "in their milieu, they are apostles and are the hope of their family as well as society and the Church." Seeing the kinds of suffering these children go through, one cannot simply describe them as metaphors of hope, as signs of a messianic or triumphant hope derived from a theological understanding based on the lives of children in comfortable situations.[31] Hope seen in the context of much suffering is different. It calls for a culture of justice for children. It keeps both the suffering and the giftedness of children in sight. Describing African children as source of hope should lead us to understand and relate to them as persons in whom the sufferings and hopes of the continent find creative tension.

The notion of children as source of hope also requires children to "positively use [their] enthusiasm and effectiveness as active agents of evangelization, especially among

[30] The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum*, 49.

[31] See Jürgen Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope," 592-596. Moltmann's theological reflection on children as *metaphors of hope* focuses on the context of "normal, peaceful, middle-class childhood." He does not talk about children in poor and vulnerable situations.

[their] peers." The bishops of Africa pledge to provide adequate space, facilities and direction to help the young people to organize themselves "for the apostolate."[32] Again, this desire or vision calls for a commitment to children's wellbeing. Without such a commitment, the notion of children as source of hope runs the risk of idealizing and romanticizing children, thereby placing on them a burden they may not be able to carry. Discussions of the kinds of hope children witness to should be realistic, focusing on concrete lives of children in relation to the Christian message.

The Synod on the Family (2014-2015)

The two-phased Synod on the Family was convened to reflect on the reality of the family and to provide appropriate pastoral response. The approach and discussions of the Synod provide yet another rationale for a theology of childhood in contemporary Africa. Central to the approach of the Synod are the acts of listening to the context and challenges of the family and of evaluating and confronting these situations in the light of the gospel. The questionnaire sent out at the preparatory stages created opportunities for particular churches as well as people in the church to participate actively in the preparation of both the Extraordinary Synod (2014) and Ordinary Synod (2015). One wonders, however, whether the questions were formulated with only adults in mind - or even adults with specific technical knowledge. The technical nature of the questions clearly leaves out children as possible respondents. In a sense, then, although this is a synod on the family, the voices of children - who are key members of the family - are left out.

[32] Bishops of Africa, *Message to the People of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, October 23, 2009, Vatican.va, 28.

Francis also encourages listening by describing the Synod as a "dialogue … in which the church experiences the action of the Holy Spirit who speaks by means of the tongue of every person." A successful participation in such dialogue requires "apostolic courage, evangelical humility, and trusting prayer."[33] The synodal process involves all the members of church in an ongoing listening to one another: "A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is simply more than hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn."[34] By developing a practical theology of the child in contemporary Africa, this present study creates space in the church for children as partners in the church's ongoing dialogue, especially in matters concerning the children's own lives and their families.

The discussions and reports of Synod on the Family are equally significant to this study. Francis dedicates a whole chapter in his post-synodal exhortation to "a better education of children." The discussion on the family as an educational setting, on ethical formation of children, the value of correction, and the importance of passing on the faith is an affirmation of the church's teaching on parental responsibility in ensuring the proper upbringing of children in the light of the gospel.[35] However, there is hardly any mention of children's own contribution to their own learning or of their vibrant, albeit growing, faith.

Francis also touches on the notion of the child as gift of new life entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother. As new life the child "allows us to appreciate the utterly

---

[33] Francis, "Introductory Remarks at the Ordinary Synod on the Family," Vatican City, October 5, 2014, Vatican.va.

[34] Francis, "Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops," Vatican City, October 17, 2015, Vatican.va.

[35] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family], Rome, March 19, 2016, Vatican.va, 259-291.

gratuitous dimension of love of parents and the primacy of the love of God."[36] Children, in turn, receive nourishment and care from parents, as well as the spiritual gift of knowing with certainty that they are loved.[37] Drawing on images from scriptures, including the images of the olive shoot, living stones, and arrows in a quiver,[38] Francis presents children as the energy and vitality of the family. And although they continue to face challenging situations in the contemporary world, their presence "is a sign of the continuity of the family throughout salvation history."[39]

As a dialogue involving the universal church, the Synod on the Family provides a broader context for constructing a theology of childhood. Its approach and discussions are invitations to develop theologies and pastoral responses that listen to children in specific contexts of the world, without overlooking the broader conversation of the universal church. A theology of childhood in contemporary Africa is a response to such invitations.

A Vatican III African Church Without Children?

The need for an intentional theological focus on children in Africa cannot be overemphasized. The current situation of children on the continent – their presence, the numerous challenges they face, and the hope they share through suffering – makes this intentional focus an urgent call for the church and theologians on the continent. Benedict XVI signals this sense of urgency when he states that children are "a *source of hope* and renewed life," that they needed special care of family, church and society, and that the

[36] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 81, 166, 172.
[37] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 172.
[38] See Psalm 128:3; 1 Peter 2:5; Psalm 127:3-5.
[39] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 14-15, 45-47.

church as a Mother "could never abandon a single one of them."[40] The bishops of Africa echo the same sentiments when they write that children "are apostles and are the hope of their family as well as society and the Church."[41] In spite of this urgency, the faces and stories of children in Africa are yet to capture the imagination of most theologians on the continent. Theology of childhood is yet to emerge as a viable and distinct theological focus among African theologians. When theologians deal with the theme of children and their wellbeing, it is mostly in fragmented manner.[42] In other words, African theologians are mostly silent about the complexities of children's vulnerability and hopefulness on the continent.

Moreover, the voices and views of children themselves wait to be heard in the cultural, religious, and political contexts of Africa. Children in Africa as elsewhere, "have often remained our 'silent others,' our voiceless *enfants terrible*."[43] There is thus a two-fold silence in relation to children in Africa: a theological silence and the 'silencing' of (or inattentiveness to) children's voices and the way they witness to hope. Both forms of silence imperil children's lives and jeopardize the opportunities theologians have to influence the way society relates to children.[44]

The theological silence is even more conspicuous among African Catholic theologians. A case in point is a Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion, and

---

[40] Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 65-68.

[41] The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum*, 49.

[42] Ignatius Swart and Hannelie Yates, "Listening to Africa's Children in the Process of Practical Theological Interpretation: A South African Application," *HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies,* 68 no. 2 (2012): 1-12.

[43] Filip de Boeck and Alcinda Honwana, "Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity and Place," in *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa,* eds. Honwana and De Boeck (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005), 1-18.

[44] David Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), xi. Jensen argues that any theology that neglects children jeopardizes itself and imperils the lives of others, stopping its ears from the suffering of children across the globe, and in the end ignoring the child who lies at the center of Christian faith.

Society in Africa (TCCRSA) convened annually from 2013 to 2015. Participants of TCCRSA consistently and persistently focus on new understandings of the church in Africa, paying attention to a wide range of issues in the African church and in contemporary society as a whole. A title of a published volume summarizes the forward-looking goals of TCCRSA. *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* shows a bold and farsighted focus on "introducing current trends and issues in African theological scholarship."[45] The selection of essays push for an African church that is committed to listening, discernment, and dialogue, a church accustomed to accountability, accompaniment, and action. The African church of Vatican III reclaims lively faith, does justice, and seeks liberation with and for the poor. It is a church with a more incisive feminine presence and a commitment to promoting the vocation and wellbeing of all women, in and outside the church; a church committed to listening to the voices of women. Such deep listening can be done through "a synod of women, for women, and by women, where women speak from the depth of their experiences and voice their dreams and aspirations for a church that recognizes, honors, and receives their gifts for the edification of the body of Christ."[46]

African Catholics also look forward to a church that searches for a new African Christian spirituality, works toward Christian unity, and is committed to the Christian scriptures. They want a church that guards, sustains, and protects life, particularly the lives of women and sexual minorities, and the earth. In sum, the African church of

[45] Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed. *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), xii. See also Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed. *Theological Imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2014); Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed. *The Church We Want: Foundations, Theology, and Mission of the Church in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2015).

[46] Anne Arabome, "When a Sleeping Woman Wakes: A Conversation with Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium about the Feminization of Poverty," in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), 62.

Vatican III would be "a poor church, a nonviolent community, rooted in African soil, a vanguard of a quiet revolution in a noisy Africa, a community of servant leadership, a women's church, and an honest and truthful church" with a place for all people.[47]

Conspicuously missing from the vision of the African church of Vatican III is an intentional focus on children as credible and viable theological theme. Not even an essay on the values and challenges of the African family makes a case for a committed focus on children.[48] Such a theological silence begs the question: will the African church of Vatican III have children?

Understanding the Theological Silence

The first reason for the conspicuous theological silence on children in Africa is that there is sometimes a disconnection between the reality of people's lives and what theologians choose to study. Theology, to a degree, is "always being written by those to whom the gospel message is being communicated."[49] For many African theologians, however, children do not seem to be part of those involved in "writing" theology, those whose lives have the power to influence what theologians decide to investigate. In other words, children are simply not on the academic radar of many African theologians.

Secondly, African theologians have also constructed specific anthropological understandings that have contributed to the marginalization of childhood in African theological reflection. The trajectory of the development of African theology shows that at every stage or context of growth, a different anthropology or construction of the

[47] Emmanuel Katongole, "The Church of the Future: Pressing Moral Issues from Ecclesia in Africa," in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), 161-173.

[48] See Philomena N. Nwaura, "The Gospel of the Family: From Africa to the World Church," in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), 145-158.

[49] John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 28.

African personhood has emerged. For instance, in the context of colonialism and missionary domination, African theology tended to be informed by the *cultural person* as the "authentic" African personhood. In the context of racial segregation in apartheid South Africa, *black personhood* was held sway, theologically. At the emergence of the African feminist theology, the *gendered person* became a prevailing theological anthropological focus, especially for women theologians on the continent. The cultural and racial anthropologies no longer addressed the needs of women. All of these anthropological constructions tended to exclude children and childhood as the subject for "authentic" African theology.[50]

A third and related reason is that the communitarian anthropology remains inherently hierarchical in many African societies, with children at the bottom of the hierarchy. African philosophy and theology both define the African as a person in community – I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.[51] The notion of community fosters an interdependent relationship – the individual and the community depend on each other. The community does not have an ontological primacy over the individual. In practice, however, many still feel oppressed in relationships fostered through the communitarian anthropology, especially in familial relationships. In the cultural context of the Kalenjin and Masai of Kenya, for instance, women and children have practically no voice in familial settings. Decisions remain in the hands of the father or husband. In a number of instances, people in these contexts still grow up "in a family

[50] For detailed discussion, see Kenneth Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," in *Liberation from Mammon: Radicalizing Reformation*, eds. Ulrich Duchrow and Hans G. Ulrich (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2015), 229-257.

[51] See Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009); Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 35-54; John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Second Edition (London: Heinemann, 1990); John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Illinois: Waveland, 2015).

where children and women are literally considered the property of the tribe, clan or men."[52] Another example is the *trokosi* practice among some tribes in Ghana, Togo, and Benin in West Africa. In this cultural practice, a female child, sometimes as young as three years, is abandoned at a shrine to serve in atonement for a crime committed by a family member, usually, males. The fact that the parents and relatives of the girl child are the ones who send the child to the shrine is indicative of a kind of communitarian anthropology that prioritizes the life and wellbeing of the adult male over that of the girl child.[53] In short, when the communitarian anthropology remains unexamined theologically, it proves unhelpful for children.[54]

Research Focus and Questions

African theologians' silence about the complexities of children's vulnerability and hopefulness creates a big gap in the theological enterprise on the continent in particular and in the church as a whole. Putting children first is a task for all people of good will. "In the Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord."[55] Certainly, the theological inattentiveness to children on the continent of Africa does not measure well against "fidelity to the Lord." In response to this gap, this study develops a practical theology of childhood that takes children's vocation, wellbeing, and rights seriously. Drawing on empirical data and hermeneutical perspectives, the study examines how a practical theological focus on children as source of hope might create

[52] Benjamin Kirisiwa, "African Model of Church as Family: Implications on Ministry and Leadership," *African Ecclesial Review* 43, no. 3 (2001): 100.

[53] For detailed discussion, see Robert Kwame Ame, "Children's Rights, Controversial Traditional Practices, and the Trokosi System: A Critical Socio-legal Perspective," in *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric,* eds. Robert Kwame Ame, DeBrenna LaFa Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 131-149.

[54] Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," 240.

[55] United States Catholic Conference (now, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or USCCB), *Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for our Church, Nation, and World* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1992), 1.

space for a culture of justice with and for children, and foster a spirituality of hope on the continent as whole.

What does it mean, theologically, to conceptualize children as source of hope? How do these meanings intersect with different African cultural understandings of children and childhood? How do children in Africa live out their vocation to witness to a *just hope*? How do they practice and witness to hope in everyday life situations, including life in the family, church, and in contemporary African society? How might Christian faith communities contribute to the development of a spirituality of hope and a culture of justice (i.e., a spirituality of a just hope) for children in Africa and for the continent as whole? These are the questions the study seeks to answer.

Approaches to Theologies of Childhood

While, African theologians are relatively silent about children, the growing theological interest in children and childhood in other parts of the world (mostly North America and Europe) has led to an emerging disciplinary focus on *theologies of childhood* and *child theologies*. Theologies of childhood provide sophisticated understandings about children and responsibilities the church and society have towards them. Child theologies, on the other hand, do not only offer critical examination of the conceptions of childhood and obligations toward children but also rethink fundamental doctrines of the church. The goal is to reevaluate the Christian tradition and retrieve elements of it in order to strengthen the church's overall theology and practice today. The different understandings of theology of childhood result from different approaches to

doing theology. Three of these approaches are discussed below. They are pedagogical, epistemological, and advocacy, approaches to theology of childhood.[56]

Pedagogical Approaches

A pedagogical approach to theology of childhood is more interested in the education and faith formation of children. The emphasis is on finding effective means of educating children in the faith. In this approach, children's own religious views constitute educational resources. Resources from children such as drawings, prayers, poems, songs, and views about God are collected, reworked and used to develop literature and other materials for religious education. The participation of children in contributing to theology is also referred to as children's theologies, that is, the theologies that children themselves develop or contribute toward. The approach also benefits from children's own imagination and views on different topics in Christian theology, such as creation, play, sin, grace, forgiveness, angels, death, and life.[57] A proper understanding of the pedagogical approach rests on a "robust theological anthropology that takes children into account" and could positively impact the church's practices and ministries.[58]

Epistemological Approaches

The focus of the epistemological approach is to evaluate established teachings of the Christian faith in light of childhood. This approach positions children and childhood as hermeneutical lenses. It argues that when we see children as authentic persons and revisit theological categories from their perspectives, new insights emerge. The basis for the epistemological approach, like the pedagogical approach, is theological anthropology.

---

[56] Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," 229-257.

[57] See Anne Richards and Peter Privett, eds. *Through the Eyes of a Child: New Insights in Theology from a Child's Perspective* (London: Church House, 2009).

[58] Marcia Bunge, "What Child Theology Is and Is Not," *Toddling Toward the Kingdom: Child Theology at Work in the Church,* ed. in John Collier (London: Child Theology Movement, 2009), 32-34.

It "points to the fact that concepts about God and many other theological categories are shaped to a large extent by our personhood constructions."[59]

Advocacy Approaches

Advocacy approaches to theology of childhood focus on transformative action. In this approach, it is not the general childhood that is subject for theological investigation but the concrete experiences of children in context, including experiences of marginalization, discrimination, neglect, and any form of abuse. The foundational blocks of the advocacy approach are solidarity and empowerment. It is a theological reflection of adults in solidarity with children who themselves are involved in some form of advocacy, either through some form of action or by the very nature of their challenging circumstances. In other words, even when children are silent, their plight cries out to heaven and demands transformative response from all persons of good will, including theologians.[60]

Hermeneutics of Just Hope as an Integrated Practical Theological Methodology

The study develops an integrated approach to the theology of childhood, drawing on concrete experiences of children, scripture, African theological thought, and on the long history and continuous emphasis on practice/praxis in practical theology in general[61] and Catholic practical theology in particular.[62] It focuses on children's lives and their practices of hope in contemporary African society. The articulation and practice of hope

[59] Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," 247.
[60] Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," 247-249.
[61] See for example Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); and Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007).
[62] See Kathleen Calahan and Bryan Froehle, "A Developing Discipline: The Catholic Voice in Practical Theology," in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Wolfteich (New York: Paulist, 2014), 27-51.

are prophetic tasks in response to suffering.[63] The focus on hope, therefore, frames practical theology of childhood in contemporary African society as a prophetic practice. It challenges all people of goodwill to face the realities of children's situations and vulnerabilities on the continent with courage and through prophetic works of justice.

This study also develops a theology of childhood as "an apology for hope,"[64] as a theological task that is always ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from the Christian community an accounting of the hope that is in them.[65] The goal of this task is to offer, not a treatise or theological discourse on hope per se, but a proposal to make the Christian hope – in light of theology of the child – relevant to children and society. Its focus on children as source of hope aims at creating space for children to be seen and heard in the church and in contemporary African society. African Christian theology will be meaningless unless it attends to the sufferings and hopes of children on the continent and challenges the religious, political, and social order that tends to leave children on the margins; unless it stands with and for children against the numerous atrocities committed against them; and unless it acknowledges and appreciates children's own vocation to witness to hope.

An apology for hope in light of theology of childhood requires a methodology of hope – a way of knowing that places a just hope at the center of our theology about children and with children. It is a way of seeing and relating to children with hope and justice as our mediating lenses. Such a methodology also invites children to see

[63] See Walter Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, and Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); *Hope Within History* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987); *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

[64] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 23.

[65] 1 Peter 3:15.

themselves and their world, as well as their relationship with God and others, through the lens of hope.

The foundational principles for this integrated methodological approach are anthropology and spirituality, both of which are central principles in African traditional thoughts, practice, and theology. Anthropology and spirituality are also key elements in practical theological understandings of children and childhood. The key elements of the integrated methodology, therefore include the following: 1) a theology of childhood as a prophetic practice, 2) a just hope as a practice of liberation, 3) anthropology as basis of a culture of just hope, and 4) spirituality as basis for a culture of just hope.

Theology of Childhood as a Prophetic Practice

Practical theology of childhood assumes a prophetic role with, and on behalf of children. It represents a way of being in God's world in which the wellbeing of children is a priority. At its core practical theology of childhood responds to concrete experiences of children and the way God encounters them in diverse experiences of their lives. The goal is to explore the different ways by which the encounters with God create opportunities for growth and transformation in children's lives, in the church, and in society.

Practical theology of childhood in the context of Africa creates space for witnessing to the action of God in the lives of children and allows such knowledge to inform and transform the way we relate to children on the continent. It is a theology informed by norms of justice for children and their families. From that viewpoint, practical theology of childhood in effect becomes a way of "doing theological anthropology." It names and enacts the meaning of human life in connection with God

from the perspective of a theological understanding of childhood and calls forth actions toward the wellbeing of children.[66]

Practical theologians engage theory and practice for the sake of transformative action of Christian faith in the world. They creatively and constructively develop alternative visions and practices for human activity that work toward justice and the reign of God in specific contexts.[67] To become voices of hope, practical theologians have to assume a prophetic role and encourage children to do the same. This means that they have to focus on God and on the proper understanding of human flourishing – particularly the flourishing of children and their families. In their quest for hope, practical theologians become "instruments of God for the sake of human flourishing, in this life and the next."[68] This prophetic stance involves four specific tasks.[69]

The first prophetic task engages practical theologians in *fruitful discernment*. In this task, theologians discover and bear witness to the manifestations of a new order latent in the disorder of the day. The new order is the reign of God. Its great and central sign is the Christ event – which is the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Keeping this in mind, the theologian and the church can always celebrate God's abiding presence with his people and discern whenever life emerges from death, hope from despair, and joy from sadness.[70]

Next, practical theologians develop a life-giving vision. Filled with hope, theologians develop the capacity to imagine a future that will be better. A theological

---

[66] Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 15-16.

[67] Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 12.

[68] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*: *How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011), 5.

[69] Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

[70] Forrester, *Truthful Action,* 128-130.

vision has "the ability to constrain selfishness and enable altruism, reaching out to the neighbor in love."[71] Practical theologians also develop a prophetic voice, which is the application of vision to a particular situation. Prophecy demonstrates the relevance of the vision and makes it operative in a specific context. Without prophecy, the theologian's vision will become "vacuous general statements rather than specific demands."[72]

Lastly, practical theologians pay particular attention to how a pluralist society works and are ready to creatively inject "theological fragments" into their engagement with the public. Grand theories and theological perspectives are relevant and shape the path of Christian witnessing. However, they also have the tendency to obscure real and concrete situations of suffering people, including the situations of suffering children. Theological fragments help to unmask this obscurity by attending to voices of the people, of the children, in specific situations and letting these voices inform and shape theological enterprising and Christian practice.[73]

However, the onus of the prophetic task does not fall on theologians alone. Defining practical theology of childhood as a prophetic practice also encourages children to theologize their own experiences and the myriad of issues in their communities in light of the gospel, and to act as prophetic voices of hope. Emphasizing theology's prophetic task also invites faith communities to listen deeply, become aware of children's concrete situations, interpret the patterns and dynamics of children's lives and experiences, and

[71] Forrester, *Truthful Action,* 146.
[72] Forrester, *Truthful Action*, 151.
[73] Forrester, *Truthful Action*, 152-157.

take steps to act justly with and on behalf of children.[74]

Just Hope as Practice of Liberation

Theology, when focused on liberation and wellbeing of people, offers a hermeneutic of hope. Hermeneutics of hope refers to a theological reflection that tries to find, in different moments of history, the reasons to hope.[75] In his discussion on the hermeneutics of hope, Gustavo Gutiérrez observes that hope is a gift, a grace and when we receive it, it is not for us; it is for our neighbor. To welcome the grace of hope is to create resources in history. Hermeneutics of hope creates opportunities to see the other, particularly the poor and marginalized, including children whose voices are silenced in different social, political, cultural and religious contexts in different parts of the world. These children and the poor are not physically absent from history. Rather, they are considered insignificant and many times irrelevant. A hermeneutic of hope allows us to see the new presence of these children and all the poor of this world in a new light. We see them as loved by God and as persons of hope. With this new insight, our focus shifts from wanting to help the poor or those on the margins to committing to fighting the causes of poverty and marginalization.

Finally, hermeneutics of hope allows us to understand theology as spirituality; as an act of commitment to Christ and to the gospel message, which is love that sets us free. If we want to understand a theology, we should go to the spirituality behind the theology.

---

[74] See Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). Osmer understands the core tasks of practical theology as priestly listening, sagely wisdom, prophetic discernment, and servant leadership.

[75] See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "A Hermeneutic of Hope," (The Center for Latin American Studies, Vanderbilt University – Occasional Paper No. 13); Gustavo Gutiérrez and Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*, trans. Robert Krieg and James Nickoloff (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015); Mtata, "African Personhood and Child Theology," 229-257; Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style* (Oregon: Pickwick, 2012); Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011; Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

This brings us to our starting point – which is the definition of the theological task as giving an apology for hope and the proposal of hermeneutics of hope as a practical theological methodology for accomplishing such as a task. Since the soul of any form of theology, and for that matter any theological methodology, is its spirituality, there is the need to expand the task of theology to include the need to create space for developing a spirituality of a just hope, particularly in relation to children.

Anthropology as Basis for a Culture of Just Hope

The concept of humanity is central in both African traditional religion and African theology. [76]As mentioned previously, the African understanding of humanity is rooted in the notions of relationality and communalism - emphasizing divine-human relationship, communal-individual relationship, and material-spiritual relationship. First, most Africans are of the view that "humanity is a creation of God."[77] An Akan maxim expresses this view succinctly: "All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth."[78] As children of God, human beings have an intrinsic value that ought to be respected. All human beings, regardless of age or status in life, deserve the same respect because God creates them all. Also, as children of God, human beings carry in their nature an aspect of God, a speck of the divine nature – that is, the soul [or *okra* in Akan]. This speck of the divine nature in the human nature creates a special bond between God and human beings. This is the basis of the divine-human relationship. Additionally, the fact that all human beings have a speck of divine nature in them "constitutes all human

[76] See Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1987), 16-18.

[77] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 24.

[78] In the Akan (Fante) language, the maxim runs something like this: "Nyimpa nyina yɛ Nyame mba; obiara nnyɛ asaase ba."

beings into one human family or humankind."[79] Thus, humanity's ontological relationship with God provides the basis for the African communal relationships.

Another aspect of the communal relationship derives from the ties human beings have with kin and kindred. Africans generally hold the view that people are not only born into families but also that they are intrinsically united to their families and communities. In addition to the soul, which connects all human beings one to another and to God, the Akan also hold that all human beings are united to their kindred through flesh (honam), blood (bogya), and spirit (sunsum). The ties through flesh and blood come through the mother while ties through spirit come through the father. These ties are not limited to one's biological mother and father but rather run through and sustain the entire existence of the community. That means those connected through kinship ties include the living, the dead, and those who are yet to be born.[80] This explains the emphasis on extended family relationships involving networks of multiple lineages. In the African thought and practice, the circle is even wider. People are not only united through blood ties. They are united, as mentioned above, by a common shared nature, and by a kindred spirit. As the Akan maxim goes, "humanity has no boundaries." People learn to embrace all others beyond their limited geographical, ethnic, and religious boundaries.[81] When boundaries are erected, painful and destructive things happen, as seen in multiple wars fueled by tribal, ethnic, and even religious sentiments on the continent.

Relationality and communalism also have implications for communal-individual relationships. Kwame Gyekye observes that Africans are united in their attempt at living

---

[79] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 24.

[80] See Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness,* 154-158; Robert C. Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and the Reception into Christianity: A Theological Synthesis*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 70-75.

[81] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 27.

a "worthy and bearable life in this world." They are united in their capacities, limitations, successes, failures, frustrations, sufferings, and good naturedness. In this shared life, the individual stands in need of the community and the community in need of the individual.[82] The following Akan maxims shed light on the value of the human person in community:

1. A human being needs help.[83]
2. It is a human being that is needed.[84]
3. The human being is more important than wealth.[85]
4. The human being is more beautiful than gold.[86]

The first maxim does not just state a fact about human nature, namely that all humans need help, which is a useful fact per se. Beyond this fact, however, the maxim reveals a deeper meaning. The Akan word translated "needs" (*hia*) has normative or moral connotation. What the maxim expresses, then, is that every human person deserves help and ought to be helped. Hospitality, respect, kindness, generosity, and justice are prerogatives of all people, including children. However, such moral concern for the human person happens only in community, in human fellowship and solidarity. That is the point of the second maxim. The third maxim further indicates that in communal life, the human person is not only a priority but also the ultimate focus. Wealth does not form a community; it takes human beings to form a community. The intrinsic value of the human person is aesthetically stated in the fourth maxim. Human beings are beautiful; they have intrinsic value and worth. Every other created thing pales in comparison.

---

[82] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 24.
[83] Nyimpa hia mboa.
[84] Nyimpa ho wɔ mfaso.
[85] Nyimpa ho hia sen ahonya.
[86] Nyimpa ho yɛ fɛw kyɛn sika kɔkɔɔ.

Anything that is beautiful "is enjoyable for its own sake." Because human beings are beautiful, they are enjoyable for their own sake, and not for the sake of anything else. That means appreciating human value for its own sake and "demonstrating that appreciation by showing compassion, generosity, and hospitality."[87] This is the basis for a culture of a just hope, for promoting an atmosphere of right relationships that allows children to flourish and their human rights to be respected.

Christian theology echoes similar understandings about the human person. For instance, Vatican II, through the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), gives a brief but profound statement about the Christian understanding of the human person. The anthropological discourse highlights three key theological insights, namely, 1) the dignity of the human person, 2) the community of the human person, and 3) the vocation of the human person. First, the human person is created in the image and likeness of God; his or her dignity is rooted and perfected in God. This means that one cannot adequately think about the human person without reference to God. The Council buttresses this point by emphasizing the connection between the event of the Incarnation and human nature: "In reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of the human person truly becomes clear."[88] Second, the human person is created for communion, for relationship with God and with fellow human beings. Human nature, therefore, is by definition relational, reflecting a Trinitarian theology of relationships.[89] Third, the proper vocation of the

[87] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 24-25; 125-133. Also, see expanded discussion on the beauty of the child in chapter four of this study.

[88] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

[89] For an engaging discussion on a Trinitarian theology of relationships, see Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans. Philip Milligan and Linda M. Cicone (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007).

human person is to know and love God, to participate in God's creative action, and as a faithful steward and a wise builder, to govern creation and the world with justice and holiness.[90]

This three-part theological reflection on the human person – dignity, communion, and vocation – serves as the basis for the Council's understandings of children and childhood. Children possess inviolable dignity that they claim along with all human beings.[91] They are also persons in communion, particularly the community of the family. Implications of these theological understandings are enormous. For instance, a failure to recognize the full human dignity of children carries the risk of abuse. On the other hand, to isolate children from their families and other proper networks of social relationships makes way for their neglect. In much the same way, to misdescribe that network anticipates an impoverished nurturance.[92]

The Council's views on children's vocation, however, are not developed in any significant detail. Parents' vocation of transmitting human life and educating children is clearly defined and well developed. Parents are cooperators with the love of God the Creator and are the interpreters of that love. They are to fulfill their task with human and Christian responsibility, and with reverence toward God, make decisions by common counsel, thoughtfully taking into consideration their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those that the future may bring[93]. The Council's description of the sharing of faith is largely unidirectional – a transmission from parents

[90] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 34.

[91] Karl Rahner offers a detailed exposition on the full humanity of the child. See Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, VIII: Further Theology of Spiritual Life 2* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

[92] William Werphowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility: Catholic Social Thought on Children," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* ed. Marcia Bunge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79-83.

[93] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, para, 50.

to children. This unidirectional mode of transmission can undercut the development of an adequate theology of childhood that highlights a child's giftedness.[94]

Spirituality as Basis for a Culture of Just Hope

Spirituality permeates every aspect of the African life. For the African, there is a seamless relationship between the spiritual world and the material world. Relationship with God, with the ancestors, and with other spirits is reflected in the way people seek to relate to one another and their environment. The spiritual world is always at home in the material world. There is no dichotomy. For this reason, both African traditional religious beliefs and African theology are "strongly spiritually-oriented."[95] In fact, so strong is the orientation that some scholars even use the terms spirituality and worldview interchangeably. For instance, Laurenti Magesa "addresses the worldview or spirituality of the people of Africa" in a recent discussion on the subject.[96]

"Spirituality is an inescapable reality. … a lived reality." It is about being "in touch with the mystery of life,"[97] about the way people seek to make sense of the realities of their lives as these relate to their historical context, religion/faith, and moral choices. In this sense, spirituality relates to values and identity, to individual and communal sense of being.

> [Spirituality is] the ideal that African communities strive for and individuals are instructed or socialized in: unity of spirit or the sense of identity of a people; trust and openness, which arise from and lead to interdependence; love and mutual

[94] See Peter De Mey, "How Do Children Become Active Subjects Within the Domestic Church? Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Roman Catholic Ecclesiological Discourse on the Domestic Church," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education,* eds. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Uitgevrij Peeters, 2010), 295-306.

[95] Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 42.

[96] Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 3.

[97] Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?* 5.

> care, which are expressions of participation; and respect for elders, nature, and the ancestors... [Other cherished values include] a sense of the sacred, respect for life and esteem for community and family, the view of existence as spiritual and sacred, and the rich symbolism in worship; also family solidarity and support for relatives.[98]

These values, these understandings of spirituality, are the basis of hope for Africa and for its children. Africans do not only socialize children in this spirituality but also find in these values the basis for caring for the wellbeing of all children.

Outline of Chapters

Christian hope, if it has to be relevant to the experiences of children, must be a just hope. This present chapter has argued that in the face of so many atrocities and injustices against children, as well as the constant resiliency many children demonstrate, the notion of children as source of hope makes sense only when we consider hope in light of justice, of right relationship with God, with others within communities, and with the rest of creation. Just hope takes into consideration the complex identities and realities of children, including their promising experiences, as well as their challenging and often tragic experiences. Just hope responds to children where they are and seeks to address issues about their rights and wellbeing, without overlooking the theological significance of their vocation as children of God. The chapter has also proposed hermeneutics of hope as an integrated approach to practical theology of childhood. Theological anthropology and spirituality are the foundational principles for such an integrated approach.

Chapter two draws on multimodal narratives to explore children's practices of hope. Multimodal narratives emphasize the historical, mediated and embodied nature of

[98] Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?* 6-9.

our human stories. The chapter examines how a multimodal narrative approach creates opportunities for children to see and listen to what is going on in their lives and communities and to articulate their understandings about what they see and hear. Specific narrative forms include children's participation in a Christian ritual practice relating to the Passion of Christ, as well as children's posters that communicate their understandings of what goes on in their communities.

Chapter three discusses what meanings of children and childhood are reflected in contemporary African social and cultural thought, practices, and policies as well as the changes and patterns that continue to influence these meanings. The chapter also emphasizes the reciprocity and complexities associated with doing practical theology of childhood in an era of children's rights. It discusses the international community's interest in children and childhood and the specific expressions of this interest in contemporary African society. Finally, the chapter examines the complex connections between religion and children's human rights in Africa today.

Chapter four is about the beauty and vocation of the child. It examines the theological anthropological basis for children's human rights. Drawing on the connection between spirituality and incarnation theology, the chapter makes a case for beauty as a foundational identity of the child. The chapter also discusses the different dimensions of the child's vocation in Christian theology and shows how identities and vocations are intertwined. Vocation is usually expressed through participation and agency. While discussing the dimensions of such an expression, the chapter also argues for an expansion in the Christian understanding of vocation to include situations where agency and participation are absent or limited, such as in the case of children still in the womb,

children at a very young age (i.e., babies and infants), and children with disabilities, especially those with profound intellectual disabilities.

Finally, chapter five expands and synthesizes the discussions in the previous chapters by focusing more closely on the question of spirituality of a just hope. The sufferings and painful experiences of children in Africa (as elsewhere) cannot be explained away through speculative theodicies. Their pain does not need to be explained. It needs to be honored and answered through a spirituality of a just hope; that is, through a culture, a lived experience of seeing, listening, and acting. Drawing on the image of God as a dangerous and tenacious "bear robbed of her young,"[99] the chapter concludes by calling on the church, family, and society to develop a kind of spirituality that demonstrates ferocious commitment to children in contemporary Africa.

[99] Example: Hosea 13:8; see also 2 Samuel 17:8, and Proverbs 17:12.

CHAPTER TWO

ATTENDING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES AND PRACTICES OF HOPE THROUGH MULTIMODAL NARRATIVITY

Description of Empirical Data

The study draws on multimodal narratives to explore children's practices of hope. Human experiences are *narrative* in nature. We lead storied lives and make meaning of our experiences through stories.[100] Narrativity or storytelling is essential to the very structure and unfolding of our theological enterprise.[101] Without the ability to tell stories, "the experience of salvation is left mute."[102] Narratives are also inherently embodied experiences. We tell our stories in space and time, drawing on different cultural tools. Some stories are better "seen"; others are powerful by way of "listening" or "touching" or "embracing" or "smelling" or "feeling," or a combination of these channels of experience. In short, our narratives are multimodal in nature. Multimodal narrativity, therefore, refers to the use of a range of semiotic resources to tell our stories, including the use of words (oral and written narratives), space, gestures, movement, facial expression, and voice quality (performance narratives). Other narrative resources include soundtracks, images and other visual elements, music, typeface, and an integration of a number of these elements (digital narratives). Posters and videos recordings are examples of multimodal narratives.

---

[100] See Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, eds. *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006).

[101] See R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Maaike de Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath, eds. *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014).

[102] Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 186-207.

Multimodal narratives emphasize the historical, mediated and embodied nature of our human stories. Encouraging children to draw on multiple modes to express their views offers them the opportunity to construct meanings that are not possible with the use of words alone.[103] A multimodal narrative approach creates opportunities for children to see and listen to what is going on in their lives and communities and to articulate their understandings about what they see and hear. Sarah Dunlop describes this process as "visualizing hope." It places children at the intersection of culture, spirituality, and the search for meaning.[104] It engages people in exploring everyday experiences and of finding faith, hope, and meaning in unlikely places.[105] The approach also allows the church and society to attend to children's voices and experiences and to act with and in support of children. In an African context, where oral and performance narratives are very much alive, engaging children in multimodal narrativity is particularly significant.[106]

Children's Posters, Written Texts, and Video Data Involving Children

The study makes use of existing empirical data, including children's posters and written work addressing important issues in their communities as well as a video recording of children's participation in ritualizing the Passion of Christ. These forms of data are from two separate projects. The *Faith Community Video Project* and the *Transforming People and Communities Project* were both carried out in southern Ghana

[103] Kim Rasmussen, "Children Taking Photos and Photographs: A Route to Children's Participation and a 'Bridge' to Exploring Children's Everyday Lives," in *The Sage Handbook of Child Research,* eds. Melton, et. al. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 443-469.

[104] See Sarah Dunlop, with Kinga Dabrowska, *Visualizing Hope: Exploring the Spirituality of Young People in Central and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: YTC Press, 2008).

[105] See Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford, 2014), Kindle Edition.

[106] See Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Toward an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to African Worship – An African Orientation* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997); Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

and involved children from ages four to fifteen.[107]

Faith Community Video Project

The first set of data is obtained from a faith community's video project. In 2015, a Catholic faith community in southern Ghana began a project to videotape some of its major liturgical celebrations. The purpose of the project was to document these celebrations as institutional memory and to allow parishioners to reflect on the events at different times of the year. The first recording was that year's Good Friday celebration of the Lord's Passion. A number of families and individuals in the community, or persons associated with the community, have obtained digital copies of the recording. Portions of the recordings have also been posted on YouTube. The focus of the present research is to analyze portions of the video that focus on children's participation in the Good Friday celebration. The analysis focuses more specifically on children's ritual of eulogizing Jesus.

The ritual of eulogizing Jesus has a long tradition in the community's liturgical celebration of the Passion of Christ on Good Friday, particularly the Veneration of the Cross, dating back to the mid 1970s. Since its inception into the faith community's Good Friday liturgy, the eulogizing Jesus ritual has involved older women (adults) who gather

[107] I am particularly associated with both projects as a researcher and a pastoral minister. The *Transforming People and Communities Project* was part of a larger research I conducted in southern Ghana in 2011. The purpose of the research was to examine different multimodal activities in which adolescent learners engaged in order to communicate their ideas about issues they found relevant to them and their communities. Approval for this work was obtained through the University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB). Portions of data from this research are analyzed for this present study, specifically an excerpt (see Textbox 1) and a poster (see Figure 1) from two participants. These portions have not hitherto been analyzed or published. The *Faith Community Video Project* took place in the same vicinity as the TPC project. The Rector and leaders of the Catholic community in the vicinity organized the project to help with the formation of faith. The Catholic community consists of a cluster of five villages. I ministered in the community from 2003 to 2007. I still have close ties with the community and help in their effort to promote children's ministry and education. The community's video project is of particular interest to me because of such ties and the community's focus on children's wellbeing. The video is obtained from an online (YouTube) posting and used with permission from the organizers of the project (See Appendix A for a Letter of Permission). I added English subtitles to the original video to make analysis easier.

around the crucifix that has been specially prepared for veneration. The women mourn Jesus through dirges, eulogies and other traditional songs of mourning. Many oftentimes shed tears, expressing their sorrow at the tragedy that has befallen the Son of God and at the plight of humanity.

The ritual draws on Akan[108] cultural and mourning practices. The Akan people reserve public eulogizing and mourning for important figures in the community, such as queen mothers, kings, chiefs, and leaders of the community, as well as those believed to have lived exemplary lives. Persons believed to have lived disruptive lives are not honored with any public eulogizing because they cannot be considered as true ancestors of the community. Only those who committed themselves to building up the community and upholding its moral, social, religious, and cultural values are eulogized publicly. This means that by eulogizing Jesus, the Christian community acknowledges him as an ancestor and affirms a central African Christological notion of Jesus as Proto-Ancestor. Referring to Jesus as a Proto-Ancestor "signifies that Jesus did not only realize the authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to new completion."[109]

Women play significant roles in Akan traditional mortuary and mourning practices. Some scholars explain women's central role in such practices in light of the Akan matrilineal system.[110] From birth to death, an Akan remains a component of a matrilineage. At the person's death, it behooves the matriclan to provide the person with

[108] The Akan ethnic group is located in the tropical rainforest and savannahs of the southern part of Ghana in West Africa and a small section of the eastern frontier of La Cote D'Ivoire, and of Togo, Benin and Burkina Faso. A greater attention is focused on the Akans because they constitute the majority of the peoples in the present day Ghana. Besides, the participants in this study are Akans.

[109] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1992), 80.

[110] See Osei-Mensah Aborampah, "Women's Roles in the Mourning Rituals of the Akan of Ghana," *Ethnology*, 38, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 257-271.

a decent funeral and help the immediate and extended families through the grieving process. Women are at the forefront in carrying out these responsibilities. For instance, older women of the matrilineage wash the corpse and prepare the body for lying in state. They also make sure to organize a public act of weeping and wailing as "a sign of the worthiness of [the deceased person's] existence here on earth."[111]

Generally, children are not expected to take part in Akan public ritual of mourning. It is mainly an adult practice. There are no specific rituals to help children manage their grief and overcome their pain when they lose a loved one, such as losing a parent, grandparent, a sibling or a friend. In fact, a child's death does not even receive the kind of attention and celebration that goes with the death of an adult. Normally, parents who lose their child are encouraged to shorten their period of public (and even private) mourning. The idea is to prepare them physically and emotionally to become pregnant again and so "replace the child they have lost."[112] Clearly, the focus is not on the child, for he or she is quickly forgotten. The emphasis is on the physical, psychological and emotional health of the parents, who are expected to give birth again in order to sustain the growth of the matrilineage. It is almost as though the child is silenced both in life and in death.

Thus, the children's involvement in eulogizing Jesus is a powerful statement on behalf of children in the community. Involving children in the ritual began about a decade ago, when children's ministry captured the community's attention. The children's participation is a significant modification to the ritual and a sign of the community's awareness and readiness to hear the voices of the children. In a cultural context where

[111] Aborampah, "Women's Roles in the Mourning Rituals of the Akan of Ghana," 263.
[112] Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity*, 108.

children are "seen but not heard," involving children in the *Eulogizing Jesus* ritual creates opportunities for children to actively participate in the Good Friday liturgy and to be both seen and heard. Seven girls participated in the ritual that was video recorded. Portions of the video are analyzed for this research. The girls are between the ages of four and twelve. Like the Akan public mourning ritual, the girls' participation take the form of a poetic performance in which their eulogies are conveyed in words, bodily movement, gestures, facial expressions, and color.

Social Semiotic and Theological Analysis of Video Data

Taking a photograph, creating a poster or shooting a ritual documents specific events and renders them objects of study. Photographs, posters, and video recordings make it possible to analyze rituals from multiple perspectives, with a special focus on the embodied nature of ritual practices. The methodological choices that a researcher makes regarding the analysis of these forms of data go a long way in shaping the kinds of meanings that are constructed. For instance, transcribing participants' words alone will not be helpful if one wants to focus on embodied practices and knowledge. This study, therefore, adopts a multimodal semiotic approach in transcribing and analyzing the video data and the children's photographs and posters.[113]

The meanings the children communicate through their posters and in the video recording are placed in critical dialogue with the Christian tradition. This approach encourages a critical theological conversation between the participants' African cultural understandings and the scriptural, aesthetic, and the several spiritual traditions of

[113] See Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault, eds. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005); Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London: Edward Arnold, 2001).

Christianity.[114] However, the ultimate goal of the analysis is not only to understand the children's practices and their deeper meanings but also to use these practices and meanings as opportunities to attend to African children's voices and experiences of hope. Many children on the continent suffer greatly. But many of them also show resilience and witness to hope through suffering.[115] Any adequate theology of childhood needs to hold both realities of suffering and resilient hope in creative tension.

Multimodal Transcription of Excerpts

Multimodal analysis begins with a multimodal transcription. Excerpts 1 and 2 are examples of multimodal transcriptions of the Eulogizing Jesus video data. The transcription shows the visual image, description of kinesic actions, as well as spoken words (Fante) and their translation into English.

Excerpt 1: Multimodal Transcription of 1st Presenter's Eulogy

Column 1 Row/ *Time in min & sec*	Column 2 VISUAL FRAME	Column 3 KINESIC ACTION	Column 4 PLAYSCRIPT (SPOKEN WORDS – IN FANTE)	Column 5 TRANSLATION
Row 1 *T: 1:30-1:35*		Speaker 2 begins her eulogy. The gesture of her palm facing upward indicates that she is asking a question	Woana ne ba na oridzi emia dɛm yi?	Whose child is this that undergoes such great suffering?
Row 2 1:36-1:40		She motions toward her mouth, indicating the need for speech. This is evident in her question about a spokesperson for the suffering child.	ɔkamafo wo hen?	Who will speak on his behalf? Who will plead his cause?

[114] See Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, Second Edition (London: SPCK, 2006); Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, "Contextual Methodologies," in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, ed. Diane Stinton (London: SPCK, 2010), Kindle Edition, Chapter 1; David Tracy, "A Correlational Model of Practical Theology Revisited," in *The Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 70-86.

[115] For a discussion on children's resilience and hope see Annemie Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality: A Practical Theological Reflection," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 1 (2012), 61-75.

Row 3 1:41- 1:4:45		She turns her back to the Crucifix laid in state. Her gesture interprets Iscariot's betrayal turning his back on Christ.	Iscariot eyi Owanwanyi no ama …	Iscariot has betrayed the Wonder worker, …
Row 4 1:46- 1:50		She raises her index finger not toward the congregation but upward and moves it around as a way of counting the (imaginary) persons involved in mocking Jesus.	… woama nyimpa nyinaa resi no atwetwe	… who is now being mocked and reviled by many.
Row 5 1:51- 1:55		She bows her head as a sign of adoration and acknowledgment of the suffering of Christ	Onyimyamfo Yesu Damirifa due, due, due	Glorious Jesus, you have suffered a painful and horrible death. Rest in peace!

Excerpt 2: Multimodal Transcription of 2nd Presenter's Eulogy

Column 1 Row/ *Time in min & sec*	Column 2 VISUAL FRAME	Column 3 KINESIC ACTION	Column 4 PLAYSCRIPT (SPOKEN WORDS)	Column 5 TRANSLATION
Row 14 *T: 2:35- 2:40*		Speaker 5 begins her eulogy. Her facial expression and her focused gaze corresponds to her words	Me maa m'enyi do	I lifted up my eyes.
Row 15 2:41- 2:45		She puts her hand on her head to direct the gaze of the congregation as to what she is talking about.	Me hwɛɛ ne tir do	I looked at his head.
Row 16 2:46- 2:50		She circles her hand around her head to indicate the crown of thorns.	Na muhun dɛ nsoekyɛw hyɛ Nyimpa Ba no	And I saw the Son of Man crowned with thorns.

Combining visual images, movements, and words offers opportunities for meaning making that transcription of words alone cannot provide. The presenters' dressing, gestures, facial expressions and movement add layers of meaning to their words. For instance, one of the themes emerging from the presenters' eulogies is the acknowledgment of the horrendous nature of Jesus' death. In the Akan tradition, to die at

such young age and at the hands of one's enemies is considered horrible and tragic. The presenters communicate this message by using the phrase "Damirifa due," which is translated, "You have died a painful and horrible death. Rest in peace!" These words are spoken as the presenters bow their heads or gesture their bodies toward the crucifix prepared for veneration (see 1st Presenter in Excerpt 1). Another example is circling one's hand around one's head, indicating the crown of thorns, as the 2nd Presenter does (Excerpt 2). Such actions bring immediate attention to the embodied meanings the presenters are communicating about Jesus' Passion through their eulogies.

The Eulogizing Jesus Ritual and the Christian Tradition: A Critical Conversation

Whose child is this? At the heart of the 1st presenter's narrative is the image of Christ as an abandoned and suffering child. Not only does this child have no voice but he also has no one to speak on his behalf: "Whose child is this that undergoes such great suffering? Who will speak on his behalf?" With these two questions, the presenter places deep theological questions before her audience. Does not everyone in the audience know whose son Christ is? Does not everyone in the audience profess the faith that Christ is the Son of God? The presenter's purpose is not to question the relationship Christ has with the Father; he is the eternal Child of the Father. But that fact of the relationship makes the presenter's questions even more pertinent. She sees a forsaken and defenseless child, with no one to speak for him. She does not name the Father, thus keeping him completely out of the picture. Her questions, then, drive home the reality and depth of Jesus' suffering. Bodily, he suffers greatly – the flogging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, and the nailing to the cross. Yet, greater still is his suffering as one forsaken by God. Jesus himself cries out in his anguish, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani; my God, my

God, why have you forsaken me?"[116]

Significantly, Jesus expresses his anguish and experience of abandonment as a question, as does the presenter. Quoting from Psalm 22, a lament psalm, Jesus questions why God has forsaken him – God, who up to now, "has always supported and heard him."[117] In this cry, Jesus reveals both intimacy (you are my God) and abandonment (you have forsaken me). The bond between the Father and the abandoned child is not severed, but it is precisely this eternal relationship, this intimacy that makes the abandonment real and unbearable: "Only in the virtue of his filial intimacy with the Father can Jesus suffer total abandonment by the Father and taste that suffering to the last drop."[118] The Father has truly forsaken him. The anger of God rages on, and there is "no countering voice."[119]

The question – whose child is this – can be extended to millions of children who experience abandonment and rejection in the African context and in the world. Children displaced by war, unaccompanied migrant children, children who experience different forms of abuse, children who die from hunger, and many more who undergo untold sufferings – these are children about whom we can continue to ask: Whose child is this that undergoes such great suffering? This question continues to demand an answer from God and from people of this world, from all of us. The countless children whose childhood dreams have crumbled away through different forms of atrocities meted out to them demand a spirituality of a just hope, a commitment to attend to their sufferings and hold these up to the light of God's transformative love.

---

[116] Matthew 27:46

[117] Raymond E. Brown, S. S. *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*, Expanded Edition, ed. Ronald D. Witherup, S. S. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, Chapter 18, Loc 3269.

[118] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Joy and the Cross," *Communio*, 31 (Spring 2004), 332-344.

[119] Donald Macleod, "Why Have You Forsaken Me?" *Desiring God*, April 3, 2015, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-have-you-forsaken-me.

Children, the passion, and hope. The presenters' eulogizing places them right in the thick of Jesus' Passion, not simply as performers but more so as participants in and witnesses of Jesus' suffering. The 2nd presenter for instance speaks and gestures about the crown of thorns: "I lifted up my eyes. I looked at his head. And I saw the Son of Man crowned with thorns." The use of gestures (circling hand around the head) and of action words and active voice (I lifted, I looked, I saw) makes her an active witness to the Passion. The eulogy transports her (and her audience) unto the very scene of the Crucifixion (liturgically speaking), allowing her and her audience to see what transpires. It is an anamnesis, a memoria. Through her gestures and words, she leads her audience (the Christian assembly) into becoming "a community of memory and narrative," people who know that their "memories are related to a historically unique event, an event in which [they believe] that eschatological redemption and liberation of human beings has dawned."[120]

Several elements of the Eulogizing Jesus ritual can be traced to the Akan traditional funeral celebrations, as discussed above. However, one can also discern a critical dialogue between the ritual and the role of children in Jesus' Passion as depicted in the gospels. In Matthew's Gospel, for instance, children's participation in Jesus' Passion begins at his birth when, as an attempt to kill him, Herod orders the slaughter of male children who are two years old and under.[121] The mourning that ensues is compared to a lament recorded in the prophecies of Jeremiah: "A voice is heard in Ramah,

[120] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 172.
[121] Matthew 2:16

lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."[122]

Thus, before Jesus takes up his cross and dies on Calvary, numerous children are massacred because of him. These children precede him in death. Mourning Jesus should therefore call to mind the suffering and death of these children, and by extension children all over the world and in history who have suffered and continue to suffer so many injustices. With specific reference to Africa, mourning Jesus should also be an occasion "to deplore and forcefully denounce the intolerable treatment to which so many children in Africa are subjected. The Church is Mother and could never abandon a single one of them."[123] Like Rachel, the Church in Africa should remain inconsolable at the lost of every one of her children, but hopeful in her fight to save those who are left.

In this sense, then, encouraging children to participate in eulogizing Jesus drives home a powerful message. By eulogizing Jesus these children mourn their own plight. Their situation can be compared to that of the women of Jerusalem whom Jesus tells to weep, not for him, but for themselves and their children.[124] By seeing their plight in light of the Passion of Christ, these children weep not in defeat and hopelessness, but with a kind of hope that keeps their suffering and resourcefulness in creative tension. This hope is made perfect, ultimately, in the Resurrection of Christ.

Matthew's Gospel also reports another episode that connects children to the Passion of Christ. The chief priests and the scribes hear children crying out in the temple,

---

[122] Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:18

[123] Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 67. The different intolerable situations the document refers to include the following: children killed before birth, unwanted children, orphans, albinos, street children, abandoned children, child soldiers, child prisoners, children forced into labor, children ill-treated on account of physical or mental handicap, children said to be witches or warlocks, children said to be serpents, children sold as sex slaves, and traumatized children without any future prospects. We can also add girls who suffer genital mutilation in some African cultures.

[124] Luke 23:28

"Hosanna to the Son of David." On hearing this, the leaders become angry and say to Jesus, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus answers by saying, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?"[125]

The proximity of the event of the children's praise to Matthew's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem[126] and the fact that the children sing the same song as those who accompany Jesus as he enters the city – Hosanna to the Son of David – situate the children within the events leading up to the Passion. The scribes become angry at hearing the children sing. Shortly before this incident, Jesus' disciples had shown similar indignation toward the children who had been brought to him that he might bless them.[127] Clearly, something about children disturbs both groups (disciples on the one side, and scribes and chief priests on the other side), and in both instances Jesus comes to the defense of the children. In the case of the chief priests and scribes, one can surmise that the leaders are indignant because of the content of the children's song – Hosanna to the Son of David, which has strong messianic connotations. This is probably why the chief priests and scribes ask Jesus, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus' response is even more shocking. Making reference to Psalm 8, Jesus indicates that what the children are doing is a fulfillment of the scriptures. A closer look at the text of Psalm 8 makes Jesus' point more poignant. Not only does the Lord find praise on the lips of children and infants, but also the kind of praise that the children offer becomes a defense and weapon

[125] Matthew 21:15-16.
[126] Matthew 21:1-12.
[127] Matthew 19:13-15; see also Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17.

"to silence the enemy and the avenger."[128]

The children themselves remain undefeated. At the beginning of Jesus' life on earth, children are massacred because of him. At the end of his life on earth – as he journeys toward the cross and resurrection - children show resilience through their praise. Herod cannot defeat them. The disciples cannot discourage them. And the chief priests and scribes cannot silence them. We note, however, that it takes someone to stand with and for the children. Jesus comes to their aid in the challenging circumstances. He points to their place in the reign of God and their right to be accepted, to be heard, and to be protected. Children have resilient hope. However, without support, this hope may never flourish.

The faith community in this study provides such support for children. Unlike the scribes and Jesus' disciples in Matthew's accounts, the faith community in this study shows appreciation (rather than indignation) for the children's involvement in eulogizing Jesus. Listening to what Jesus says about such acts of praise should encourage the children and the community to realize and make use of the transformative power of the children's presence and faith, particularly faith as expressed through spirituality and rituals.

Transforming People and Communities Project

This project was carried out in a school and community setting. The project involved forty-eight young people, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. There were twenty-five girls and twenty-three boys. The purpose of the project was to encourage these young people to pay attention to concrete social and cultural issues that were of interest

[128] Psalm 8:2. See chapter five of this study for more detailed discussion on Psalm 8 and its anthropological implication for a theology of the child.

to them and their communities and to construct meanings about these issues using different modes of expression, including visual images, written texts, and oral presentations. The goal was to allow the young people's reflections to inspire transformation at the personal and communal level. The participants engaged in five specific activities.

1. They acquired images (mainly photographs they took with digital cameras provided for the projects and pictures from their albums or the Internet).
2. They analyzed the images and reflected on why these images were important to them.
3. They created posters on issues that were important to them, using written words and the images they had acquired.
4. They shared their posters with their friends, families and their communities. They also used this process to revise their written texts.
5. They reflected on the process and outcome of these activities in their journal.

Engaging in the Transforming People and Communities project brought so much joy to the participants and their audience, partly because this was the first time they had been involved in an activity of this kind. But the most significant reason was the opportunity to reflect on issues that mattered to them as young people and to share their views with friends, family, and community. They felt they could be heard and could make a difference in their communities. The participants' posters and reflections focused on a variety of issues, including those that were cultural, religious, moral, and educational in nature. They also talked about sports, national leaders, and the environment.

The works of two participants are selected for analysis in this study, based on the

extent to which the issues addressed in the data speak to the focus of this current study. These works include an excerpt from a written text and a poster. The selected excerpt focuses on the importance of festivals in Ghanaian communities (see Textbox 1). The author's name is Kwame.[129] He is fourteen years old. The selected poster reflects on the need to keep the environment clean, particularly homes and communities (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Its author is Ewurabena. She is also fourteen years old. The excerpt and poster are discussed under two separate but interrelated themes: 1) African cultural traditions as grounds for hope and 2) children and the care for the environment. The themes derive from the hermeneutical, empirical, and intersemiotic complementary analyses of the participants' works.

Combining hermeneutical and empirical methodological approaches provides this study the opportunity to attend to context and to concrete experiences of children.[130] It also provides the tools for critical analysis and interpretation of different text forms, including texts from the Christian tradition, African cultural context, and from the lives of the children. The commitment to context, to empirical data, and to critical interpretation of the Christian and cultural traditions is intended to make the practical theology of childhood developed in this study relevant to children in contemporary African society, to their families and to the local and world church.

Intersemiotic complementary analysis is a form of discourse analysis. It examines the way different modes or elements in a text (e.g. visual elements and written language) complement each other to communicate meaning. This approach is referred to as

[129] Names on posters have been changed for confidentiality reasons. The authors' ages at the time of the research are retained.

[130] For a discussion on a combined focus on hermeneutics and empirical study in practical theology, see Chris Hermans and Mary Elizabeth Moore, eds. *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

intersemiotic complementarity.[131] The analysis follows two major steps. The first step examines the content elements of the visual texts (or images) by asking series of questions that help to describe the participants in the text, their specific qualities, the activities they engage in and the circumstances surrounding these activities. The second step examines how the visual content relates semantically to the written language in the text. The intersemiotic relations between the visual elements and language in the texts occur in different ways:

1. Intersemiotic repetition involves the repetition of a lexical item that encodes the same experiential meaning represented in the visual.

2. Intersemiotic synonymy shows similarity relations between visual and lexical elements.

3. Intersemiotic antonymy shows opposition relations between visual and lexical elements.

4. Intersemiotic MOOD focuses mainly on interpersonal features of multimodal texts, showing the ways that modes are used to address viewers or readers.[132]

The use of intersemiotic analysis makes room for a theological perspective that is open to change, dialogue, and a relationship with the other, as well as to the mediation and plurality of human existence.[133] Such openness allows and supports theological insights that emerge from different cultural and disciplinary contexts and from the

---

[131] Terry D. Royce, "Intersemiotic Complementarity: A Framework for Multimodal Discourse Analysis," in *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*, eds. Terry. D. Royce and Wendy L. Bowcher (London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 63-110.

[132] For an application of intersemiotic complementary analysis, see Anthony Adawu, "Examining Transformations in Adolescent English Second Language Writers' Ideational Meanings: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis," *International Journal of TESOL and Learning,* 2, no.1 (2013): 41-60.

[133] See Cyril Orji, *A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015).

everyday experiences of ordinary people.

Adopting hermeneutic, empirical, and intersemiotic approaches allows the experiences and voices of the children in this study to be taken seriously, both culturally and theologically.

African Cultural Traditions as Grounds for Hope

Africa's intellectual, cultural, and religious traditions are grounds for hope.[134] Her cultural values are "the springboard of the gospel and its genuine interpretation." The gospel does not abrogate the rich and positive values of the different African traditions; it complements and perfects them, even as these values shed light on and give meaning to the gospel in the context of the African people.[135] Thus, Africans who become Christians do not abandon their rich and positive traditions. Doing so would mean abandoning their identity and heritage. Rather, embracing the gospel allows them to bring forth from their "cultures original expressions of Christian life, celebration, and thought."[136] Africans have profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God as the Creator, and of the spiritual world. Africans also love children; they possess a generous openness and commitment to life and family, as well as acute sense of solidarity and community life.[137] These and similar cultural values provide grounds for hope. Accepting such hope also means recognizing what needs to change in the African cultural context, including anything that is inimical to human wholeness and to life in general.

Kwame's focus on the significance of festivals in Ghanaian communities echoes these sentiments of hope (see Textbox 1). His work highlights the values of beauty, joy,

[134] Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 9.
[135] Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?* 9.
[136] John Paul II, "Address to the Bishops of Ghana," Kumasi, Ghana, May 9, 1980, Vatican.va.
[137] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 42-43.

hard work, community life, and shared culture. These values are often manifested through the celebration of festivals.

Textbox 1: Excerpt from Kwame's Work on the Significance of Festivals[138]

IMPORTANCE OF FESTIVALS IN COMMUNITIES

Festivals are important celebrations in Ghana. These celebrations transform communities by bringing people together in homes and also in public places, such as at durbars. Festivals bring the people in the community together as one people with a common goal. Festivals help us to think about our history and traditions, for example the ancestors who helped us. It is the time to show appreciation to God, the ancestors, and people who have been good to us. New crops are harvested around this time and there is plenty to eat and drink in the community. Festivals project the image of community, which brings about development. Festivals help us to educate the youth to uphold and continue the rich social and cultural traditions of their forefathers.

Examples of festivals in Ghana are Aboakyer and Bakatue. The people of Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana celebrate Aboakyer. During that time the people focus on deer hunting. They also prepare a lot of food for many people. Bakatue is the festival of the people of Elmina, also in the Central Region. The celebration marks the beginning of the fishing trade. The traditional dressing for these celebrations is always beautiful to see, such as wearing kente clothes.

Kwame

In Ghana, as in many other cultural settings, different festivals are celebrated to commemorate different histories of the people. The specific examples cited in Kwame's work are the Aboakyer festival of the people of Winneba in southern Ghana and the Bakatue festival. "Aboakyer" literally means animal hunting. The highlight of the celebration is the hunting competition between two traditional groups of warriors (or asafo companies). The goal is to hunt and bring home a live antelope. The group that is first to bring home an animal wins. The Aboakyer festival celebrates the gift of the natural environment. As Godwin Yirenkyi notes, "The essence of the festival is to ensure

[138] The excerpt is culled from Kwame's multiple texts, including his poster, written essay, and poster presentation, all of which were composed as part of the Transforming People and Communities Project.

a healthy environment through the protection of the habitat of the ceremonial animal and by extension other local species as well as the natural environment including the water bodies in the area."[139] The second example is the Bakatue festival celebrated by the people of Elmina, also in southern Ghana. "Bakatue" means the opening of a lagoon. The people open the Benyah lagoon into the sea, thus marking the beginning of the fishing season. Intense preparations precede the celebration of both festivals, including cleaning up the communities and banning drumming and high volume noise in the community. The significance of noise reduction is to allow the community as whole to take time to reflect on its progress and to listen deeply to the wounds of the community, including wounds caused by division. The celebration of the festivals thus becomes an opportunity to solve problems, and to find forgiveness and reconciliation.

In his original poster, he strategically places the stark, an adinkra symbol, at the center of his work.[140] The stark is a symbol of appreciation to God and the ancestors for blessings received, including the blessings of a great harvest and of sustenance in general. It symbolizes to the Akan that food is a basis of life and that they could not survive if not for the food that God has placed here on Earth for their nourishment.[141] The stark adinkra symbol also means "by God's grace." By placing this symbol and its meaning at the center of his thoughts, the author shows the sacredness of the life and events he talks about. Everything is sacred because everything happens by God's grace. From the harvesting of crops to the gathering of the people at a durbar; from the hunting of animals

[139] Godwin Yirenkyi, "Traditional Festivals in Ghana" (National Commission of Ghana, 2009), accessed August 28, 2016, http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=65&archiveid=1829&page=1

[140] Since Kwame's poster features possible copyrighted pictures from the Internet, it could not be incorporated into this research.

[141] Adinkra symbols are Akan visual symbols that carry rich proverbial meanings. See Bruce Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Boston: Pyramid Complex, 1998).

to the opening of the lagoon; from the celebration of the natural environment as the Creator's gift to the beginning of a new fishing season – God's watchful care holds all things in place; it is all done by God's grace. For the African, it is this grace, this permeating power of God's caring presence that gives hope. Hope, then, is not a metaphysical idea or an abstract thought. Hope is that presence of God that gives life and transforms all things for the better.

This is also the Christian hope. It ensues from a real encounter with God and it is life changing. In a Christian understanding, "the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life."[142] With this statement, Benedict XVI highlights not just the salvific nature of the Christian hope but also its ethical character. The hope that saves is not individualistic but creates opportunities for ethical awareness and moral decision-making, compelling the Christian to reach out in charity to the whole of humanity. However, the moral wellbeing of all people and of the world cannot be guaranteed through material structures alone, but must acknowledge the freedom of all persons and seek to invite people to assent freely to the social order. In other words, the Christian hope seeks to transform not only the external material structures of society but also the inner moral structures of every person. Christian hope engages our human agency and freedom and commits us to live for others.

This theological thought on human agency and freedom opens up further conversations about the practical theological understanding of a spirituality of a just hope, especially in relation to children. First, while acknowledging the reality of suffering and vulnerability, a spirituality of a just hope also recognizes and honors children and

[142] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* [An Encyclical Letter – Saved in Hope], November 30, 2007, Vatican.va, 2.

young people as moral agents. Second, precisely because they are moral agents, children also have responsibilities towards themselves and others. Their actions can become actions of hope, if they are encouraged to nurture and practice hope.[143]

Children and the Care for the Environment

One area that children show agency is through their care for the environment. Children's involvement in community development and environmental care has been the subject for debate and research for several decades. The environmental movements that began in the 1960s, mostly in Europe and North America, often involved children "in large-scale, highly superficial, short-term actions to 'save the earth.'"[144] Since the Convention on the Right of the Child, the discussion has focused mainly on children's "right and responsibility to be involved in shaping their own futures and the futures of their communities."[145] Caring for the environment thus becomes an opportunity for children to participate in democratic processes of their communities.

For the African child, caring for the environment is not only a democratic process but also a search for wholeness. As Ewurabena shows in her poster (see Figure 1 and Table 1), caring for the environment is about health, about avoiding the spread of diseases, and preventing harm. Children's actions in this regard are specific and tailored to the needs of their communities. They sweep homes and school compounds, and weed their surroundings. The poster focuses entirely on children. The author is a fourteen-year

[143] See chapter five of this study for a detailed discussion on the idea of a spirituality of a just hope.

[144] Roger A. Hart, *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care* (New York: UNICEF, 1997), Kindle Edition, Chapter 1, Loc 274.

[145] Roger A. Hart, *Children's Participation*, Chapter 1.

old girl. The participants in the poster are all children. And, while the audience is the entire community, the message is likely to resonate well with children.

Figure 1. Ewurabena's Poster on the Environment[146]

Analysis of Intersemiotic Meanings in Ewurabena's Poster

Element	Visual Meanings	Verbal Meanings	Intersemiotic Meanings
Title/Topic	Font: Bookman Old Style, 36	Keeping Our Homes Clean	Following convention: written in bold and centered to draw viewers' attention
Picture 1 Top Left	Picture appears to be a facility of some sort. The compound looks clean, with well kept flowers	We have to keep our houses clean to avoid the spread of diseases.	Intersemiotic MOOD: Ewurabena presents the building with a clean compound as a model of the kind of environment she desires for her community.

[146] Ewurabena scanned the first picture (top left) from a page of a magazine of some sort. She had this page in her books prior to the project. The picture of the girl at the center came from her personal album. She took the rest of the pictures with a camera provided for the project. The poster is part of data collected for a larger research and has not been published anywhere. See footnote 107 above.

Picture 2 Top Right	The three boys in the picture seem to be weeding with cutlasses.	We must weed our surroundings to present harmful animals from coming to our home.	Intersemiotic repetition: the call to weed the surroundings matches the activities of the boys in the picture
Picture 3 Bottom Left	A refuse dump with stagnant water	We must burn rubbish after throwing them away. We must clean choked gutters.	Intersemiotic synonymy: there is a similarity relation between the content of the picture and the verbal meaning.
Picture 4 Bottom Right	Three students sweeping a school compound	We must sweep our homes regularly	Intersemiotic repetition: while school compound is different from a home environment, the same action is recommended for both – sweeping.
Picture 5 Center	The little girl is scantily dressed. The necklace, the pair of sox, and her posture suggests that she is intentionally dressed that way, possibly for the photo. [It is not uncommon in southern Ghana to dress young children like this for a photo shot]	Intersemiotic MOOD: although there is not complementary verbal meaning, placing the picture of the little girl at the center suggests that every discussion relates to her. Possibly the author's way of inviting the viewers/readers to think about the impact environmental issues have on children. It is also important to note that all the participants in the activities captured in the pictures are children.	

Table 1. Intersemiotic Analysis of Ewurabena's Poster on the Environment

The author begins her discussion by pointing to a beautifully painted building with clean surroundings. There is a similarity between picture 1 and its related verbal meaning: "We have to keep our houses clean to prevent the spread of diseases." The similarity between the visual and lexical elements drives home the author's message about the kind of environment she envisions for her community. Next, picture 1 sharply contrasts with the image of a refuse dump (picture 3) and its associated lexical element. The rubbish and stagnant water behind what appears to be homes do not promote health. By presenting two contrasting images, Ewurabena forces a choice. She does not propose two options to choose from but rather pushes the community towards choosing a clean and well-kept environment. Children are not idle in this process. Pictures 2 and 4 show children's own involvement and initiative in keeping the surroundings clean. The children's activities in the pictures correspond to the associated verbal meanings. Their participation is a challenge and an invitation to adults to get involved. The contrast

between pictures 1 and 3 and the children's activities in pictures 2 and 4 also show the impact humans can have on the environment, for good or for ill. Finally, the author places a child (a girl child) at the center of the conversation (picture 5). The child's central position connects her to the beauty (picture 1), the ugliness (picture 3), and the action (pictures 2 and 4) in the poster. Through this strategic semiotic communication, the author makes her most daring statement, namely, that children are the most affected by whatever choices communities make about the environment, especially choices that result in pollution and poor sanitation. Care for the environment, therefore, means care for the child, and vice versa.

Francis' recent encyclical letter Laudato si' has sparked a range of animated interests and discussions about the environment.[147] This ongoing conversation makes Ewurabena's poster and message about the impact of environmental choices on children a significant theological issue. Her poster gives her a voice in a theological conversation usually reserved to adults and experts. As seen from her poster, and from the discussions above, she focuses on the child as a person and as an agent of change, on the relationship between the child and the environment, and the possible impact of environmental choices on the child as a human person. This relationship between the human person and the environment constitutes a central theological and pastoral message in Francis' encyclical.

Laudato si' is a call to right relationship,[148] a call into "dialogue with all people about our common home"[149] and about our common relationship with one another and with God. Everything is interconnected, so much so that "genuine care for our own lives

[147] See Francis, *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home], May 24, 2015, Vatican.va.

[148] Jonathan Reyes, "Laudato Si': A Call to Right Relationship," *Columbia*, Online Edition, August 1, 2015, http://www.kofc.org/en/columbia/detail/call-to-right-relationship.html

[149] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 3

and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to others." Disregard for justice, for right relationship, imperils human life, especially the life of the most vulnerable of the world, namely, the millions of poor people in the world. Efforts at combating environmental deterioration should thus aim at hearing "both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth."[150]

Reading Laudato si' with children in mind is key to understanding the encyclical's multi-generational approach to human family and its problems and aspirations.[151] For instance, many families are forced to migrate after local animals and plants disappear due to climate change. For many parents, this creates "great uncertainty for their future and that of their children."[152] Francis also formulates the encyclical's pivotal question with children in mind: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are growing up?"[153] He commends parents and local populations who remain "concerned about their own future and that of their children." He, however, remains deeply critical of parents and individuals who "can be prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption," leaving their children with very little or nothing to build their lives on.[154] Francis further denounces the culture of relativism (the throw-away culture), which is the cause of the rampant "sexual exploitation of children and the abandonment of the elderly."[155] The notion and practice of care is central to the Pope's reflections on humanity's common home. "To care is to allow oneself to be affected by

[150] Francis, *Laudato Si',* 48.
[151] Peter Turkson, "Remarks on Laudato Si' to Child-Focused Agencies," June 30, 2015, Vatican.va.
[152] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 25.
[153] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 160.
[154] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 162.
[155] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 123.

another, so much so that one's path and priorities change. Children understand these bonds."[156]

Ewurabena's poster, and earlier on that of Kwame both demonstrate the children's understanding of Pope Francis' view on integral ecology. For Ewurabena, every human action or inaction about the environment impacts the child's wellbeing. Kwame argues that all things, all events, and all people are connected and transformed through the grace of God. Such interconnections are the grounds for a just hope for children and for all people. The insights from the children reveal not only what they are capable of accomplishing (their vocation) but also who they are as children and members of the human family. Chapters three and four will take up these discussions in much detail.

[156] Peter Turkson, "Remarks on Laudato Si' to Child-Focused Agencies."

CHAPTER THREE

THE RIGHTS AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN IN AFRICAN THOUGHT, PRACTICES, AND POLICIES: A THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT

Conceptions of childhood are dependent upon the historical, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of a given society and the society's relationship with other cross-cultural contexts.[157] Any expression of a universal conception of childhood must be measured against specific regional or local understandings, and vice versa.[158] For that reason, a practical theology of childhood for Africa cannot be done in isolation, particularly when it seeks to develop a culture of justice and create space for hope. It is a theology at the intersection of global and local perspectives. It draws on particular and concrete experiences of children in Africa as well as theological and other disciplinary perspectives from the continent. However, it also speaks to thoughts, events, and experiences at the global level. This chapter discusses what meanings of children and childhood are reflected in contemporary African social and cultural thought, practices, and policies as well as the changes and patterns that continue to influence these meanings. The chapter also emphasizes the reciprocity and complexities associated with doing practical theology of childhood in an era of children's rights. It discusses the international community's interest in children and childhood and the specific expressions of this interest in contemporary African society. Finally, the chapter examines the complex connections between religion and children's human rights on the continent of Africa.

---

[157] See Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Robert Ame, eds. *Childhoods at the Intersection of the Local and the Global* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

[158] See Welshman Ncube, ed. *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Dartmouth: Ashgate, 1998).

African Social and Cultural Understandings of Childhood

The Family as Context for Conceptualizing Childhood

A discussion on the meaning of childhood in African thought and practices begins with a focus on the family. In almost all expressions of African thought, including philosophical, anthropological, social, and religious thought, the individual person is always talked about in relation to the person's ties to the community. Personhood, in African thought, is characterized by relationality. The emphasis on family is an outstanding feature of the communal structure of African society and kinship.[159] Communal values – such as solidarity, mutual helpfulness, interdependence, and concern for the wellbeing of every individual member of the community – find their highest expression in the family. The family – itself a fundamental social and moral value – plays primary role in the construction of childhood and in the protection and upbringing of children. The family is primary agent of socialization, the locus of children's interactions with the world, and "the center and base for the production, reproduction and legitimization of the basic cultural fingerprinting of each and every society.[160] The family constructs, defines, and guards society's cultural values and norms, including the norms and values which define its conception of childhood and its rights and obligations.

Family in the African context refers primarily to the extended family, which is a large number of blood relatives who trace their descent from a common ancestor and who are held together by their sense of obligation to one another. The nuclear family exists within the broad system of the extended family. In such broad system of familial

[159] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra, Ghana: Sankofa, 2003), 79.
[160] Welshman Ncube, "The African Cultural Fingerprint? The Changing Concept of Childhood," in *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed. Welshman Ncube (Dartmouth: Ashgate), 11-27.

relationships, what binds a family is the sense of obligation, and not individual rights. It is the responsibility of each member of the family to seek and maintain the cohesion of the family, and to bring honor to it. Children, in particular, continue with the heritage and name of the family, so that the family does not diminish or disappear.[161]

In African familial and cultural contexts, therefore, childhood is perceived and conceptualized not only in terms of age but also, and more importantly, in terms of intergenerational obligations of support and reciprocity. The term childhood denotes the relationship of mutual dependence between children and their parents, based on cultural understandings and expectations of reciprocal rights and duties. Childhood, for instance, is traditionally associated with respect for elders and obedience to them. Parents also look to their children for support in old age and in times of need. Only obedient, respectful, and well-socialized children would take their obligations to support their parents in old age seriously. For this reason, children are taught and socialized into accepting these responsibilities by way of persuasion through cultural practices and religious belief systems. The social and cultural construction of childhood, therefore, is a continuous lifelong process designed to reproduce and reinforce underlying values about relationship between children and their parents.[162]

African parents, like parents in other societies, desire that their children would grow to become respectful and respectable persons. For that reason, character development is a key component of children's upbringing. To ensure successful development of character, parents are expected to remain close to their children. "Absence does not bring up a child" is an Akan proverb that captures this expectation so

[161] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values,* 75-83.
[162] Ncube, "The African Cultural Fingerprint?" 18

well. The proverb underscores the parental obligation to be present to their children and to care and nurture them. It is also expected that such values as respect, cordiality, and mutual trust should form the basis of the relationship between adults and children. Many Africans believe that establishing a satisfactory relationship with children is a sure way to prevent children from going astray and thus keeping them out of trouble.[163]

African Cultural Practices as Contexts for Conceptualizing Childhood

Several African cultural celebrations, such as naming ceremonies and other rites of passage, also provide opportunities for understanding children and childhood in different contexts of Africa. African society, like many other societies in the world, has high regard for children. Different maxims, as well as names given to children, attest to the regard society has for children. An Ewe maxim, for instance, says: "There is no wealth where there are no children."[164] This proverb means that one does not enjoy one's wealth when there are no children to care for. The following names given to Yoruba and Ewe children are also quite revealing:

Yoruba (of Nigeria)

Omodumbi	Children are sweet to have.
Omoleye	Children are the sources of prestige
Omotayo	Children are sufficient cause for joy
Omoyele	Children confer glory on a home

[163] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 88.

[164] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 84. *Ewes* are an ethnic group located mainly in the Volta Region of Ghana, Togo, and southern Benin.

Ewe (of Ghana)

Adzitowu	Children are more important
Dzidzienyo	Procreation is a good thing
Exoke	It has taken root; by the birth of this child our house shall stand[165]

The different socio-religious rituals performed to mark the beginning of a new life are also indicative of the positive attitude society has toward children. These include rituals associated with pregnancy, birth, and outdooring.[166] Among the Akans of Ghana, for instance, the outdooring or naming ceremony is performed eight days after the child's birth to welcome and integrate the child into the community, making him or her an identifiable member of the community. The ceremony is a significant and joyous occasion for the community. It marks the fulfillment of the process of the child's transition into the world of the living. Family members of both spouses take part in the ceremony. Members from the entire community may also take part voluntarily. The rituals performed are to ensure that the child would remain a person of integrity, always upholding the virtues of truth and honesty.[167]

There are also rites that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. For instance, the Akan nubility rites are performed for girls who reach the age of puberty. These rites celebrate a girl's physiological maturation, changes in her jural and moral status, her initiation into adulthood, and her preparation for her role as a future mother. The rites highlight the significance of beauty; that is, on what it means to live as a

[165] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 84.
[166] See Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity*.
[167] Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity, 69.*

beautiful woman. To drive home this message, the elderly women who perform the rites provide instruction on how girls should take care of their physical appearance, build good character, and comport themselves in private and in public. The elderly women and the society as whole take seriously the teachings on sexuality. Parents are therefore expected to guard their daughters against prenuptial or premarital sex, promiscuity or incest. Such sexual deviations cast a slur on a girl's reputation and on her family. There is also an emphasis on collective consciousness, which helps the girls undergoing the rites to develop a "we-feeling" and to understand their place, rights and responsibilities within the community.[168]

Care must be taken not to overgeneralize these values. One must work to acknowledge the significance of these cultural values without reifying them. There is enough evidence to show that we cannot hold these values up as sacrosanct. Many scholars and human rights activists, for instance, have questioned some basic traditional values in order to retrieve and maintain values that lead to human flourishing, and to transform or even discard values that hinder human flourishing. Traditional practices such as the stretching of girls' lower lips and wearing of lip plates among the Mursi people of Ethiopia and female genital mutilation in different cultural contexts are notable examples. Such practices do not only violate the human rights of girls and women but also endanger their very lives. There is no legal justification for continuing such harmful

[168] See Robert Lystard, *The Ashanti: A Proud People* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 1958); Peter Sarpong, *Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977); and Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity,* 78-86.

practices, regardless of what their cultural intents might be.[169]

Changes Affecting the Conceptualizations of Children and Childhood in Africa

Families in Africa are changing, often gaining or losing resources and sharing power with delocalized forces that are part of a worldwide system. For example, institutional structures of African families are becoming more diverse. Functions such as support and care for children, and care for the elderly remain strong, although changing in form, and sometimes not homogenous and as stable. In many parts of Africa, family life has also become unstable more due to wars and migration than to a change in the value of family institution per se. There is, however, significant continuity and adaptive resilience in the face of contemporary changes. The changes in the African family can be explained from a variety of perspectives. Two of these perspectives are discussed below, namely, 1) colonialism and missionary work and 2) the notion of crisis.

Colonialism and missionary work as lens for understanding childhood. The changes in the African family can be explained from a variety of perspectives. Some scholars have focused on the changing conception of childhood under colonial rule, and how the idea of modern childhood influenced the way in which people across social class, gender, race, and power formation responded to the notion of childhood in Africa. For instance, recent works on the emergence of modern ideas of childhood in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa have examined the multiple domains in which colonial

[169] Janet Kabeberi-Macharia, "Female Genital Mutilation and the Rights of the Girl-Child in Kenya," in *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed. Welshman Ncube (Dartmouth: Ashgate), 249-264.

sociocultural transformation manifested and shaped children's encounter with imperialism and missionary work.[170]

From the nineteenth century when Christian missionaries began to spread European culture, the core constituents of good childhood reflected a negotiation between local and international interests as well as between Christian and traditional African values. Such negotiations shifted the focus on childhood from a uniquely African understanding to a much broader construct. Children came under non-relatives and were subject to multiple agencies of colonial rule. They were also introduced to a new culture of child socialization rooted in European understandings and biblical teaching. Western education gradually introduced children to global consumerist culture as European toys and gifts meant to attract children to school found their ways into African households. In many instances, missionary education sought to downplay African traditional training of the child and emphasized European cultural ideals believed to be more appropriate for children, including the way children dressed, ate, and talked in public. The new churches they established raised a new kind of child, one who experienced growing up with Christianity at the center of African life.[171]

Children's experiences under colonialism and missionary activities were in part shaped by where they were raised and by their families' socioeconomic status and class. Unban children had access to opportunities and infrastructure that were out of reach for their counterparts in rural communities, such as access to quality education, potable

[170] See DeBrenna LaFa Agbenyiga, "Defining Childhood: A Historical Development Perspective," in *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric?* eds. Robert Kwame Ame, DeBrenna LaFa Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), 15-35. Saheed Aderinto, ed. *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).

[171] Saheed Aderinto, "Introduction: Colonialism and the Invention of Modern Nigerian Childhood," in *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, ed. Saheed Aderinto (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 6-7.

water, and electricity. Communal parenting helped protect children from social ills in small rural communities. However, once children moved to urban centers, such protection was no longer possible. The anonymity of the urban lifestyle put children at the risk of being exploited. For many children, however, the challenges in the urban centers meant becoming creative. Children in the urban centers became an integral part of colonial African performance arts and creative experience. They made crafts and composed music that reflected their life experiences, including their changing encounter with families, communities, and their colonial state in general. An example is the children's masquerading culture, a significant aspect of religious and sociocultural life in some African cultures, such as Nigeria and South Africa. Children carved a niche for themselves in this culture that was otherwise dominated by adults and gave new expression to the art forms. In the urban centers, children's masquerades borrowed from different cultures in creating new forms, masks and performance styles. They also realized the importance of physical and gendered space in mobilizing support for their acts, which not only provided a source of income but also paved the way for the expression of talents by several jobless children. The masquerades also gave children opportunities for leisure that shaped their experience of childhood in the urban space.[172]

The changing perception of child work is another distinctive feature of modern African childhood. Children have always worked in African society. Under colonial rule, however, the activities of children as workers began to take on new meaning in part because of new perception tied to the notion of ideal childhood, and the visibly negative impact that some forms of economic activities had on children's health and wellbeing.

[172] Aderinto, "Introduction," 9-14.

Crisis as lens for understanding children and family in contemporary Africa.

Others scholars also draw on the notion of *crisis* to explain the changes in the African family[173]. A crisis is an acute change most often associated with serious personal concerns and insecurity, illness, ecological damage, and economic and political instability. Images of Africa as a continent in crisis appear in literature, art, academic writing, and media. These images include starving children, wars, kidnapping and trafficking of children, and growing acts of terrorism. Writings on the crisis in Africa focus on disintegration of the multigenerational family structure, the breakdown of morals, the loss of economic viability, the dispersion of family members, and the loss of values, language, and cultural traditions in the wake of colonialism, modernization, and marginalization.[174] Often times these images are broadcasted on western televisions and different digital media accompanied by voices expressing pity and asking for donations.

However, the perception of crisis in the family is not merely one of western imagination. It reflects the concerns expressed by Africans themselves in scholarship, film, literature, poetry, popular media, and political discourse. The difference lies in how the western world and individuals influenced by western ideologies use the crisis to perpetuate negative conceptualization of the African situation[175]. For instance, the West rarely assesses its role in creating such crisis on the African continent. More importantly, Africa's stories of hope receive very little attention in western minds. We should hold crisis and hope in creative tension, if we seek to remedy the ills that befall children and

[173] See Thomas S. Weisner, Candice Bradley, and Philip L. Kilbride, eds. *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change* (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1997).

[174] Candice Bradley and Thomas S. Weisner, "Introduction: Crisis in the African Family," in *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*, eds. Thomas S. Weisner, Candice Bradley, and Philip L. Kilbride (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1997), xix.

[175] Bradley and Weisner, "Introduction: Crisis in the African Family," xxii-xxxi.

families in Africa. African families and children face serious crisis today. They are under economic, demographic, and political pressures of all kinds. This crisis impacts the relationships in families, including the way families define children's place and roles, and the way children are treated.

Hope as lens for understanding children in contemporary Africa. Families and children are not hapless victims of global change. They are proactive, resilient agents, and creators of change. Recent studies with intentional and specific focus on children have also provided great insight into how people conceptualize children and childhood in Africa amidst the ongoing changes on the continent. Examples include childhood studies in history,[176] law,[177] educational development,[178] and neuropsychology.[179] Without overlooking the challenges children face on the continent, these studies generally present a more hopeful view, highlighting children's involvement in the "processes of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, survival, and participatory human development."[180]

African Childhood in an Era of Children's Rights

Current and ongoing focus on the rights of the child provides another significant context or lens for understanding children and childhood in contemporary African society. The requirement to serve the life and dignity of children has become a prominent

[176] See Saheed Aderinto ed., *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories;* Heidi Morrison, *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).

[177] See Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Nicola Ansell, eds. *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2014). Robert Kwame Ame, DeBrenna LaFa Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt, eds. *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric?* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011).

[178] See Marito Garcia, Alan Pence, and Judith L. Evans, eds. *Africa's Future, Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008).

[179] See Michael J. Boivin, and Bruno Giordani, eds. *Neuropsychology of Children in Africa: Perspectives on Risk and Resilience* (New York: Springer, 2013).

[180] Marisa Ensor, "Introduction," in *African Childhoods: Education, Development, Peacebuilding, and the Youngest Continent, ed.* Marisa Ensor (New York: Palgrave), 1-3.

theme in recent times in the international community and in different academic and disciplinary contexts. The global interest in the wellbeing of children is particularly expressed through the major international children's rights agreements in the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. The earlier agreements focused mainly on provision rights, including the right to "normal development, both materially and spiritually."[181] After World War II – with its horrors, abuse, cruelty, and genocides, which affected children as much as they did adults – it became clear that children's and human treaties and documents needed to account for children's deep vulnerability to harm from persons and groups within and beyond their immediate environments. The focus on children's rights expanded to include protection rights, such as the rights to be protected against any form of discrimination, neglect, cruelty, and exploitation.[182,183]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The adoption of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 marks a significant milestone in the international community's interest in children's flourishing.[184] CRC's grander vision is to completely transform the way we see children – as people not with needs, but with rights. The Convention provides (1) rights of provision (education, health care, adequate nutrition, economic welfare); (2) protection rights (protection from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation); and (3) rights of

[181] The League of Nations, "Geneva Declaration of Rights of the Child" (September 26, 1924), UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements, http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm

[182] The following two declarations reflect the expanded focus of children's rights. United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (December 10, 1948), General Assembly Resolution 217 A, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/; and United Nations, "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (November 20, 1959), General Assembly Resolution 1386(XIV), http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/1959-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-the-Child.pdf

[183] For detailed analysis on provision and protection rights of children, see John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

[184] United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (November 20, 1989), United Nations' Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx

participation (opportunities for children to play, express themselves, and to have a say in decisions that affect them). By ratifying this revolutionary treaty, nations pledge themselves to adopting these basic standards to ensure the holistic development of all children – without regard to gender, economic status, ethnicity, religious belief, disability or geographical location.

The Convention has become the benchmark against which the global community measures children's rights issues. Two central pillars of the Convention are its focus on ensuring the best interest of the child and its support for children's rights of participation. A major significance of the conceptualization of childhood in international law, particularly the Convention, is the notion that childhood and children require special protection and rights specifically designed for them because they are particularly vulnerable and lack judgment and experience in the ways of the world.[185] The underlying assumption of the international human rights law approach to childhood is that childhood is a special, precarious, and weak stage in the development of the human being and requires special protection. Childhood is viewed as separate and distinct stage from adulthood and as preparatory stage for adulthood, which must be managed properly to ensure that children grow up to be responsible adults.

The perception of children as physically weak and mentally immature has far reaching implications for the societal roles assigned to children for the legal construction of childhood. For instance, the conception of childhood as synonymous with weakness and immaturity has meant a denial of children's right to be effectively consulted on matters affecting their lives and interests. In this way, adults almost exclusively determine what is in the child's best interest under the guise that childhood by definition

[185] Ncube, "The African Cultural Fingerprint? 15.

makes children ill-suited to make rational and wise decisions about their life and interests.[186] This perspective is not entirely wrong in its intent. Children at a very tender age depend on their parents and guardians for protection and for decisions that affect their lives. Also, at every stage of their lives, children need the constant support of family to navigate the increasingly challenging social, economic, and political situations of their time. The problem arises when society views children through a deficiency model – that is, understanding children through what they lack rather than who they are as full and gifted human beings. It is also problematic when specific cultural understandings make it possible to continue to tune out the voices of children even when these children are capable of contributing to such decisions affecting their lives and their communities. For instance, the notion that *a child is seen but not heard* is a widely held concept in many African cultural contexts. In many instances, even adults who are perceived as younger in relation to an elderly person or someone in authority have difficulty getting their views across, not for lack of trying, but because they are still perceived as children. Younger people who are known to speak their minds are oftentimes considered rude and disrespectful, even when what they are saying is true and relevant.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

The Convention is criticized for its lack of sensitivity to variation in cultural and religious norms[187] and its limited vision of the child's individuality. In cultural and religious contexts where the child is understood as a person in communion with others,

[186] Chuma Himonga, "The Right of the Child to Participate in Decision Making: A Perspective from Zambia," in *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed. Welshman Ncube (Dartmouth: Ashgate), 95-128.

[187] Philip Cook, "Introduction," in *Religious Dimensions of Child and Family Life: Reflections on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, eds. Harold Coward and Philip Cook (British Columbia, Canada: Center for Studies in Religion and Society), 1-10.

the Convention's overemphasis on the individual child becomes a problem. In Africa, particularly, questions remain about the relevance of the Convention, which was drafted mainly by the governments of Western Europe and North America.[188] The views on children in the Convention reflect the recent events and understandings of these countries.[189] African leaders' frustration is rooted in the fact that "specific provisions peculiar to Africa fell victim to the overriding aim of reaching a compromise, and were not sufficiently addressed in the UN instrument."[190] In response to these gaps, African governments, through the Organization of African Unity (OAU), adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (hereinafter, African Children's Charter or the Charter) on July 11, 1990 with the aim of specifically and explicitly foregrounding the historical and cultural heritage of the African people and ensuring a continent-specific treaty on the rights of children in Africa.[191] The Charter entered into force some nine years later on November 29, 1999, and, up to date, only thirty-seven out of fifty-three States have either adhered to or ratified the Charter.[192] Such a slow uptake of the Charter reflects a lack of interest on the part of many member States, a lack of knowledge and need to popularize and sensitize member States about the Charter, and some member

[188] Only four African countries participated in the drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Senegal.

[189] Afua Twum-Danso Imoh, "Realizing Children's Rights in Africa: An Introduction," in *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa,* ed. Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Nicola Ansell (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-16.

[190] Frans Viljoen, "Supra-national Human Rights Instruments for the Protection of Children in Africa: The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, 31, no. 2 (1998), 205.

[191] Afua Twum-Danso Imoh, "Realizing Children's Rights in Africa," 5; Organization of African Unity (now African Union), "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child" (July 11, 1990), African Commission on Human and People's Rights: Legal Instruments, http://www.achpr.org/instruments/child/

[192] See Stephen Archilihu, *Do African Children Have Rights? A Comparative and Legal Analysis of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2010).

States' reservations about portions of the treaty.[193] Regardless of the slow uptake, the Charter has made great strides and continues to exhibit far reaching potential.[194]

The African Children's Charter rests on four cardinal principles, which help with the interpretation of the Charter as a whole and thereby guide national implementation efforts. These principles are (1) non-discrimination, (2) best interest of the child, (3) the right to life, survival and development, and (4) the right to be heard. The principle on the best interest of the child "connotes the yardstick for measuring all the actions, laws, and policies of a State affecting children."[195] These cardinal principles reflect the content and goals of the UN Convention, showing the complementarity of the two treaties.

However, there are unique provisions in the African Children's Charter that speak directly to the needs and situation of children in Africa. The Charter outlaws all customs, cultural, and religious practices that violate children's rights and impede their development. For instance, the Charter unequivocally prohibits incidence of child marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and the recruitment of children in armed conflicts. Other provisions that specifically respond to the context of Africa include children living under apartheid;[196] severely depressing economic situation of children; expansion of the responsibilities of States towards refugee children to include internally displaced children,[197] and unequal treatment of female children, especially in regard to educational opportunities. In this latter provision, member States are to take all appropriate measures to help children who fall pregnant at school to complete their

[193] Archilihu, *Do African Children Have Rights?* 67-69.

[194] Edward Amarkwei Foley, "Evaluating the 'African' in the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," Paper presented at the Conference on the Status of Children's Rights in Africa: 25 Years After the Adoption of the Charter (Addis Ababa: Ethiopia, November 20-12, 2015).

[195] Archilihu, *Do African Children Have Rights?* 72.

[196] Organization of African Unity, "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," 26.

[197] Organization of African Unity, "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," 23(4).

education. The inability of communities to meaningfully participate in planning and management of programs for children also receives great attention in the Charter. The Charter also protects the rights of children of imprisoned mothers. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that children who find themselves in such circumstances receive parental care, even in instances of criminal justice.[198] Giving children access to parental care in the circumstance of a mother's imprisonment is a testimony to the Charter's strong focus on the family as the natural unit and basis of society. In this direction, the Charter provides for parental responsibilities and obligates the State to support parents in performing their duties.[199]

The Charter, unlike the Convention, has also sought to underline that children have duties, which they owe to family, society, and state. These responsibilities include working for the cohesion of family, respecting parents and elders at all times, supporting parents in event of need, preserving and strengthening African cultural values, and strengthening social and national solidarity.[200] This provision reflects the African philosophy of human rights, which underscores the fact that individuals' enjoyment of rights are intrinsically linked with their reciprocal responsibilities toward society. The burden of such a provision is not on the child, such that children can be prosecuted for not carrying out these responsibilities. On contrary, the burden "is placed on the State to guide children in the performance of these responsibilities."[201] Kathleen Marshall, however, cautions against "the dangers of moving towards a duty-based understanding

[198] Organization of African Unity, "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," 30.
[199] Foley, "Evaluating the 'African' in the Charter," 7.
[200] Organization of African Unity, "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child," 31.
[201] Foley, "Evaluating the 'African' in the Charter," 8.

of the world," as such an understanding has historically disadvantaged the less powerful and minorities, including children and women.[202]

Children's Rights and Wellbeing in Contemporary Africa

Almost three decades later, many successes have been achieved in regard to both the UN Convention and the African Charter. But there still remain disparities and even widening gaps in the support children receive across the globe and in Africa specifically, and millions of children who have not yet been reached. The deprivations and adversities that exist "are violations of children's rights and cruel betrayals of children's hopes and dreams for a better life."[203] Recent wars in Africa and the heinous crimes perpetrated against children on the continent, such as kidnappings and child trafficking, are manifestations of the fact that Africans have a long way to go in upholding the standards set by both the UN Convention and the African Charter on Children. However, the many challenges do not discourage Africans. There are many people on the continent, including children and young people, who still keep hope alive and work hard to ensure that children's rights are respected and wellbeing promoted.[204] These practices of hope are opportunities and raw materials for doing practical theology of childhood in Africa.

A recent report on the wellbeing of children in Africa, for instance, highlights specific areas where African governments have made great strides in protecting the rights of children and ensuring their development. The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) report on children's wellbeing is situated within discussions on the 2015 deadline for the

---

[202] Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis, *Honouring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 2004), 365-367.

[203] UNICEF, *Twenty-Five Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Is the World a Better Place for Children?* (New York: UNICEF, 2014), 4-5 accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CRC_at_25_Anniversary_Publication_compilation_5Nov2014.pdf

[204] See Robert Ame, DeBrenna Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt, eds. *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric?* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

Millennium Goals and post-2015 development framework. Situating the report within discussions on development reminds readers and all stakeholders "that children's rights and overall wellbeing should permeate any development agenda."[205] Joaquim Chissano, the former President of Mozambique (1986-2005) succinctly articulates the philosophical underpinnings and policy conviction of the ACPF report in the following statement:

> The Africa we envision will not materialize without first ensuring the central place that children must have in our societies; without giving greater priority to their best interests in our laws and policies; or without listening to their voices.[206]

The report aims to promote accountability and compliance with the UN Convention and the African Charter on Children. First, it identifies and celebrates the significant progress Africa has made towards promoting the rights and wellbeing of children on the continent. For instance, a comparative analysis of Child-friendliness Indices between 2008 and 2013 shows that the African continent has become a more suitable place for its children than in previous years. Countries with outstanding performance on child-friendliness have two things in common. They put in place national laws and policies to protect children from violence and maltreatment. They also allocate adequate budgets for sectors that focus on children and ensure that such allocations translate into better child wellbeing outcomes. It is important to note that a country's child-friendliness is not related to its wealth or level of development. Rather, it is a matter

[205] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013: Towards Greater Accountability to Africa's Children* (Addis Ababa: ACPF, 2013), xii, accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.awepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ARCW2013-English.pdf

[206] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013, xi*i.

of the extent to which the leadership of a country is willing to commit resources to the course of children and to place children at the top of its development agenda.[207]

According to the ACFP report, the most notable achievement has been the increase in survival rate of Africa's children and a huge reduction in infant mortality. The report describes this achievement as "the best story in development." In the years under review (2008-2013), countries such as Angola, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe recorded high rates of reduction in their percentages of underweight children. The ACPF also reports a reduction in child hunger and malnutrition, better access to healthcare services, and increase in primary education.

These gains notwithstanding, there are still areas needing much attention. Africa is still a region in which large numbers of children die of preventable causes such as malaria and diarrhea, mainly due to poor sanitation and hygiene. Many children are still deprived of access to their basic needs, such as adequate health and nutrition. Malnutrition is a major cause of death in children under age five. The level of children's wellbeing in fragile countries is undoubtedly the lowest. These are countries that face protracted socio-political crisis and showcase inadequate governance structures. Such countries record highest child mortality rates and the lowest access to healthcare and education services. Besides, because law and policy-making structures are often in disarray in such conflict-torn countries, accountability is left to chance and crimes against children are committed with impunity.[208] Throughout Africa, children who do not have

[207] In the 2013 child-friendliness rankings, Mauritius, South Africa, Tunisia, Egypt, Cape Verde, Rwanda, Lesotho, Algeria, Swaziland, and Morocco emerged as the ten most child-friendly countries in Africa. The ten least friendly countries included Chad, Eritrea, Sao Tome and Principe, Comoros, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, and Zimbabwe. See The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013,* 68 and 75.

[208] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013, x*vii.

access to social protection mechanisms to support them face additional risks. These include children with disabilities, children living on the streets, children without parental care, and child-headed households.

Participation as a Dimension of Wellbeing

Voice is an important dimension of children's identity and wellbeing. The concept of participation expresses the need to listen to children's voices and to involve them in matters affecting their lives, as well as the willingness to acknowledge their contributions in building a more just and hope-filled society. Children's participation has several benefits. It enhances children's social competence, responsibilities, and confidence in becoming agents of change in society. It gives children the opportunity to influence familial, communal, national, and global decision-making. Participation also allows children to learn from their peers and acquire new skills such as problem solving, assertiveness, negotiation, and collaboration. Children's participation in decision-making and community life also enhances their self-esteem, strengthens their understanding of and commitment to democratic processes, and protects children more effectively. The extent of participation depends on the evolving capacities of the child, including the child's age, capacity to form views, and psychological maturity. The evolving nature of a child's capacities makes participation a relative concept.[209]

Examples of Child Participation in Africa

Many African traditions already involve children in everyday activities of the home and community. Children engage in household chores, family occupation, and help preserve community's cultural heritage. Children learn from the wisdom of their elders

[209] See Gerison Lansdown, *Can You Hear Me? The Right of Young Children to Participate in Decisions Affecting Them,* Working Paper 36 (The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2005).

and contribute to decisions through practices anchored in family and community systems. In traditional contexts where children gather around the fire with elders, they get the opportunity to share in folklore, stories, and songs that communicate rich values of their communities. Elders in such contexts always encourage children to participate actively, to ask questions, and share interpretations and opinions about specific cultural practices and moral values.[210]

In more recent times, many African countries have acknowledged children's participation as a human rights issue and taken steps to protect and promote such rights. For instance, South Africa has entrenched the right to participation of children in national legislation. Rwanda has also made provisions in its legislation to protect the right of the child to be heard in judicial proceedings. According to the ACFP 2013 report, Rwandan Law mandates that before any decision can be made in regard to a child in administrative or judicial proceedings, it is necessary to hear from the child either directly or indirectly through a representative[211].

Children also participate in children's forums, where the facilitators and participants are themselves children and young people. In 2001, children's forum in Botswana allowed legislators and policy-makers to consult children aged eleven to eighteen on their views on how legislations concerning children should be changed. Children's parliaments, children's polls, child rights clubs, children's movements and

[210] See Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), T*he National Child Participation Guide for Uganda: Creating an Environment for Children to be Heard* (Kampala: MGLSD, 2008), accessed June 11, 2016, http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1033/The_National_Child_Participation_Guide_Uganda.pdf

[211] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013,* 23.

networks, and child helplines are other mechanisms and structures that help promote children's participation in Africa.[212]

Drawing on these multiple child participation approaches and mechanisms, the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) has proposed a number of considerations for effective child participation. All stakeholders should promote child participation as a matter of principle and right. All children, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized, should have the freedom to express their views through their preferred medium, including art, other visual forms, and social media. Child participation should be context-specific, and should build on the supportive role of adults, such as parents, guardians, and community leaders. Finally, child participation should not be an end in itself but should serve as a catalyst for change in children's lives and in the way society views and relates to children.[213]

Obstacles to Children's Participation

In spite of the progress, adult indifference to children's voices still permeates African society, especially the governance and policy arenas. A number of reasons underpin such indifference. The first reason relates to the preconceived ideas that children are inherently unproductive and incapable of forming high-level rational views. Such preconceived ideas are formulated based on and in comparison to adult persons' thinking capacities. Not only are such comparisons unproductive, but they also fail to take into consideration children's own capacities at their level as children.

Gerison Lansdown argues that young children are experts in their own lives, with a competence to communicate a unique insight into their experiences and perspectives;

[212] See The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013.*
[213] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013,* 23-24.

that they are skillful communicators, employing a huge range of languages and other modes of communication with which to articulate their views and experience; that they are active agents, influencing and interacting with the world around them; and meaning makers, constructing and interpreting meaning in their lives. She explains that from the earliest moments of their lives, children seek to express their feelings, needs, and desire to engage in social activities through different modes of communication, such as babbling, crying, gestures, and facial expressions. People around children even at these earliest days and weeks of the babies' lives learn to respond to the children's communication signals. From eighteen months children begin to express themselves through play, drawing, and words. They learn to share, engage and play with other children, and begin to understand the need for partnership with others. From four years, children begin to acquire a greater sense of self and independence along with cognitive and language skills. They increase their skills in playing with peers through the creation of their own sets of rules, relationships and decision-making processes.[214]

The point is that, naturally, adults recognize and respect children's communicative and meaning making abilities, and continue to help children develop these abilities: "children, from birth, start to develop the skills and competences for participation. However, the responsiveness and respect they receive from caring adults and their surroundings will enhance and support the development of these competencies and characteristics."[215] Although different cultural contexts interpret and respond to babies' communication signals differently, all cultural contexts have their unique ways of

[214] Gerison Lansdown, *Can You Hear Me?* 1-4.
[215] Gerison Lansdown, *Can You Hear Me?* 2.

engaging in meaningful interaction with babies and young children.[216] In fact, in many African cultural contexts, people believe that children are not tabula rasa when they are born, that children from the very first day of their lives are filled with spiritual wisdom. Such an understanding of the identity and capabilities of the child influences the way parents and society relates to infants, from bathing and feeding infants to protecting them from diseases and teaching them how to crawl, walk, and speak.[217] It thus becomes strange when adults begin, at some point, to dismiss the meanings children make through different modes of communication. Considering the fact that adults themselves have been involved in shaping children's meaning-making process, one can argue that their dismissal of, and oftentimes inattentiveness to, children's meaning-making can lead to adults losing a part of themselves.

A second reason for adult indifference to children's voices is reflected in the difficulty in reconciling the treaty-based notions of child participation with traditional attitudes and values that require children to respect adults and often remain passive listeners. In societies where adults expect to exercise sole and unquestionable authority over children, genuine child participation can upset the status quo of power balance and age hierarchies within families, communities, schools, and religious institutions. Some communities also feel that an emphasis on child participation could mean outsiders invading the private spaces of their homes and dictating how they should raise their children. [218]

---

[216] See David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings, 2nd ed.,* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2015); Heather Montgomery, *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (United Kingdom: Blackwell, 2009);

[217] See Alma Gottlieb, *The Afterlife is Where We Come From: The Culture of Infancy from West Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[218] See Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), *The National Child Participation Guide for Uganda*.

Another reason for indifference to child participation rights is that the existing participation approaches tend to be highly elitist in nature. These include high-profile global forums where children chosen and groomed by adults deliver emotionally moving speeches.[219] The messages these children present do not always reflect the everyday grassroots experiences of children and their communities. The applause, photographs, and media attention given to such presentations often do not translate into action. Many of these high profile initiatives are not sustainable, as they tend to be initiated by civil society and dependent on donor funding. Besides, such high profile speeches do not necessarily encourage other children to see themselves as capable of expressing their views. A balanced approach that combines high profile forums and everyday grassroots and community approaches could be more helpful.[220]

Religion and Children's Human Rights

Religion and Human Rights in General

The relationship between human rights and religion is complex. Human rights are a contested issue in all countries of the world. Human rights discourses often serve as an "ideological tool for individuals and groups pursuing conflicting interests" or they are often themselves direct source of conflict.[221] In a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and religiously pluralistic context like Africa – with its hundreds of years of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid – the discussion about religion and human rights is even more contested and often fraught with great difficulty. The complexity associated with religion

[219] Jason Hart, "Children's Participation and International Development: Attending to the Political," *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16, no. 3 (2008): 407-418.

[220] The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013,* 29-30.

[221] Johannes A. van der Ven, Jaco S. Dreyer, and Hendrik J. C. Pieterse, *Is There a God of Human Rights? The Complex Relationship Between Human Rights and Religion: A South African Case* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xi-xiii.

and human rights is a major reason why most policy studies sidestep the discussion in their investigation and reports. However, considering the fact that the powerful influence of religion continues to permeate African societies, one cannot avoid such a discussion, especially when the wellbeing of children is at stake.

In the African context, many hold the view that the post-Enlightenment liberal agenda of individualism continues to dominate human rights discourse and policies. The language of human rights, especially at the international level, oftentimes perpetuates Western hegemony. The feeling is that human rights discourse, with its flavor of Western type of individualism, contributes to the erosion of the solidarity in groups and communities, particularly in non-Western contexts. The question is about how the universalistic claims inherent in human rights language be harmonized with the different needs of people in different cultural settings, especially when such groups want their rights to be developed in light of their specific needs and interests. Western countries mostly tend to ignore such diverse needs and often impose their interpretation of human rights on people in non-Western contexts, including countries in Africa.

> In the process, Western countries have hypocritically turned a blind eye to certain dictatorships out of economic and/or political self-interests. Such imperialistic behavior by Western countries turns human rights law into hegemonic law, and hence into corrupt law; it also remains a particular form of colonial law, albeit using different means.[222]

The bishops of Africa and Madagascar express similar sentiments in their statement in view of the United Nations' Summit for the adoption of a post-2015 global development agenda. In their Common Declaration, the bishops invite leaders of the

[222] van der Ven, Dreyer, and Pieterse, *Is There a God of Human Rights?* xviii.

world, including leaders of Africa, to have the courage and commitment to "respect, love, and serve Africa in truth" and to open themselves to "the human and spiritual contribution that the African continent can offer humanity."[223] In very strong terms, the bishops denounce what they consider as attacks on life, the family, and the cherished cultural and human values of the African people. They denounce also the "unabated aggressiveness" and "powerfully financed manner" with which foreign values marked by "individualism" are introduced into societies of Africa. They describe and decry what they perceive as a campaign and promotion of "a civilization of death" and "a terrifying resurgence of a colonialist spirit under the guise of the appealing names of liberty, equality, rights, autonomy, democratization and development."[224] Such a campaign "is a new type of slavery!"

The pain emanating from neo-colonialism and ongoing manipulation of Africa in the hands of international leaders and officials and oppression by many of its own leaders is unmistakable. What is at stake is the very harmony and soul of Africa and the dignity of its people.

> We want the dignity of our people to be respected. Africa is populated by men, women, and children endowed with a transcendent dignity and a magnificent and eternal vocation. [...] Women and men in Africa are not mere individuals, autonomous from their parents, spouses, children: women, men, children, we are

[223] Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, *Common Declaration of Bishops of Africa and Madagascar: Respect, Love, and Serve Africa in Truth!* (June 11, 2015), 3, http://aleteia.org/common-declaration-of-the-bishops-of-africa-and-madagascar/

[224] Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, *Common Declaration*, 4-5.

> all persons, created out of love and for love, and we all belong to a family and a community, vitally, ontologically and emotionally united![225]

The bishops further deconstruct and expose as hypocritical the different international partnerships and treaties that have "become powerful political and financial force" and instruments of oppression.[226] Their heartfelt message reflects the pain and concern of the people of Africa and cannot be ignored. Their prophetic message that calls out, and even condemns, existing social evils and injustices on the continent of Africa is also in order. However, they could have practiced what Cathleen Kaveny describes as prophecy without contempt[227] and adopted a prophetic rhetoric that does not only seek to chastise but also offer workable solutions. Besides, in their effort to rein in the pervasive international and intra-national political powers, the bishops themselves fall prey to the temptation of power. Referencing a fifth century letter that Pope Gelasius wrote to the Byzantine emperor Athanasius I (491-518), the bishops of Africa and Madagascar state the following:

> There are two powers, August Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. Of these that of the priests is the more weighty, since they have to render an account for even the kings of men in the divine judgment. You are also aware, dear son, that while you are permitted honorably to rule over humankind, yet in things divine you bow

[225] Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, *Common Declaration*, 5-7.
[226] Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, *Common Declaration*, 8-14.
[227] See Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Situated within the increasingly pluralistic, and oftentimes polarizing, American democratic context, Kaveny's work calls attention to the dangers of allowing our prophetic rhetoric, which sometimes must condemn deep social evils, to mutate into contempt.

> your head humbly before the leaders of the clergy and await from their hands the means of your salvation.[228]

By referencing Pope Gelasius' letter, and perhaps without intending it, the bishops reveal what has always been part of the problem: the desire to have others bow their heads humbly before you is a recipe for oppression. Such a desire contradicts the message and mission of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve and to offer his life as a ransom for many" and who clearly instructs his disciples not to make their authority felt.[229]

Lastly, the bishops also fail to articulate the fact that religion itself compounds the problem about human rights. The Western political hegemony has often gone hand in hand with religious hegemony. For instance, while religion in general and faith communities engage in the promotion of human rights through public service, such as education, health, and different charities, there are also different forms of abuses in many religious contexts. The scandal of abuse of minors by some Catholic priests and subsequent mishandling of the cases is but one example. Many also commit atrocities and violence in the name of religion, such as the current terrorist activities in different parts of the world. In light of such ambivalence, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar could do well to seek a clear yet more conciliatory approach to the question of justice and human rights for the people in Africa.

Religion and Children's Human Rights

The specific focus on the human rights of children is no less complex and no less contested. Critics within Christian circles often raise two major objections against the

[228] Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, *Common Declaration*, 15.
[229] Mark 10: 42-45 and parallels.

emphasis on children's rights. First, there are those who argue that the notion of children's rights encourages an attitude of self-seeking confrontation between children and parents and therefore contributes to the fragmentation within family and society. The second objection is that that the notion of children's rights is unbiblical.[230]

One way to respond to the fragmentation objection is to point out that rights exist as a safety net. They come into play when things go wrong, as they often do in our fallen world. Whereas it is possible for a loving family to function without any need to revert to the category of children's rights, history offers us more than enough evidence of atrocities and violations of children's rights within many loving and well-functioning families.[231] In such circumstances, it is important for children to have recourse to instruments and mechanisms that can and actually do protect them from harm. Besides, their rights as children are not only to protect them against their families, but also to ensure their flourishing as members of their families and of the human family at large.

Another level of the response to the fragmentation argument is to realize that children's interactions and relationships go far beyond the family, and that abuses of children and their rights occur in other parts of society, including abuses at the level of the state, in schools, churches, and many other public spaces. Objections within religious circles that focus solely on familial relationships miss the bigger picture. Families have to be vigilant in regard to the intrusive nature of state governance. However, religious and theological discussions about children's rights must take full cognizance of children's

[230] Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis, *Honoring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 2004), 195-256.

[231] See Annemie Dillen, ed. *When 'Love' Strikes: Social Sciences, Ethics, and Theology on Family Violence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

complex relationships with family, church, and society and seek ways to protect and promote children's rights at all levels.

With regard to the second objection (namely, that the notion of children's rights is unbiblical), the argument is that children claiming rights against their parents would contravene the biblical demand for submission. Individuals who make this argument often refer to the commandment to honor mother and father,[232] the injunction to obey parents,[233] and parents' obligation to discipline their children, even through corporal punishment.[234]

This argument and the referencing texts have been the subject of many interpretations and commentaries throughout the history of the Christian tradition, often with ambivalent perspectives. Interpretations of parental authority in particular have sometimes taken extreme positions. However, the Christian tradition also shows that parental authority has not always been considered absolute. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, says that in regard to the power and authority of a child's parents, the child "differs not from an irrational animal" and should be raised according to the desires of the parents.[235] However, commenting on the injunction on children to obey their parents "in the Lord,"[236] Aquinas explains that the phrase "in the Lord" indicates that neither parents nor anyone else is to be obeyed in things that are contrary to God. "It is better to obey God than human beings," he quotes.[237] Calvin also teaches that God sanctions children's obedience to parents. However, children should obey their parents "to the

[232] Exodus 28:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.
[233] Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20.
[234] Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15.
[235] Marshall and Parvis, *Honouring Children,* 286.
[236] Ephesians 6:1.
[237] Acts 5:29.

extent that piety towards God is not damaged."[238] Lastly, the new Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms children's obligation to obey their parents in all things, if the things asked are for the good of the child or that of the family. However, "if a child is convinced in conscience that it would be morally wrong to obey a particular order, [the child] must not do it."[239]

Another aspect of the objection that has received much attention is the parent's obligation to discipline the child. Referencing scripture in support of corporal punishment is a classic example of how certain forms of religious thinking and interpretation can hinder the promotion and protection of children's dignity and human rights.[240] The argument that children need to be corporally punished reveals specific understandings of who children are and how they should be treated. These understandings are rooted in two polarizing views: first, the pessimistic view of children as inherently sinful; and second, the often romanticized view of children as pure and innocent. Neither of these views is helpful. Thinking about children inherently and exclusively as sinful distorts the way Christians relate to children and often leads to abuse. On the other hand, viewing children as pure and innocent "leaves no room for appreciating a child's own growing autonomy and accountability."[241]

These ambiguities notwithstanding, the Christian tradition shows strength when it interprets parental obligation in light of parents' commitment to care and nurture, rather than quickly turning the gaze on authority and obedience. "That would mean seeing the

---

[238] Marshall and Parvis, *Honouring Children*, 292.

[239] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York City: Doubleday, 2003), 2217.

[240] Annemie Dillen, "Standing up for Children in Europe: The Contribution of Catholic Theology," *Bulletin ET*, 19 (2008): 4-25.

[241] Marcia J. Bunge, "Christian Understandings of Children: Central Biblical Themes and Resources," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

obligation to nurture and to care as correlative with [a child's] right to be cared for. And defining that would have to start with the child."[242] Chapter four takes up the discussion on the Christian understanding of children, focusing the beauty and vocation of the child.

[242] Marshall and Parvis, *Honouring Children*, 271.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT: ON THE BEAUTY AND VOCATION OF THE CHILD

The worldwide interest in children's rights and wellbeing finds echo in contemporary theological discourses across religions.[243] While maintaining the significance of the rights of children, these theological perspectives expand our understandings of the nature of children and childhood beyond a rights-based approach. Some theologians have called for a broadening of the conception of children to include children's shared responsibilities with adults.[244] Others find the rights language about the child's identity as an individual too limited and argue for an emphasis on relationality – that is, on a bidirectional focus on children and adults relationships.[245] The child is also a mystery. This understanding reflects the "wonder and joy of relating to children."[246] A number of contemporary practical theologians have also taken up the theme of childhood with a priority focus on securing the conditions for children's wellbeing within the community of family, church, and society. The effort is also aimed at understanding the person and place of the child in practical theology and how children influence the way we make sense of faith.[247]

---

[243] See for instance Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, eds. *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (London: Rutgers, 2011). This edited volume highlights understandings of children and childhood in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

[244] See Marcia Bunge, "Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children's Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies," in *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, eds. Trygve Wyller and Ugah Nayar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), 27-50.

[245] Annemie Dillen, "The Child 'as a Child': A Theological-Ethical Investigation of the Concrete and Relational Giving of a Child," in *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, eds. Trygve Wyller and Ugah Nayar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), 83-103.

[246] Martin E. Marty, *The Mystery of the Child* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1.

[247] See Pamela Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000); Pamela Couture, *Child Poverty: Love, Justice, and Social*

This chapter focuses on the theological anthropological basis for children's human rights. The approach taken here is theological aesthetics, beginning with an anthropological perspective on identity and dignity within the human rights discourse. The human rights discourse is basically about the significance of human life and the interplay between dignity and identity. Thus, dignity presupposes a whole anthropology. The claims for human rights should, therefore, emanate from a fundamental understanding of human dignity with the emphasis on the anthropological question: who am I?[248] In the case of our discussion, we ask: who is a child and what has beauty got to do with the child's identity, dignity, and vocation? The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section addresses the question of children's complex identities in lights of theological aesthetics. Drawing on the connection between spirituality and incarnation theology, the discussion in this section makes a case for beauty as a foundational identity of the child. Beauty, it will be argued, makes it possible to see the child as both a suffering child and as one with the grace and capacity to perceive the glory of the Lord; that is, to share in the life of God in Christ, and shed light on our understanding of all human existence before God. The second section focuses on the vocation of the child. It discusses the different dimensions of the child's vocation in Christian theology and shows how identities and vocations are intertwined. Vocation is usually expressed through participation and agency. While discussing the dimensions of such an expression, the section also argues for an expansion in the Christian understanding of vocation to

---

Responsibility (St. Louis: Chalice, 2007); Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (New York: Chalice, 2005); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

[248] Daniel Louw, "Homo Aestheticus within the Framework of Inhabitational Theology," in *Religion and Human Rights: Global Challenges from Intercultural Perspectives*, eds. Wilhelm Grab and Lars Charbonnier (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 87-129.

include situations where agency and participation are absent or limited, such as in the case of children still in the womb, babies, and children with disabilities, especially those with profound intellectual disabilities.

Theological Aesthetics and the Question of Identity

Beginning with Beauty

Neo-Scholasticism makes rationality a criterion for reality, rather than an upshot of it. Hans Urs von Balthasar counters this intellectualist bias by claiming that there are aspects of truth that cannot be fit into any definition.[249] He argues that beauty is one of such aspects. "Beauty gives truth its gravitational pull into reality because it doesn't 'fit' a logical schema."[250] The question at stake in his theological aesthetics is how the revelation of God's sovereign grace can be perceived in the world.[251] The response to this question focuses on "the confrontation of beauty and revelation in dogmatic theology," a confrontation (or relationship) that encapsulates the full dimension of God's glory made manifest in the Incarnate Son. The argument is that the divine self-manifestation is *expressed* as truth, *perceived* as beauty and enters into *relationship* with creation as goodness. Beauty, then, does not stand alone in the economy of revelation. Without it, however, truth and goodness fall apart.[252] "In a world that no longer has enough confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their

---

[249] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory Vol 1, The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 142.

[250] Francesca Aran Murphy, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Beauty as a Gateway to Love," in *Theological Aesthetics After von Balthasar*, eds. Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 8.

[251] Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 13.

[252] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol 1 Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 9-11.

cogency."[253] Beauty occupies a central place in Christian contemplation and love. "We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name … can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love."[254] Beauty also occupies a place of pride in Christian theology particularly because of its capacity to perceive the form and splendor of Being. Being is not formless; it has the capacity to communicate its form, and humans, consequently, to perceive it. The most striking instance of such perception of form is the aesthetic experience of beauty. Beauty is the revelation or radiance from the depth of being. Perceiving the form of beauty, therefore, "becomes the first task of a theologian-aesthetician."[255] Thus, beauty makes it possible to perceive the glory of God and of the human person.

Beauty, then, is a gateway to love and to glory. Beginning from beauty helps one to see how theology is founded in love. This includes the theology of childhood. As a gateway to love, beauty allows faith to be grounded in love. Faith means allowing love to have its way. Thus, by drawing on beauty, not only does Balthasar give priority to faith but also grounds that move in interpreting existence as love, rather than as a logical schema.[256] And, as beauty looks towards glory, it is also a pathway to hope, which is experienced as both a present and a future reality.

Beauty also invites a response, thus initiating a movement from contemplation to action. Despite the emphasis on contemplative "seeing the form," contemplation must ultimately lead not only to the realization of truth but also to transformative action. In addition to the contemplative traits, which make it revelatory, aesthetic experience often

---

[253] von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 19.
[254] von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 18.
[255] Oleg Bychkov, "Introduction," in *Theological Aesthetic After von Balthasar,* eds. Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), xiv.
[256] Murphy, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Beauty as a Gateway to Love," 10.

takes on a participatory and transformative character, particularly that of drama. Its expressive-emotive nature is especially conducive to transforming the human soul and the human situation spiritually, ethically, and even socially.[257]

Beauty is not always radiant. There are times when beauty is difficult to look at, when beauty is not pleasing to the eyes or the mind. All children (all human beings) are beautiful. Yet, pictures of children suffering many illnesses, children who are hungry, or abused, or rejected, or destroyed through violence or displaced through the ravages of war; children who are homeless and for whom the streets serve as the only dwelling place; children who are kidnapped and trafficked; and children with physical or profound intellectual disabilities. All these children are beautiful, too. Yet, their beauty is difficult to behold. Their beauty confronts us and fills us with "aesthetic nervousness," that is, with unease and moral panic.[258] This is a kind of beauty that haunts us and invites us to enter the place of suffering and of hope, with children and for children.

The Christian tradition presents us with the paradox of beauty by pointing to "the beauty of the cross."[259] The cross is a scandal, but it is also a means of salvation. It is associated with foolishness and with wisdom, with weakness and with power. Its beauty is not in itself alone, but in the one who hangs on it. It is Christ who makes the cross something beautiful; his death and resurrection transform the cross and the way we look at it. We do not look past the cross to see Jesus; we look *through* the cross to see Jesus, just as we look through Jesus to see the cross. By analogy, we do not look past the sufferings children go through to see their beauty; rather, we look *through* their suffering

---

[257] Oleg Bychkov, "Introduction," xv, xviii, xix.

[258] Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1-3.

[259] Richard Viladesau, T*he Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 1-18.

to behold their beauty and their hope. Beauty, then, brings suffering and hope together and keeps them in creative tension. Our task – as family members, theologians, pastoral ministers, teachers, and political leaders – is to encounter children from the standpoint of this tension.

Another reason for turning to beauty is that beauty coincides with the human quest for meaning and purpose. The attempt within theology to formulate the Christian faith in rational categories turned the Christian faith in the direction of positivistic knowledge of the mind and away from wisdom and devotional knowledge of the heart. A theology with a focus on aesthetics reverses the focus. A theological anthropology that views the human person in light of aesthetics points in the direction of spiritual beauty: the passionate expression of redemptive grace and sensitive benevolence.[260] A human being is "homo aestheticus," with innate creative imagination that allows the human person to overcome loss and limitation set by vulnerability and suffering. Humanity's effort to overcome limitation is like an art. A piece of art is an attempt to express perfect interrelatedness of different pieces to one another; it wants to explain how the different parts are related to the whole. In this sense, aesthetics points in the direction of healing and wellbeing, of making the world whole. "The human being as *homo aestheticus* refers to visionary anticipation and artistic appreciation within the quest for meaning and the creative attempts to signify and decode the markings of life."[261]

The focus on beauty allows for an understanding of the human person, and particularly the human child as "an iconic being who thinks, perceives, and acts in images." Beauty helps us to see the child as an "imaginative focus through which to

[260] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 99.
[261] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 100.

explore the nature of human life before God. The child is not a fleeting image. On the contrary, the child has the capacity to "illuminate our understanding of all human existence before God." The child's inherent dynamism, her continually growing sense of herself and her environment, provides a flexible and fruitful figure for humanity.[262] Humanity sees itself unfolding in the realities of the child; humanity's past, present, and future are all wrapped up in the child.

The Christian theological anthropological concept of the imago Dei, which is the human person's identity as a creature in the image and likeness of God, provides us with a specific expression of the human child (and the human person in general) as an iconic being. The child is the imago Dei in exact same way as the adult human being. However, the child possesses unique newness and openness that "points to the way in which the human being as the image of God is both a mystery in itself and a reflection of the mystery of God." The newness and openness further illustrate the Christian understanding of the human person as a pilgrim, as one on the way. Living in the presence of God, and through the lens of the child, humanity becomes aware of its openness and incompleteness;[263] its origins in God as well as its movement towards wholeness in Christ, "who holds all things together [...] and in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."[264]

On Dignity, Identity, and Aesthetics

Human dignity and human self-realization correspond with aesthetic experience of life fulfillment, which forms the basis of the human search for meaning and the

[262] Edmund Newey, *Children of God: The Child as Source of Theological Anthropology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 187.
[263] Newey, *Children of God*, 202-203.
[264] See Colossians 1:15-19.

formation of identity. Daniel Louw argues that in order to detect the meaning of identity and dignity, and to promote human rights, the starting point should be aesthetics, where the emphasis is on the value and meaning of human life, and not ethics, where the emphasis is on moral issues and the tension between good and evil. When one starts with an emphasis on ethical behavior, the discourse on human rights runs the risk of quickly turning into legalistic and moralistic arguments. Human right then becomes a legalistic principle or legalistic prescription for human behavior. Human beings should be assessed in the first place with aesthetic categories (meaning, significance, and purposefulness); ethical categories (morality and sinfulness) are important, but they should follow, rather than precede, aesthetic categories. Theological ethics emanates from theological aesthetics.[265]

In systematic theology, however, the focus on human rights remains mostly an ethical issue and not an aesthetic issue. Wolfgang Huber, for instance, relates human rights and human dignity to an "ethics of human dignity." The discourse about human rights and human dignity is a "packed-up ethical argument."[266] Theological aesthetics does not ignore the reality of ethics and human weakness, but rather takes as its starting point God's plan for creation and humanity. Before everything else, God sees creation to be "very good" and expresses delight in human beings:[267] "good" and "delight" not as ethical categories, but as meaning categories, detecting destiny, significance, and

[265] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 94.

[266] Wolfgang Huber, *Violence: The Unrelenting Assault on Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), xvi.

[267] Genesis 1:31; Proverbs 8:31.

purposefulness (telos), as well as an aesthetic category, pointing to worth and vocation."[268]

Dignity is also a spiritual category. It refers to meaning and quality of life. As a spiritual category within the framework of Christian anthropology, one cannot avoid the notion of grace and unconditional love as well as the notion of the fruit of the Spirit (charisma). Human dignity – the meaning and quality of life – is also spiritual category "in the fact that dignity is enfleshed in human bodies due to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, human dignity, according to Louw, is a matter of inhabitational theology.[269] The challenge of theological anthropology is to describe and illuminate the dynamics between dignity and rights within the parameters of spiritual hermeneutics in order to better understand and appreciate how identity is related to human dignity and the spiritual quest for meaning and purpose.[270]

Lastly, aesthetics can inspire human beings to transcend the harsh conditions of inhuman living. In order to prevent human rights from becoming sheer political ideology and even legalistic imperative, human rights should emanate from human dignity. The emphasis on dignity should in turn lead to a rediscovery of the worth of being human within the "aesthetics of a suffering God."[271] Beauty does not turn its back on suffering; instead, it embraces suffering and transforms it into aesthetic dignity. "The 'ugliness' of dereliction beautifies life unconditionally, especially when life is at its most broken state."[272] The apostle Paul expresses it more poignantly: "I am content with weaknesses,

[268] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 95.
[269] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 97.
[270] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 97-98.
[271] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 123.
[272] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 124.

insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."[273]

Calling for a Paradigm Shift

Louw argues that the connection between aesthetics and Christian spiritual approach to meaning calls for a paradigm shift in theological anthropology from incarnation theology to inhabitational theology. "The praxis-question in anthropology should eventually reside in pneumatology and not in Christology."[274] He offers two main reasons for such a shift. First, he argues that within incarnation theology, the human being is nothing and God is everything (giving a sacrificial grace). Christ is the mediator. Christology is about redemption. In inhabitational theology, the human being is becoming "whole" and therefore "everything;" human beings are not excluded in salvation, but totally incorporated because now the Spirit determines the life of the human person. Second, Louw argues that in pneumatology, the human person, now governed by the Spirit, becomes "fully authentic human person and autonomous." Humanity displays the charisma of the Spirit, what Louw describes as the "soulfulness of embodied humanism." "To build any currency between God and human beings," he concludes, "is pagan idolatry."[275]

Assessing the Paradigm Shift

The call for a paradigm shift is a step in the right direction. For one thing, the aesthetic approach to identity and dignity requires a shift from human self-determination to a relationship in the Spirit. This shift creates an "intimate space of unconditional love" as

[273] 2 Corinthians 12:10.
[274] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 124.
[275] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 124-125.

framed by communion and service.[276] Moreover, the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, is not only the source of all charisms, but also the link to the Trinitarian life and the pledge of human wholeness. In the African context – where cultural understandings and religious practices are deeply connected to the spiritual life – a focus on how the Spirit ensures human wholeness is particularly important.[277]

However, the argument in favor of inhabitational theology over incarnational theology (and Christology in general) needs some clarification. First, Louw's argument displays some internal inconsistency that needs redress. One the one hand, he argues that human beings are already a new creation in Christ; on the other hand, he sees the mediation of Christ as secondary, at best, in "a theological osmosis between God and human beings."[278]

Secondly, he argues that the "aesthetics of a suffering God" allows theological anthropology to address and overcome the notion of "the apathetic God of theistic doctrine." But God can be described as a "suffering God" precisely because of incarnational and christological anthropology: it is Christ who takes on human nature, journeys with humanity, and embraces suffering in order that the *ugliness of dereliction* might beautify (i.e., transform) human life and all of creation.

Thirdly, the argument that in incarnation theology the human being is nothing and God is everything needs some qualification. The event of the incarnation is, first and foremost, based on love – God's love for humanity and for God's creation, and humanity's love for God, for one another, and for all of God's creation. The goal of the

[276] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 124

[277] For a detailed discussion on how the Spirit ensures human wholeness, see Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness.*

[278] Louw, "Homo Aestheticus," 125.

incarnation is life – abundant and eternal life. What the incarnation reveals is the beauty of life made manifest in Christ, in all his brothers and sisters, and in all of God's creation. Incarnation anthropology, therefore, reveals humanity's worth to be loved and its capacity to love. This is the basis for the "wholeness" of the human person; it is the foundational principle of humanity as *homo aestheticus* – of becoming whole in and through the love, which reveals both beauty and suffering. In the love made manifest in Christ, and "poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,"[279] human nothingness is transformed into wholeness.

Fourth, the incarnation "nourishes conformity to Christ in the midst of the world."[280] In Christian theology, the goal of humanity is to become like Christ. This is the work of the Spirit. However, humans are not passive; we cooperate with God's grace and actively participate in the action of love. In that sense, humanity is not "excluded in salvation," as Louw argues. Christians understand that "God created us without us; but he did not will to save us without us."[281] Besides, we are not less human if we see and admit our faults. On the contrary, we move closer to our goal of attaining the "full stature of Christ,"[282] in whom we obtain the love and mercy of God.

Lastly, the argument for a shift from incarnation theology to inhabitational theology risks separating spirituality (i.e., both the spiritual life and its study particularly in pneumatology) from theology in general and incarnation theology in particular; or theological aesthetics from Christology. This kind of separation has been the bane of theology for centuries. Pneumatology is intrinsically linked to Christology. An

---

[279] Romans 5:5; 8:15.

[280] McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Indiana: Notre Dame University, 2000), 4.

[281] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1847.

[282] See Ephesians 4:13.

appreciation of their connection strengthens the paradigm shift based on aesthetics. The spiritual life or life in the Spirit is a specific form of life; its content is Christ. In the words of Christ addressed to his disciples, "The Spirit will take what is mine and teach it to you."[283] The teaching that the Spirit imparts is not only in reference to the words of Christ, but also to his very person and his vision for humanity. The Spirit lives in us to transform us into the image of God, which is fully understood in Christ.

For most part of its early development and practice (as late as the Middle Ages), theology remained a reasoned consideration of the implications of spirituality. The reciprocal movement is also true; namely, that the discursive theological understandings became a source of guidance for the spiritual journey. Today, however, theology and spirituality remain "much in need of rejuvenating communion with each other."[284] Thus, instead of a shift to inhabitational theology, this study argues for a revised paradigm shift that focuses on the connection between spirituality and the incarnation. It is a shift to spiritual Christology, to a life of Christ lived in the Spirit.

Hans Urs von Balthasar has long been known as an avowed proponent of this revised paradigm shift. The key to interpreting his approach to Christology is the integrity of spirituality and theology in his thought, particularly on how theology and spirituality function together in the task of constructive theology.[285] Drawing on von Balthasar's work, the paradigm shift called for in this chapter focuses on how spirituality and incarnation theology might work together for the task of a practical theology of

[283] John 16:13.
[284] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, ix.
[285] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, x.

childhood. Mark McIntosh describes the integrity of spirituality and the Incarnation as "Christology from within."[286]

A Revised Paradigm Shift: Theology of Childhood and Spiritual Christology

A paradigm shift that seeks a stronger connection between incarnation and spirituality serves as a strong basis for a theology of childhood. The reality of God's son becoming human, and being born as a child through the overshadowing of the Spirit, offers a stronger argument for a theology that focuses on the reality of children in our world, and particularly on their status and vocation as source of hope. As Balthasar observes, "it takes the incarnation to show us that being born has not just an anthropological, but also a theological, eternal significance."[287] This is the basis of the child's vocation to witness to hope – hope in response to the realities of the child's life here and now (as in promoting and protecting the rights and wellbeing of children) and for the future (as in adult life and ultimately eternal life).

Christology from within is a discovery in disciples of Christ – particularly in the saints and mystics – of a much needed witness both to the human struggle of Jesus and the divine force which animates that struggle. It is an analysis of Christ from those women and men who have deeply entered within the life of Christ; a Christology that arises out of a dialogue between spirituality and theology. The understanding of Jesus that emerges from a Christology from within is "disturbingly lifelike. This is a Jesus whose passionate desire, whose struggles and commitment have suddenly been rendered theologically accessible and significant. It is, above all, a Christology in which the

[286] Drawing on the work of von Balthasar, Mark McIntosh offers a detailed discussion on a "Christology from within." See McIntosh, *Christology from Within*.

[287] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Jesus as Child and his Praise for the Child," trans. Adrian Walker, *Communio* 22 (Winter 1995): 625, 633.

spiritual journey of an authentic human being is not only present but also salvific."[288] From the standpoint of a "Christology from within," the event of the incarnation is understood as depending entirely for its full reality on the active historical realities of Jesus: his willing, loving, hoping, and fearing, as well as his encounter with his fellow human beings.[289] Balthasar sees Christ developing humanly as he commits himself to his divine mission. Each act of love for God and for humanity, each encounter with God and neighbor, "brings the hidden possibility of his human nature forth into historical existence." And this does not happen as a foregone conclusion. Instead, each development in Jesus' life comes about as he struggles to discern the particular shape that his love for God and neighbor must take in every moment."[290] In the words of Scripture, Christ "learned to obey through suffering."[291] As Jesus comes to human fulfillment – drawn ever forward into his mission – he is by these acts drawn ever more deeply into the concrete historical predicament and hope of the people. It is not a typological or universal "human condition" which Christ increasingly shared. Rather, it is the concrete experience of the people in the historical setting into which he came. Only in sharing fully and profoundly in the situation of a specific historical setting can he be said to share the equally time-bound existence of every human being.

The goal of engaging the saints is the formation of a new matrix for theological discipleship. The saints demonstrate the charism and ability to re-immerse themselves in the contemporaneity with the Gospel and to share the fruit of their intimate experience with others. Contemporaneity with the Gospel means not so much of a bringing forward

[288] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 2.
[289] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 135 -137.
[290] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 136.
[291] Hebrews 5:8.

of the past into the present experience of the believer, but the participation of the believer in the eternal aspect of definitive historical saving events.[292] Because of their communion with Christ, the saints bear within themselves the marks of Christ's own experience. This participation in Christ is possible for two reasons. First, humanity itself is ordered to fulfillment in Christ and actualized by sharing in the obedience of Christ's own mission. Second, Christ is a uniquely open and inclusive being, always drawing his fellow humans into his own life. Christ is the "the origin and ground in which our whole being with all its roots is fixed, from which it draws its sustenance and derives all its best and characteristic features."[293]

Beyond the saints, however, the argument should be made for all disciples of Christ and their capacity to immerse themselves in the life of Christ. All disciples, including children, are called into a relationship with God in Christ. All are called to participate in the life of Christ. This participation is rooted in the spirituality of all disciples. Spirituality involves a form of practice, a pattern of life in search of ultimate meaning. Christian spirituality involves the practice of belief that communion with Christ is the way of encountering ultimate meaning. It is in Christ that Christians find the "path of the transforming companionship with God" and with one another.[294] The patterns and practices by which we live our lives also shape our thoughts. Our spirituality and theology of childhood – our thoughts and patterns of life in relation to children – therefore, reveal not only our conceptions of children and childhood, but also our understandings of the God who has revealed himself in his creation, the fullness of which is in Christ. Balthasar himself makes a case for the capacity of the human child to

[292] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 16-17.
[293] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 22.
[294] McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, ix.

perceive the glory of God; that is, to participate in the life of God in Christ, the eternal Child.

The Child and Divine Glory

Balthasar is best known for his sixteen-volume trilogy focusing on the transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth and their complementary relationship to divine revelation. However, the twentieth century Swiss theologian's final thoughts rest on the person and place of the child in Christian theology. These thoughts are summed up in his *Unless You Become Like This Child*, the last book he completed before his death in 1988. Christopher Denny regards the theology of childhood expounded in this small book as "the summation of Balthasar's entire theological anthropology."[295] In this book, Balthasar "picked up the main threads of his theology and weaved a meditation on the basic conditions of being a Christian."[296] Following these observations, but also going beyond them, this study regards Balthasar's thoughts on the theme of childhood as more of an invitation to accomplish two principal theological tasks. The first task involves seeing the reality of children in our midst and listening to their voices. This entails recognizing, protecting, and promoting the rights and wellbeing of all children in our world, especially those in deprived and challenging situations. This task has been discussed in more detail in chapter three. The second task is to embrace the childlikeness of the Christian thought and experience, at the heart of which is the eternal Child of the Father – Christ Jesus, the hope of glory.[297] This task addresses the question about how the humanity of the child reflects the human capacity to perceive the glory of the Lord. With

[295] Christopher D. Denny, "Which Holy Child? German Romantic Rivals to Balthasar's Theology of Youth," *Communio* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 677.

[296] Christophe Potworowski, "The Attitude of the Child in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar." *Communio* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 44.

[297] See Colossians 1:7.

this focus, the second task further elaborates on the notion of the beauty of the child and creates space for a discussion on the child's vocation. We will turn to this task in a moment. Together, these two tasks reflect the anthropological (first task) and theological, eternal significance (second task) of the incarnation. The focus on children's rights and wellbeing, and the theological significance of their identity and vocation constitute the two key components of the theology of a just hope proposed in this work (see chapter one and chapter five). Taking the event of the incarnation seriously creates opportunities for nurturing hope in young people, and for helping to hold the reality of vulnerability, agency, and complexity of the child before us.

As mentioned earlier, the question of interest to us at this point is about how the humanity of the child reflects the human capacity to perceive the glory of the Lord; that is, to share and reflect the life of God in Christ. To answer such a question we need, first and foremost, to turn to the eternal Child of the Father, and to his Incarnation. As the eternal Word of God takes on human flesh, he shows us, beyond the Mosaic Law, "the 'glorious splendor' of the Father and bestows on us 'grace upon grace,' the 'plenitude' of 'grace and truth'. In this way he has 'explained' to us the God who is hidden to all as the only one who knows him out of an eternal experience – 'explained' him not exteriorly … but through the interior participation in his own status as child."[298] Here, the Child's capacity to manifest divine glory is unmistakable. As John attests to in his prologue, the only begotten Son of God is full of light, and in the splendor of this light all things are made, all things have life. In this way, light and life unite in pouring forth the glory of the Lord. In other words, the divine glory is seen (knowable) in the form of the Child-

[298] John 1:1-18; see von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child,* 58.

Word[299] who is Light and Life.

The Letter to the Hebrews makes a similar point. The mystery of God, partially revealed in the prophets, is fully revealed in the Son, who is "the heir of all things, the refulgence of God's glory and the very imprint of his being."[300] This unfolding of the mystery of God is such that when " the eternal son accomplishes his work of salvation for us, it is in order to present us before the Father along with himself: 'Behold, here we are, I and the children God has given to me.'"[301]

The seventeenth chapter of John's gospel is another critical text that helps to explain how the person of the child reflects the human capacity to perceive the glory of the Lord. Jesus, realizing that his hour has come, cries out: "Father, … Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you … with the glory I had with you before the world began."[302] Here, we see Jesus as the eternal Son who never leaves the Father's bosom. He shares in and manifests God's glory precisely because he is the child of the Father. Yet in this case, the child is glorified in his suffering, so that the suffering child might also be known (or perceived) as the glorious child, along with all those who would believe in him, those who would be given "power to become children of God."[303] For this reason, Jesus also prays that these children of God – from every tribe and tongue and nation – might be consecrated in the word of *truth*, that "they may be *one,*" and be drawn into the divine life, into a relationship with God through the *goodness* made manifest in the

[299] von Balthasar uses the expression "Child-Word" to refer to the eternal Word who became perceptible through the Incarnation. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 251.

[300] Hebrews 1:1-3.

[301] von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child,* 59-60.

[302] John 17:1-5.

[303] John 1:11-13.

beauty of the Incarnate Son (that is, in the glory of the Child-Word).[304] In short, the eternal child is the embodiment of divine truth, goodness and beauty (or glory). In him, all the children of God also find their place in the divine relationship, not only as sharers but also as (perceptible) expressions of divine glory.

Childhood – divine and human – holds primacy over the whole drama of salvation. It is as the eternal child that Christ Jesus goes all the way to the high-priestly office on the Cross.[305] Jesus' suffering on the Cross is "redemptive solely because, as eternal Son of God, he could represent humanity as a whole before the Father and atone for it." Childhood is also humanity's identity before God. Hence in their discipleship, renunciation or suffering can make sense and bear fruit only because the sufferers have first been made into [the children] of God by the Son of God.[306]

The idea of the divine Son representing humanity in his human childhood also places the human child at the center of theological anthropology. "Just as human childhood is a reminder of both fragility and the wondrous potential of human life, so the human childhood of God in Christ teaches the paradoxical coinherence of powerlessness and glory in the incarnation."[307] Also, both the human child and the divine Child in their "powerlessness can be so easily and by a thousand means rejected and got rid of, almost without believers noticing it."[308] The reality of such powerlessness, vulnerability, and rejection should continue to motivate practical theologians and all persons of goodwill to keep the child in mind and seek to promote their wellbeing.

Finally, the notion that the person of the child reflects the human capacity to

---

[304] See Revelation 7:9; John 17:14-16.
[305] von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child,* 64.
[306] von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child,* 58
[307] Edmund Newey, *Children of God,* 191.
[308] von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 251.

perceive the glory of the Lord relates to the treatment of the human person as existing in familial relationship, particularly the relationship a child has with the mother. The mother-child relationship allows the child to know herself as part of (or related to) but also as separate from the mother. In this relationship also, the child (representing humanity), discovers her openness to goodness, truth, beauty and oneness:

> Now man (sic) exists only in dialogue with his neighbor. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that that love is good, therefore all being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all being is beautiful.[309]

With this idea of the child's capacity to perceive the glory of the Lord, the ideas about the place of the child in Balthasar's theology come full circle. Not only is the child firmly situated at the center of theological aesthetics and anthropology but also, through this situatedness, the child is seen as a lens through which to understand human beings' radical openness to the unlimited, to the transcendental qualities of Being. This radical openness also makes a strange demand on humans, as evidenced in three childlike activities: that of sleep, play, and contemplation.

Sleep is one of children's normal occupations. When the child is asleep, people around her keep quiet, making sure their activities and words do not disturb or awaken her. At such times, people even save their demonstrations of affection for a later moment when the child is available. But love does not depart because, even in their withdrawal,

[309] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "A Résumé of My Thought," *Communio* 15, no. 4 (1988): 468-473.

children make great demands on people around them. For instance, because the child is asleep, the mother stays awake. "And when she has to sleep, then she must be turned toward the child so that she wakes at the child's slightest movement." We see then, that "the mother's capacity of attentive readiness is activated by the child, [a readiness which] echoes the helpless dependence of the child."[310]

Then there is play, in which children freely create their world. The rules of play (that of the human child and the eternal Child) are not known in advance. Children do not worry about what the rules are or whether or not the rules change. Oftentimes, they make up the rules to begin the game, only to see the rules change as play continues. Thus, even though they invent the rules, they are content to see the rules take on a life of their own, "enchanted by the fact that what they have invented has its own laws. … Woe [then] to the person who plays with the child according to fixed rules. … If that person truly wants to play, he enters the world of the Child which is built up and transformed as he goes along." The only thing necessary is the person's "readiness to comply with the strangest demands."[311]

Children are also masters of contemplation. They lie in his crib, or on their mat, or any suitable place prepared for them by the mother and watch for hours. It is not known for certain what children see or whether they are consciously aware of the object on which their gaze rests. Yet, it can be said that the children's contemplation hardly detaches itself from the identity which the subject and object made up originally in God. Never again in their lives will humans experience this gaze, except at the end of their lives when their eyes open wide, and with silent attention, try to see again that from

[310] von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 252-253.
[311] von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 253-254.

which they have turned away. In other words, only in true humility, in total helplessness, can humans engage and penetrate the object of one's gaze: "the deprivation of all power of one's own, the incapacity of the child to act, even to express himself [or herself] – this total poverty is the way and the condition of true contemplation."[312]

What, then, does this childlike, radical openness – along with its correlate of strange demands – tell us about the child's vocation in life? The next section addresses this question.

The Vocation of the Child

There are different ways of speaking about vocation in the Christian tradition. "Vocation" or "calling" is used in contemporary culture and church to refer to a person's aims and goals in life, such as one's occupation or profession, say as a medical doctor. Others think of vocation more specifically as entering into ordained ministry (e.g., as deacon or priest) or into religious life (e.g., as nun or religious brother, especially in the Catholic tradition). Vocation is also used more generally to refer to one attempt at finding a sense of self-fulfillment and purpose in life. In the third sense, calling is what one does, paid or unpaid, to find wholeness and personal meaning and happiness. All of these common ways of talking about vocation exclude children, and from a Christian theological perspective, all of them are too narrow.[313]

The concept of vocation, rightly understood, addresses our deepest human longings for purpose and meaning in life and encompasses the totality of our lives. Central to the interpretation of the Christian understanding of vocation is the notion that

---

[312] von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 254.

[313] Marcia J. Bunge, "The Vocation of the Child: Theological Perspectives of the Particular and Paradoxical Roles and Responsibilities of Children," in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 31-52.

God calls all of us, including children, to a life centered in Christ and lived in the Spirit, and to ways in which we meaningfully contribute to God's work in the world. Vocation is a call to discipleship and to unity with Christ in the Spirit.[314]

Dimensions of Children's Vocation

Participation as Vocation

In addition to children's duties to honor, respect, and obey parents in the Lord (as discussed in previous chapter), there are other specific dimensions of children's vocation. Children are called to fear and love the Lord, learn about and practice the faith, teach adults and be models of faith, go to school and study diligently for both the present and the future, and to play and be in the present.[315] Marcia Bunge argues that the identification of the dimensions of children's vocation is closely connected to specific understandings individuals may have about children. She criticizes views that portray children as simply innocent and pure or as depraved and immature and encourages, instead, theological perspectives that honor the complex, and oftentimes paradoxical, identities of children. Examples of the complex and paradoxical identities include understanding children as both sinful and moral agents; as fully human made in the image of God and also as developing beings who need care and nurture; as models of faith and sources of revelation and yet in need of instruction and guidance; as gifts of God and sources of joy, but also as orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of justice and compassion. Appreciating these paradoxes encourages Christians of all traditions and in different cultural contexts to outline specific obligations and responsibilities of adults

[314] Bunge, "The Vocation of the Child," 31-32.

[315] For a detailed discussion of these dimensions of children's vocation, see Bunge, "The Vocation of the Child," 40-51; and Marcia J. Bunge, "Christian Understandings of Children: Central Biblical Themes and Resources," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2012), 59-78.

toward children: including bringing up children in the teachings of the faith, caring for all children, especially orphans and the poor, and educating children and helping them design their vocation.[316]

Efforts to reclaim inherent worth and theological discussion of vocation also acknowledge and explore children's role as contributors to family wellbeing. Focusing specifically on household chores, Bonnie Miller-McLemore explains that work has both economic and spiritual value, and that children are useful precisely because they have a vocation as full members of the household of the family and the household of faith.[317]

In the African context, many children continue to be an integral part of advancing the wellbeing of the family. Children go on different errands on behalf of the family. They carry out numerous household chores, including fetching water, sweeping the house and compound, washing dishes, fetching firewood from the forest for meals, and helping prepare meals for the family. Children also support the family by participating in the family business, usually families' petty trading. In instances like this, children send family items of trade to customers or help sell these items at the market or by the roadside. In some rural communities, children take part in family farming and/or pastoral activities, serving as helping hands on the farm or tending animals.

Children's full participation in family life in Africa is not a new phenomenon. Children have always worked in African society. Under colonial rule, however, the activities of children as workers began to take on new meaning in part because of a new perception tied to the notion of ideal childhood, and the visibly negative impact that some

[316] Bunge, "Christian Understandings of Children," 62-72.

[317] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Children, Chores, and Vocation: A Social and Theological Lacuna," in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 295-323.

forms of economic activities had on children's health and wellbeing.[318] Today, prevention of child labor remains one of the main children's rights issues. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child calls on governments to put in place measures to protect children "from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with [children's] education, or to be harmful to [children's] health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."[319] In spite of this clear position on child labor and the Convention's widespread ratification, over 200 million children are still engaged in prohibited work around the world. Most of these children are found in developing countries.[320] Fifty nine million children (aged 5-17) engage in child labor in Africa; about twenty nine million children engage in hazardous labor on the continent. These forms of labor put children "in immediate and very serious danger of irreversible harm and even risk of losing their lives."[321] Sub-Saharan Africa in particular has long had the highest incidence of child labor in the world. In spite of efforts to curb the phenomenon, the number of children's participation in hazardous work remains high in the region.[322] Any theological discourse about children's vocation as contributors to the wellbeing of families in Africa may do well to consider the realities and complexities of child labor on the continent.

---

[318] See for example Saheed Aderinto, "Introduction: Colonialism and the Invention of Modern Nigerian Childhood," in *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, ed. Saheed Aderinto (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 1-18.

[319] United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* , 32.

[320] See International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Child Labour Developments: Measuring Trends from 2004 to 2008* (Geneva: ILO, 2010); ILO, *Children in Hazardous Work: What we Know, What we Need to Do* (Geneva: ILO, 2011).

[321] See International Labour Organization (ILO), *Accelerating Action against Child Labour in Africa: Building on Experience and Results* (Geneva: ILO, 2013).

[322] See Samuel Okyere, "Children's Participation in Prohibited Work in Ghana and its Implications for the Convention on the Rights of the Child," in *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa*, eds. Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Nicola Ansell (New York: Routledge, 2014), 92-104.

Dignity, Agency, and Vocation

Discussions about children's vocation endow childhood with dignity and incipient but substantial decision-making potential. To speak about "vocation" is to recognize the dignity of each child along with the conviction that children grow by exercising their abilities to make decisions and act on choices.[323] Drawing on Catholic social thought, William Werpehowski also relates children's vocation to their dignity as human persons. Children possess God-given dignity, which they share with all other human beings. An acceptance of their dignity implies an affirmation of their rights, and recognition of their claims as religious and moral agents to participation in forms of social, familial, and faith life. It also encourages a preferential attention to their vulnerability and need for support.[324] A person's dignity is rooted in humanity's sacred worth. A human person is created for fellowship with God in knowledge and love, for the loving service of neighbor, and for stewardship over non-human environments. It is also part of human sacred worth to be interdependent, to recognize our limitations and need for the other. We are not created as isolated beings, separated from God, from one another, and from the rest of creation. Rather, we are created "within bonds of mutual love, loyalty, and assistance," as manifested in familial relationships, friendships, and other social, political, and economic relations.[325] However, it is not only our limitations that draw us to each other. We come to the aid of one another also because of our resourcefulness. In the spirit of charity, our giftedness lays open to others and embraces them. This is the expression

[323] George Van Grieken, FSC, "Soul for Soul: The Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 357.

[324] William Werpehowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility: Catholic Social Thought on Children," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79-98.

[325] Werpehowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility," 81-82.

of a just hope: when we recognize both our need and resourcefulness, and reach out in charity to lift one another up; when we persevere together to address injustices against children and create opportunities for their flourishing.

Applying Catholic social teaching and theology today "requires a priority focus on children" and on securing the conditions for children's wellbeing within the community of the family. The reasons for such a focus is not difficult to find. As discussed several times in this work, all around the world children are hurting. "The lives, dignity, rights, and hopes of literally millions of children are at risk." Children are also a test of both our humanity and our faith. Our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord, to one another, and to God's creation. Lastly, children are our present and our future. They bring us special gifts. They "are God's continual gift to the world. Thus we need to respect them and place their rights as a priority in our society and our Church."[326]

Catholic thought also affirms that children have religious and moral rights, such as the right through their own volition, upon attaining the age of reason, to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, and Anointing of the Sick. The Church also teaches that children have the right to be protected against all forms of violence. The strong endorsement of children's rights often relates to protecting and advancing the good of the family constituted of marriage. This connection between the rights of children and the good of the family "reiterates the notion that individual human dignity is realized in social relations of interdependence."[327] Children are not

[326] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Putting Children and Families First,* 1-3.
[327] Werpehowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility," 83.

"windowless and doorless 'monads'" whose rights have no relation to, or bearing on, their real and concrete situation of dependence and need for support and protection.[328]

Catholic understanding of children's agency accords with the norm of "justice as participation."[329] Families' responsibility to form children in a loving community includes the recognition of how children contribute to familial and community life through their gift of respect, obedience, gratitude, and service of neighbor, especially to those in need. Parents are to help their children to develop a lifelong commitment of responsibility towards the disadvantaged in society, even when they themselves have great suffering. This involvement or participation in the work of justice and peace and in seeking the wellbeing of others is not an extra religious activity. Rather, the invitation and encouragement to participate is central to children's vocation as disciples of Christ.[330]

Werpehowski, however, cautions against the dangers of self-deception in relation to the *vocation of the child*. He explains that the idea of the "vocation of the child" as applied to young people up to their early adolescence can be dangerous because of the self-deception it can foster among those who care for children. In their effort to form children in specific vocations, adults could project their vision, desires, and imaginings unto children. What may be considered as formation of children in their own vocation could quickly turn into adults' subtle, and sometimes aggressive, ways of "creating" children in adults' own image. Yet, since the abuse of some religious or moral notion does not prevent its proper use, an exploration of a Christian theological tradition that seeks to overcome the possible distortion of the idea of the vocation of the child is in

[328] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 26.
[329] Werpehowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility," 84.
[330] Werpehowski, "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility," 84-85.

order. The central focus of the vocation of the child should be to encourage children to become their own self in Christ.[331]

Children's Vocation in the Absence or Limited Situations of Agency and Participation

The notions of agency and participation do not exhaust our understanding of children's vocation. Children have enormous impact on parents, families, and society even before they explicitly express any agency or demonstrate any act of participation. From the moment of conception, a child's life demands a response. There is, for instance, a woman's joy at the gift of pregnancy; a man's pride in becoming a father; and a change in lifestyle and family arrangement to get ready for the baby. Some cultures – including many cultural contexts in Africa – even perform specific rituals from the moment a woman becomes pregnant to the time she gives birth.[332] These responses are indicative of how a child changes people and alters situations even before the child is born. There are also times when individuals' and society's response to the news of a child's life becomes ambivalent. The painful choice and experience of terminating a pregnancy and the institutional structures and laws that support such a process are examples of such ambivalence. Extending justice to the unborn child is certainly one of the intense debates of our contemporary society. Regardless of the response, it is clear that a child's life does not permit neutrality. Long before any talk of agency or participation, the presence of a child exerts an influence on familial and societal decisions and actions.

---

[331] William Werpehowski, "In Search of Real Children: Innocence, Absence, and Becoming Self in Christ," in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 53-74.

[332] See for example Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity*, for a discussion on different socio-religious rituals performed to mark the beginning of a new life in Africa, including at the stages of pregnancy, birth, and outdooring.

Christians believe that the very existence of the human person constitutes a vocation, and that God's calling reaches the depth of the human person from the very beginning of a person's life. The first calling we all receive, regardless of what we will or will not do, is the calling to be in existence, the calling to live. The following scripture references express the beauty of our calling *to be*, and of God's engagement with the human person even before the person is born:

> You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made […]. Your eyes saw me unformed; [...] my days were shaped, before one came to be.[333] Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.[334] For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.[335]

If vocation (i.e., God's calling on our lives) is rooted in our dignity and worth as humans created in the image and likeness of God, then the starting point of a theological discourse on children's vocation cannot be what a child can do or cannot do (i.e., the question of agency and participation). The starting point has to be the beauty of the human life itself, deeply rooted in God's Trinitarian love. Another example we can give – in addition to the example of the unborn child – is the life and vocation of children with disability, particularly those with profound intellectual disabilities. The notions of agency and participation become problematic when tested against the experiences of individuals whose agency and participation are often limited or even in some cases absent, such as children with profound intellectual disability. Agency and participation often connotes a

[333] Psalm 139:13-16.
[334] Jeremiah 1:5.
[335] Luke 1:41, 44.

need to achieve autonomy, freedom, and self-representation. Yet, persons with profound intellectual disabilities cannot achieve these goals – they thrive on interdependence, on constant support of family, and friends.[336] For such individuals, the focus on vocation as agency and participation becomes inadequate, theologically.

Including children with profound intellectual disability (and all children with limited agency) in our theology of children's vocation requires an expanded theological anthropology that sees vulnerability as intrinsic to our beauty as human persons. The fundamental character of our humanness is achieved through vulnerability and interdependence: "It is vulnerability … that we all share as human beings."[337] Our vulnerability opens the way for us to acknowledge and experience our deepest need for connection with others, our deepest need for mutual dependence. With specific reference to children with disabilities, our inability or refusal to take human vulnerability seriously creates "a cult of normalcy" – that is, the false pretenses upon which exclusionary practices against persons with disabilities are based. As Thomas Reynolds explains, "normalcy operates as a cultural system of social control […], a force that flows according to strategic mechanisms of power that serve the conventions of the status quo." This cult regulates acceptability. It determines which bodies and minds are normal and fit societal expectations. Persons with profound disabilities have bodies or states of mind that do not fit the definition of this cult and so are rejected. For Reynolds, the problem is not with the persons with disabilities, but with society, with the persons who feel

[336] John Swinton, "Disability, Ableism, and Disablism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2012), 443-451.

[337] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 14.

themselves in the position of power to define who belongs and who does not.[338] An over emphasis on agency and participation in theological discourse about children's vocation can create similar cult of normalcy and, as a result, marginalize the vocations of millions of children who do not fit our definition.

Hans Reinders also shifts attention from agency and participation to friendship. Grounding his arguments in theological anthropology and ethics, he addresses the question about our theological understanding of the ultimate good of being human and the implications this understanding might have on the unconditional acceptance of the persons with profound disability.[339] Reinders argues that human personhood is ultimately and necessarily a gift of the Spirit and grounded in the unconditional love of God. Our value as humans does not rest on what we can do or cannot do (i.e., on our capacity for agency and self-representation), but on God's desire to meet our needs in relational friendship:

> True human being is extrinsically grounded in God [...], whose grace allows us to participate in Trinitarian communion. This means that our ultimate good of being human is found in this communion as a movement from God to us. In this way Christian anthropology provides an understanding of our humanity that includes human beings with profound intellectual disabilities. All other alternative approaches will inevitably confront them with criteria they cannot possibly meet.[340]

---

[338] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 48.

[339] Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5.

[340] Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 15.

The notion of friendship as God's relational and unconditional friendship with human beings has practical and ethical implications for our discussion on children's vocation. God's friendship is the gift that precedes Christian friendship and makes it possible. With this in mind, a Christian account of vocation needs to show how the gift of unconditional friendship we receive from God can be extended to all children, including children with profound intellectual disabilities, even when they cannot reciprocate through participation or the exercise of agency, or when their agency is limited.

All children have a vocation; all have a purpose in life, regardless of age or conditions of life. Thus, the specific vocation to witness to hope, especially to a just hope, applies to all children. To appreciate the life and the calling of all children requires a renewed practice, a spirituality of hope that does justice for all children and for all people. Chapter five develops this notion of a spirituality of hope in much detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEOLOGY OF THE CHILD AND SPIRITUALITY OF A JUST HOPE

Christian hope, if it has to be relevant to the experiences of children, must be a just hope. In the face of so many atrocities and injustices against children, as well as the constant resiliency many children demonstrate, the notion of children as source of hope makes sense only when we consider hope in light of justice, of right relationship with God, with others within communities, and with the rest of creation. Just hope takes into consideration the complex identities and realities of children, including their promising experiences, as well as their challenging and often tragic experiences. Just hope responds to children where they are and seeks to address issues about their rights and wellbeing, without overlooking the theological significance of their vocation as children of God. Given the opportunity and support, children can contribute substantially to the wellbeing of their families, faith communities, and of society as a whole. These discussions on a just hope have ensued from the perspectives of theological anthropology, theological aesthetics, ethics (on rights and wellbeing), multimodal narrativity, and ritual theory. This chapter expands the discussion by focusing more closely on the question of spirituality. The notion of a just hope must become a way of life, a patterned practice.

Spirituality and Practical Theology of Childhood in Contemporary Africa

An attempt at constructing a practical theology of childhood in the context of Africa should place children's spirituality at the center. There are several reasons for this assertion. First, there is a strong connection between practical theology and spirituality, akin to the connection between ritual theory and practical theology discussed in chapter two. There is a renewed call to focus on spirituality in theology in general, and

contemporary practical theology in particular. The goal of seeking this reunion of theology and spirituality is to emphasize the theological and critical conversation with the aesthetic, the metaphysical, the contemplative, and the several spiritual traditions of Christianity. The argument is that theology without spirituality becomes increasingly empty of spiritual substance. On the other hand, spirituality without strong fundamental, systematic, and practical theology can drift off into sentimental piety.[341]

In practical theology in particular, the call for a "fruitful conversation" between practical theology and spirituality focuses attention on the action of God's Spirit in bringing about God's reign of justice. Claire Wolfteich, for instance, defines spirituality as "a life animated by the Spirit of God, practiced with love, holiness, and justice. It is a life both received through grace and built upon over time through the cultivation of practices in a sustaining community."[342] The disciplines of spirituality and practical theology are both deeply concerned with embodied way of life, the teaching of spiritual wisdom, critical appraisal of traditions in light of the demands of faith and justice, and the transformation of practices, contexts and communities.

The second reason for placing spirituality at the center of practical theology of childhood in contemporary Africa is that spirituality and theology are closely connected in African Christian thought and indigenous religions. A number of African theologians have observed that the emphasis in African theology has been on involvement in worship, rites, and rituals in daily life rather than on abstract beliefs entrenched in intellectual

[341] See Tracy, "A Correlational Model of Practical Theology Revisited," 70-86.

[342] Claire Wolfteich, "Spirituality," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 335. See also Claire Wolfteich, *Lord Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

dialogues.[343] Rituals, in particular, serve as a means of developing spirituality. Rituals have the potential to help develop communal spirituality. They help to set in place a community's understanding of its public horizons (its public meanings), and therefore its way of being in public or its public spirituality and identity. Christian public spirituality refers to "a vision of what it means to live as a member of the Christian community."[344] The public spirituality that an assembly passes on challenges its members as well as sets limits for the assembly regarding its meaning making processes. However, these horizons are not static and do change as a result of decisions made within the collective subject.

The importance of spirituality in African Christian theology is also closely related to and draws upon the African worldview, which perceives the universe as a seamless relationship between spiritual and physical realities. African indigenous religions embodied this worldview prior to the introduction of Christianity. For instance, Robert Snyper, a Ghanaian systematic theologian, describes the Akan indigenous religion as encompassing "a gem of intense spirituality manifested overtly through socio-cultural rituals," including its rites of passage.[345]African spirituality and prayer life demonstrate a kind of vitality that inspires vibrant religious life and experience on the continent. The attunement to the spiritual life shows the dynamism of the African life. African spirituality is rooted in relationality. Every aspect of the African life is saturated with spirituality, with the recognition of the deep relationships that are the foundations of the mystery of life. Africans put a premium on the relationship between the material and the

[343] See for instance Daisy Nwachuku, "[Practical Theology in] West Africa," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* ed., Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 517; Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?* Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*.

[344] Margaret Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, eds. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 206-207.

[345] Snyper, *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity*, 17.

spiritual world, between humans and God, and between the living and the ancestral world. They cherish their kinship ties and their relationship to the rest of creation as fundamental to human existence and wholeness. This connection between relationality and spirituality remains the basis for the energy and hope on the continent. African people overcome their difficulties through their "traditional way of life that gives them energy and a spirituality of hope."[346]

Thirdly, the focus on spirituality in practical theology of childhood finds a fruitful dialogue with the growing and interdisciplinary interest in children's spirituality. Some of these studies have focused on listening to children on their spiritual journey[347] and/or examining the spiritual life of children in different contexts.[348] Other researchers have also paid attention to how spirituality and resilience are related in children.[349] In Africa in particular, recent theological studies have started focusing on children as spiritual subjects in their own rights and on how this understanding contributes to the development of holistic care for children.[350]

Towards a Spirituality of a Just Hope

Hermeneutics of Seeing, Listening, and Acting

The specific spirituality this study seeks to develop is the spirituality of a just hope. The study proposes hermeneutics of seeing, listening, and acting as a way of

[346] Benezet Bujo, "Foreword," in Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), x.

[347] See Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2010).

[348] See Robert Coles, The Spiritual Life of Children (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990).

[349] See Annemie Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality: A Practical Theological Reflection," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 1 (2012): 61-75. See also Emily Crawford, Marian O'Dougherty Wright and Ann Masten, "Resilience and Spirituality in Youth," in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, eds. Roehlkepartian, et al. (London: Sage, 2006), 355-370.

[350] See for example Peter Chipililo Kantembe, "Nurturing Children's Spirituality in Hospitals: Childhood Studies and Their Theological Implications for Child-Centered Pastoral Care in Hospitals in Malawi" (PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2015).

nurturing a spirituality of hope in the light of justice – of a right relationship that offers children the opportunity to thrive. The hermeneutics of seeing, listening and acting proposes a way of attending to children's voices and experiences in the process of practical theological interpretation.[351] A number of theological perspectives underpin this hermeneutical approach. The first is a christological perspective. The event of Christ, particularly his incarnation, gives new sight to humanity. Christ is the image of the invisible God. It is through his incarnation that the beauty of God is seen (becomes perceptible and knowable). It is also in him as the eternal Word that the voice of God is heard in its fullness. However, the incarnation of the divine Child does not only reveal God to the human person. It also reveals humanity to itself, so that human beings can see and hear themselves in Christ. Christ, the Incarnate Word, makes it possible for all his brothers and sisters, including children, to be seen and heard in order that they might also become, in Christ, the human expressions of divine truth, goodness, and beauty.[352]

In the African context, the event of the Incarnation inspires a specific focus on how the message of Christ takes flesh within the cultural context of the people. This is the underlining principle of the theologies of inculturation on the continent. It encourages Africans to see themselves as God sees them and to express the immediacy of Christ in their lives. Africans understand and relate to Christ as a life-giver, a healer, mediator, friend, and redeemer/liberator.[353] While most of these christological understandings are applicable to all persons, the metaphor of *friend* quite often expresses the relationship

[351] Swart and Yates, "Listening to Africa's Children," 1-12.

[352] See von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol 1 Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009); von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*; Hans Urs von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986), 18-26. von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child;* Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Jesus as Child and his Praise for the Child," 625-634.

[353] See Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

Jesus has with children. The following children's song from the Ghanaian context illustrates this point.

Gyises mbɔfra Nyarko	*Jesus, Friend of children*
Hwe yaaba wo hɔ	*Here we come to you*
W'adom nsti yɛ hen aso	*In your mercy hear us*
Tsie mbɔfra mpaebɔ[354]	*Grant your children's prayer*

The song expresses children's special affinity to Christ and the hope they have in him to hear their plea and grant their request. This hope is founded on Jesus' own attitude towards children in the gospels. At a time when children are considered inferior and occupied a subordinate position in society, Jesus sees and embraces them and places them in the midst of his disciples as models for the kingdom of God, as icons of eternal hope. He also speaks against any form of evil against children, warning that anyone who causes "one of these little ones" to fall would face a grave consequence.

The second theological perspective is ecclesiological in nature and explained in light of the concept of "a listening church."[355] Elochukwu Uzukwu views "*listening"* as the overriding metaphor for the church in Africa. The challenge to listen is for the entire Christian community. However, leadership of the church has a specific responsibility to "cultivate the ministry with 'large ears.'" Leaders who take time to listen to their people make it easier for the people also to listen to the voice of Christ and of their brothers and sisters within and outside the Christian community. When leaders fail to listen, they

[354] This song is commonly sung at Sunday Schools in many parts of Ghana, particularly among the Akans.

[355]See Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 137.

jeopardize the health of the community and put the faith of their people at risk.[356] Listening is also a powerful means to heal the wounds of those marginalized in the community, particularly children, women, and persons with disability. A listening church provides an environment for all persons to thrive, including children.

The hermeneutics of seeing and listening can further be explained from a practical theological perspective.[357] In particular, the questions posed through the descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and the pragmatic tasks of practical theology[358] highlight the interconnections, systems, and relationships in which ministry and theological interpretation take place. Such complex relationships between the church and society show the ambiguous and multilayered character of both Christianity and society in the way they understand and respond to children.[359] Both the church and society have "mixed record" regarding their treatment of children. While the church and society have developed many programs, committed resources, and taken initiatives on behalf of children, there have also been instances of abuse and neglect.[360]

Situating the hermeneutics of seeing and listening in this complex framework challenges practical theologians to revisit simplistic views of children, allow their theological investigations to be transformed by childhood studies, and reflect anew on the contributions theology could make towards alternative views of children and their wellbeing, rights, and agency in society.[361] For instance, practical theologians and other

---

[356] Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 137-142.

[357] See Osmer, *Practical Theology*.

[358] See Swart and Yates, "Listening to Africa's Children," 1-12.

[359] Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt, "Introduction, Children's Studies and Complexity: An Hermeneutics of Complexity," in *Children's Voices, Children's Perspectives in Ethics: Theology and Religious Education*, eds. Anne Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010), 1-14.

[360] Marcia Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation," in *Understanding Children's Spirituality*, ed. Kevin E. Lawson (Eugene: CASCADE, 2012), 3-25.

[361] Swart and Yates, "Listening to Africa's Children," 2.

scholars engaged in hermeneutics of seeing and listening could begin to view children as active participants in the creation of a better society.[362]

However, seeing children and listening to children's voices go beyond encouraging participation. Theologies of childhood can also create understandings about children's wellbeing, preventing child abuse, and providing care for those who become victims of different forms of abuse. Oftentimes, children who suffer forms of abuse in families speak through their body language. Thus, attending to their voices also means, "noticing their often silent voices, the words they don't say in order to protect themselves or their families."[363]

Discussions in chapter two show how the commitment to seeing, listening, and acting can transform children's lives and energize communities. For the children who engaged in the poster creation and presentation activities and in eulogizing Christ, the joys derived from these activities will remain windows of hope, a shared hope with a community that is willing to give them a voice and a chance.

Just Hope as Solidaristic Hope

Just hope is a solidaristic hope. Witnessing to a just hope means "taking responsibility for the Christian hope."[364] The theological character of this responsibility cannot be worked out in advance; the experiences, insights, and theories that give shape to this responsibility do not come to us as a fixed or finished product. Rather, the theological character of this responsibility "always has to be discovered anew through a

[362] John Hull, "The Child as Gift," in *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, eds. Trygve Wyller and Usha S. Nayar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), 185-192.

[363] Dillen and Pollefeyt, "Introduction, Children's Studies and Complexity," 4.

[364] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 31.

sort of historical-experimental synthesis."[365] This process of discovery and rediscovery is rooted in the theological categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity.[366] Memory, in the context of practical and political theology, refers to "dangerous memory," which is "that form of eschatological hope that is worked out in terms of its historical and social mediation."[367] In Christian theology, this dangerous memory involves the remembering of a kind of suffering that challenges and yet nourishes hope. There is first and foremost the dangerous memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the author and mediator of Christian hope. But Christ does not suffer alone. He suffers with and in the midst of all his brothers and sisters. Therefore, dangerous memory also calls to mind the many sufferings of all people, including children. As discussed in chapter two of this study, children share in the sufferings of Christ in quite unique ways, as seen in their destruction by Herod and their rejection by Jesus' own disciples as well as by the chief priests and scribes. All these sufferings are dangerously called to mind and relived through the children's participation in ritualizing the passion of Christ. By eulogizing Jesus, these children connect their sufferings and the sufferings of all children of the world to the sufferings of Christ. A spirituality of a just hope recognizes this connection and seeks to honor it.

Memory is also a "liberating memory." The calling to mind of the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus – and for that matter the sufferings and hope of all his brothers and sisters – "is no bourgeois counterfigure to hope. Rather, it holds a particular anticipation of the future as a future for the hopeless, the shattered, and oppressed." In this way, a dangerous and liberating memory challenges "the present and calls it into

[365] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 31.
[366] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 169-214.
[367] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 169.

question." It also compels "believers to be in the constant state of transformation" in order to take the future of those who suffer into consideration.[368] Memory, then, becomes the medium in which reason, faith, and discourse become practical as freedom.[369]

A dangerous and liberating memory has "a narrative depth structure." Without narrative, the dangerous and liberating events and experiences of faith will remain speechless.[370] Narratives pay attention to the concrete and embodied experiences of faith. They have practical and performative significance. In narrativity, the storyteller and the listener are united in their effort to bring to light the human experiences of suffering and hope and to point to a possible transformative end. In the African and Judeo-Christian traditions, the stories of suffering and hope are also God's story. God and humanity are joined in a story in which both are speakers and listeners, with the goal of ensuring the material and spiritual wellbeing of the human person. In the Christian tradition in particular, this wellbeing is sought in the light of the Gospel, of the reign of God which is in Christ and which is enacted through the power of the Spirit. In this reign, in this Christian narrative, children have a rightful place, as does any other person of the human race.

Lastly, the Christian hope is not a privatized hope. The Christian hope is a solidaristic hope in a God who has called all persons to be present to him in history. It is a hope that acknowledges and attends to the concrete social and historical circumstances of all persons. Our human experiences – unspeakable sufferings, brokenness, pain, wellbeing and strength – make sense only when we look at them through our hope in a God who, in his Incarnate Son, is capable of suffering with us and of raising us up.

---

[368] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 89.
[369] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 179-181.
[370] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 186.

However, the image of a God who suffers with us should not be presented so as to smoothen out or explain away the reality of suffering. Rather, our theology of hope should create a space for suffering and hope to be held in a creative tension. In this way, the Christian hope will be able to speak to the situations of all persons, including children, with whom we stand before God. In this way also, our Christian witnessing to hope gains credibility and relevance and is able to enter into dialogue with its social and cultural milieu.[371]

In African theology in general, and theological anthropology and spirituality in particular, all these categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity come together in the notion of relationality, the purpose of which is human wholeness.[372] In this context, the story of one is the story of all; the suffering and hope of one encompasses all in a relational understanding of our common humanity. The Christian hope, then, is grounded in the ongoing experiences of a people who stand before God in solidarity and in openness to God's future, the reign of God in which the oppressed have a place. In other words, hope looks towards human experience and towards God's action. In this sense, Christian hope is "a responsible hope."[373] It relies on God's loving presence in the world and on human ability to identify this presence. Because this hope affirms God's presence within every moment of human experience and everyday aspect of creation, it enlarges our scope of vision and range of accountability. "It unearths beauty and faces tragedy. It

[371] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 23-30.

[372] See Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*; Jones Chitalu Mwale, *Relationality in Theological Anthropology: An African Perspective* (Saarbrucken: Lambert, 2013).

[373] For an extended discussion on Christian hope as "a responsible hope" see Ellen Ott Marshall, *Though the Fig Tree Does not Blossom: Toward a responsible Theology of Christian Hope* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

celebrates goodness and knows cruelty. It is dynamic and difficult practice of holding fragility of life and resiliency in creative tension."[374]

Children, Resiliency, and the Spirituality of a Just Hope

In children in particular, just hope is also resilient hope. Researchers focusing on children's resiliency and its intersection with spirituality have found that resilience in children contributes to the nurturing of children's own spirituality of hope.[375] Resilience may be defined as a dynamic developmental process reflecting evidence of a positive adaptation despite significant life adversity. Resilience is not believed to be a priori attribute of a child; rather, it is viewed as a general pattern that is inferred from a person's competent functioning despite heavy burden of risky or adverse conditions. This inference requires two judgments: that the person is 'doing okay', and that there has been an adversity to overcome.[376] Studies show that spirituality and religion help to promote resilience. For instance, religious beliefs, practices, and organizations may work to protect individuals, families and communities in overcoming adversities. Usually, such protection results from attachment relationships, including relationship with the divine, family cohesion, and relationships with peers and mentors. Protection in times of adversity also comes from general social support, which manifests itself in a sense of community belonging, use of rituals at different stages in a person's life, visits with and

---

[374] Marshall, *Though the Fig Tree Does not Blossom*, xiv.

[375] See Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality," 61-75; Emily Crawford, Marian O'Dougherty Wright and Ann Masten, "Resilience and Spirituality in Youth," 355-370; Duane R. Bidwell, "Eschatology and Childhood Hope: Reflections from Work in Progress," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 20 no. 2 (2010), 109-127; Duane R. Bidwell and Donald L. Batisky, "Abundance in Finitude: An Exploratory Study of Children's Accounts of Hope in Chronic Illness," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 19, no. 1 (2009); 38-59; Duane R. Bidwell and Donald L. Batisky, "The Role of Identity and Wisdom in a Spirituality of Hope Among Children with End-Stage Renal Disease," in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin K. Lawson, (Eugene: CASCADE, 2012), 399-418.

[376] Ann Masten and Jenifer Powell, "A Resilience Framework for Research, Policy and Practice," *in Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversity*, ed. Suniya S. Luthar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 1-25.

prayers for the sick and bereaved, bringing food in troubled times, counseling, support groups, political sanctuary, and sanctuary from persecution. Spirituality and religion also operate in resilience through the provision of guidelines for conduct and moral values, such as integrity, compassion, forgiveness, empathy, altruism, and kindness. Finally, spirituality and religion develop resiliency through personal growth and transformational opportunities. Such opportunities include regulation of the affect, prayer, meditation, liturgy and music, opportunities for worship and celebration, reinforcement of family values and rules, provision of meaning and a philosophy of life, reframing of trauma, acceptance of God's will, conversion, and transformation.[377]

However, spirituality and religion may also have the potential for harm in the lives of children and adolescents, because they can be misdirected or manipulated to achieve unhealthy and selfish results. Children can be harmed by destructive cultural practices that are perpetrated in the name of religion or motivated by certain religious understandings. Examples include the practice of female mutilation in certain parts of Africa and the perpetuation of corporal punishment. There could also be negative religious mentors whose actions and words may lead children to view God as harsh, punitive and distant. Children who develop such views are at risk for feeling isolated and may internalize feelings of shame and self-hatred.[378]

The relationship between resilience and spirituality/religion is bidirectional, meaning that one could also examine the role of resilience in developing spirituality and understanding theological concepts and actions. For instant, Annemie Dillen interprets

[377] Emily Crawford, Marian O'Dougherty Wright and Ann Masten, "Resilience and Spirituality in Youth," 355-370.

[378] See Emily Crawford, Marian O'Dougherty Wright and Ann Masten, "Resilience and Spirituality in Youth."

resilience theologically and examines its role in developing the themes of spirituality, grace, and hope.[379] However, a spirituality and theology of hope do not automatically result from psychological resilience. One needs a 'leap' of faith as well. This means that the development of resilience can be described in theological terms as a work of grace, a blessing people may experience. Resilience as grace, however, does not take away people's responsibilities for protecting children; rather, it equips individuals to help children develop resilience, and for people to learn from children to become resilient. Finally, Dillen says that resilience is hope; it is a life experience that gives people a glimpse of what the Christian understanding of resurrection could be like. "The belief that 'resurrection' is possible, not only after life but also in this life itself, together with the belief in the activity of the Holy Spirit, makes it possible for people to deal with the confusion [and various challenges and adversities in their lives]."[380]

The concept of resilience grounds the notion of the spirituality of a just hope in everyday experiences. The connection between resiliency and spirituality shows that hope is not an experience of an individual working in isolation. While we acknowledge the moral agency and resilience of a child, we also realize immediately that agency, resilience, and hope are developed through an interaction with others in a community. Even when we consider these patterns of human experience as gifts, we still need to learn and practice them in the midst of a loving and supportive community. The dignity, spirituality, and resilient hope of the child are interlocking realities that flourish only in the context of communal life.

[379] Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality," 61-75
[380] Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality," 68.

Children, Spirituality, and Theological Anthropology

From the mouths of infants and sucklings

You have founded strength on account of Your foes,

to put an end to enemy and avenger.[381]

The Book of Psalms is a collection of poetic prayers that offer great insight into the spirituality and liturgical life of the people of Israel. They offer readers the opportunity to understand spirituality as lived experience, as a community and individual's stance before God. The different genres of the psalms also help to understand how the people relate to their God. The psalms reveal a people who relate to God through their hymns of praise, laments or pleas for help, and thanksgiving. There are also royal psalms as well as wisdom and torah psalms. The psalms "have recourse to many of the same themes found elsewhere in the Bible [that are] central to the corporate identity of Israel." These include the themes of creation, the promise to Abraham of land and descendants, the exodus, the covenant and the law (torah), the exile, and the David monarchy.[382] While the theme of children and childhood is not treated as a separate category in the psalms, the references to children show their close connection to the central themes of the psalter. For instance, Psalm 127 describes children as a gift from the Lord.[383] This is a major theme in the Bible, especially with regard to God's promise to make Abraham a father of nations.[384] Psalm 113 praises God for lifting up the poor and the needy from the dust and for gladdening the heart of the childless woman with

---

[381] Psalm 8:2-3. The quotation is cited from *The Jewish Study Bible* (JSB).

[382] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, "Psalms: Introduction," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, TANAKH Translation, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford, 2004), 1283.

[383] Psalms 127:3-5.

[384] It is important to note that all the children mentioned in relation to "the promise" are sons. These texts should therefore be read with a critical eye, so as not to use them as basis for a preference of a male-child over the female-child. The same critical lens should be applied to the Psalms cited in this chapter.

children.[385] Psalm 128 counts children among the blessings of those who fear the Lord.[386] Psalm 71 speaks of the Divine care for the psalmist from birth to old age: "You are my hope, O Lord God, my trust from my youth. While yet unborn, I depended on You; in the womb of my mother, You were my support; [...]. Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me!"[387]

Scripture in general is also filled with direct and indirect references to children and childhood. Direct references tell the stories of the conception, birth, and naming of children. They also give account of childhood experiences, sibling relationships and rivalries, and emotion-filled child-adult relationships. These accounts are often complex, revealing moments of grief and anxiety but also of joy and hope. Some adults enjoy children, carry them in their bosom and on their shoulders. Others reject children and try to keep them at a distance. Some even abandon children and/or plot their destruction. Various children in the scriptures are blessed, touched, and healed. Others become victims of injustice or are murdered.[388] The Book of Genesis, for instance, presents us with complex stories of children. Examples include the birth of Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah's abandonment of the child Ishmael and his mother, and God's protection for both mother and son; the birth of the promised son Isaac and his near-sacrifice at God's command; and the birth of Esau and Jacob and associated accounts of deceit, rivalry, and restlessness, particularly with regard to Jacob.[389] Claire Matthews McGinnis also

---

[385] Psalm 113:7-9. Other women with similar stories in the Bible include Sarah (Genesis 16-17, and 21), Hannah (1 Samuel 1-2), and Elizabeth (Luke 1).

[386] Psalm 128:3b and 6a.

[387] Psalm 71:5-9 (JSB).

[388] Marcia J. Bunge, "Introduction," in T*he Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), xiv-xxvi.

[389] See Terence E. Fretheim, "'God was with the Boy' (Genesis 21:20): Children in the Book of Genesis," in T*he Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 3-23.

describes the Book of Exodus as "text of terror" for children because of the many acts of violence against children in the book, including Pharaoh's command to drown all Hebrew baby boys in the Nile and God's final plague on Egypt in which all the firstborns of the Egyptians are slain while the firstborns of the Israelites are "passed over."[390]

The New Testament records similar accounts: the expression of joy at the birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist; Herod's threat to the infant Jesus and the killing of boys two years and below; the disciples' attempt at stopping children from coming to Jesus; the chief priests' and scribes' indignation at children for singing "Hosanna to the Son of David"; and Jesus' blessing and welcoming of children.

Biblical texts also often refer indirectly or metaphorically to children and childhood. Individuals and nations are referred to as children of God or as sons and daughters of God.[391] Visions of peace, hope, and restoration are described with the images of children.[392] The Book of Proverbs describes wisdom not only as a woman but also as a child growing beside and playing in the presence of God.[393] These references provide a broader background to a critical and theological analysis of Psalm 8, which places children at the center of the psalmist's theological anthropology and praise of God's majestic glory.

Children, Human Dignity, and Glory: Critical Theological Analysis of Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is unique in its reference to children. Whereas the reference to children in the psalm is indirect (that is, not referring to any specific child or any event involving a

[390] Exodus 1:22; 11:1-12:30. For detailed discussion see Claire Matthews McGinnis, "Exodus as a 'Text of Terror' for Children," in T*he Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 24-44.

[391] For a discussion on Israel as God's child, see Brent A. Strawn, "Israel, My Child": The Ethics of a Biblical Metaphor," in *The Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 103-140.

[392] Isaiah 11:6; Zechariah 8:5.

[393] Proverbs 8:27-31.

specific child), it will not be sufficient to interpret that reference as only a metaphor. By bringing children, beauty (the glory of the Lord), and human dignity (humanity's reflected glory) together, Psalm 8 offers a rare occasion in the entire Book of Psalms where the anthropological question (what is man/ what is the human person?) is associated with children; that is, discussed in the same context with views on children. Children are associated with divine glory, and with the creative work of God, including the work of overcoming God's enemies – all those and anything that stands in the way of God's majestic power and plan for humanity and the entire creation.

Psalm 8 is a creation hymn.[394] Its theme is the majestic glory of God and the place God has given to human beings in God's creation. The Psalm holds together an exalted view of God's majesty and a high estimate of human beings. What is man/ What are human beings? This is the central question the psalmist ponders. It is a theological anthropological question in that the question about the nature of the human person is posed in light of God's greatness.[395] The question "who is man?" is posed and answered in light of a second question: "who is God?" The Psalm thus focuses on the relation between the glory of God as revealed in creation, and the glory of humankind as the apex of God's creation.[396] The human dignity in its entirety points to God who has given that dignity to the human person.

---

[394] Leonard P. Mare, "Psalm 8: God's Glory and Humanity's Reflected Glory," *OTE*, 19, no. 3 (2006): 929. See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 28, 36. Others read Psalm 8 as a royal psalm, rather than a hymn of creation. In that reading, references to man (ben adam) are applied specifically to the Davidic king, and not to humanity in general. See for example Douglas J. Green, "Psalm 8: What is Israel's King that You Remember Him?" (July 2003), accessed August 1, 2016, http://files1.wts.edu/uploads/pdf/articles/psalm8-green.pdf

[395] Matthew V. Thekkekara SDB, *The Psalms of the First Covenant People of God* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013), Kindle Edition, the chapter on Psalm 8: Divine Majesty and Human Dignity, Loc 1282.

[396] Mare, "Psalm 8," 927.

The psalmist places children at the beginning of this theological anthropological discourse: "From the mouths of infants and sucklings, You have founded strength on account of Your foes, to put an end to enemy and avenger." Different interpretations are given to this verse. Many scholars and commentators interpret the mention of children in Psalm 8 metaphorically. This figurative sense presents children as a symbol of the weak and powerless, or as the weak and humble worshippers, whose inadequate praise of God's glory is still used by God to stop the avenger. In this sense, then, children are a reference to those who testify to God's power.[397] "Babes and infants would represent those on earth who see God's glory reflected in his creation and praise him for it." They could stand for simple, god-fearing religious people as opposed to irreligious people, or for "the childlike attitude of human existence, which discovers the world with a wonder and fullness of joy."[398]

The views on children as metaphors for weakness and powerlessness have implications for theological anthropology in general and theology of childhood in particular. For instance, such views indicate that our understanding of human nature relates to our conception of the child. Making such a connection presents children as relevant in theological discourse about the human person. Children become a source of theological anthropology: to understand humanity is to look at the child. However, since these interpretations conceptualize the child as weak and powerless, they also present humanity as weak and powerless. There is some merit to such an understanding. God relates to humanity in its weakness and cares for it. This is a common theme in scripture. Yet, this is not the overall picture that Psalm 8 gives about the human person. According

[397] Mare, "Psalm 8," 928-932. See also John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and a New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 81.

[398] Thekkekara SDB, *The Psalms of the First Covenant People of God*, on Psalm 8, Loc 1322.

to the psalmist, God has made human beings little less that divine, adorned them with glory and majesty, and laid the world at their feet. Humanity shares in divine life and in God's creative work.

Thus, the interpretation of children as metaphor for weak humanity is not consistent with the overall picture of the human person as presented in Psalm 8. An alternative interpretation is needed. The psalmist may just as well mean that children will join in the praise offered to God and that out of their praise the Lord establishes strength to silence the enemy.[399] In this literal sense, the text "seems to emphasize that even very young children recognize God's majesty." Children are an intrinsic part of the community that praises God's majesty.[400] Similar references to children are seen in other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, in the Book of Joel, the Lord requires that "babes and the suckling at the breast" be part of the assembly that gathers for a solemn fast. The cry to spare God's people should come from the entire community, including children.[401] The understanding that children are part of the community and that they have the capacity to recognize God's majesty takes children seriously and recognizes them as full human beings who have a relationship with their Creator. This interpretation echoes the notion of the child's capacity to behold the glory of God, as discussed extensively in Chapter Four of this study. Psalm 8 expands the discussion by offering a generation approach to the theology of God's glory. The assembly stands together before God to acknowledge God's majestic power. In this stance before God, children are not just a metaphor for weak and powerless humanity. Rather, they are full human beings with their

[399] Mare, "Psalm 8," 932.

[400] See commentary on Psalm 8:3 in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1291.

[401] Joel 2:15-16 (JSB).

unique vocation: in their mouths – in the voice of the child – God establishes strength to defeat the enemy of God and of humanity. In short, to understand humanity – what is man/ what are human beings – it is not enough to reduce children to a metaphor. Rather, our notion of humanity becomes richer and more complete when we recognize the humanity of the child, how the child stands before God with the rest of humanity, and what role the child plays on behalf of God and God's reign.

New Testament writers read Psalm 8 as prophecy, finding its fulfillment in the Christ event. For instance, in Matthew Jesus applies Psalm 8:3 to the children singing "Hosanna" as Jesus enters Jerusalem for his Passion.[402] Citing Psalm 8, other New Testament writers present Jesus as standing at the climax of history, with "everything under his feet." Christ must reign until God has put all things under his feet.[403] This Christocentric or Christological reading of the psalm ties the theological anthropological question - what is the human person - to the Christ event. Ultimately, human dignity, including the dignity of the child, is fulfilled in Christ.

Children's Voice as an Expression of a Just Hope

Helping children find their voice is not only a human rights issue. It is also a theological issue. Voice is not just speech. The notion of voice is a discovery of self, a conviction in one's subjectivity and continuous development of the capacity to engage the other in right relationship. Voice is an alternative to violence, and therefore an expression of a hope for a just order or for a right relationship. The Old Testament insists upon Israel's finding voice, a voice that tends to be abrasive and insistent. The lament psalms, for instance, are a reflection of a Jewish refusal to be silent before God. The

[402] See a detailed discussion in Chapter 2 of this study.
[403] See Hebrews 2:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20-22.

refusal of silence is thus theological; it is the people's understanding that an adequate relationship with God not only permits but also requires a human voice that would speak against every wrong perpetrated on earth.[404]

Silence has a great value especially in the spiritual life and in theology as a whole. Scripture is replete with the invitation to be silent before God so as to acknowledge the presence of God and hear what God has to say.[405] There are even times when God chooses distance and silence or a still small voice (rather than a mighty wind, earthquake, or fire)[406] as "*preferred modes of divine transcendence and availability*" to all people and all of creation.[407] The case in point here refers to the story of the prophet Elijah who flees to Mount Horeb after slaying the prophets of Baal at the contest of Mount Carmel.[408] God's choice of distance and silence at Horeb provides opportunities for using a more conciliatory approach to witnessing to God's relational presence. Another prophet, Hosea, uses this approach of silence and relationality in addressing Israel's unfaithfulness to God. More specifically, he "employs the imagery of the singularity of betrothal, love, and marriage, rather than violence, to exclude the cult of other deities from the religious practice of … Israel."[409] Such an approach of silence and relationality is more consistent with African understandings and narrative traditions in respect to God. Without undermining the "dynamism of oneness and uniqueness" of God, Africans also emphasize a theology of God that "involves the encounter of cultures" and embraces

---

[404] Walter Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 36 (2001): 22-33.

[405] See for example Habakkuk, 2:20.

[406] 1 Kings 19:9-12.

[407] Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 122. Italics in the original.

[408] 1 Kings 18: 20-19:8.

[409] Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 124.

"diversity and plurality." The approach of silence, then, "succeeds in enriching theology in the cross fertilization of Hebraic and … African narratives and practice.[410]

However, for people who feel oppressed, silence is not always golden. In circumstances of oppression, silence can become a means of coercion. Coercive or imposed silence is an unequal transaction between the powerful and the powerless. Such silence generates and legitimates violence on the part of both the powerful and the powerless.[411] Those with the power to silence others become oblivious to how their power affects others and soon begin to think they can do whatever they want. Those who are silenced and are reduced to docility by the silencer would eventually break out in violence either against self or against the silencer. In the case of children and women, the violence is usually against self. Carol Gilligan, for instance, reports a study in which adolescent girls (ages 12-14) become silent because they figure out that in an environment dominated by males, the safest thing for them as girls is to shelf their competence and withdraw and be silent. Such imposed silence is devastating.[412] Coercive silence has theological, psychological, and sociological implications. Theologically, where there is no speech from below, from those forced into silence, pain is reduced to guilt. Psychologically, without speech, a person is reduced to non-being, to mere breath.[413] Sociologically, without speech, established power goes unchecked and leaves destruction in its wake.[414]

---

[410] Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 125.

[411] Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," 22.

[412] See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theology and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982).

[413] In anguish, the psalmist describes self and existence as "just handbreadths long," as nothing more than a breath. See Psalm 39: 5-12 (JSB).

[414] Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," 33.

When children are silenced – as they are in many contexts of the world – the only way for them is to break out against violence by finding their voice. The lament psalms could provide opportunities for finding one's voice. In her work with adolescents girls who have suffered different forms abuse (or who have themselves been the perpetrators of abuse), Karen Marie Yust finds that in the face of injustice (structural or familial), there is no room for a trite spirituality of hope; the kind of spirituality that continues to say that all things would be fine if only we trust in God. Children who face unjust treatment do not need such spiritual platitudes and have no way of making sense of that kind of faith. Rather, these young people seek to develop a spirituality that allows them to discover their voice and speak meaningfully to God in a way that brings healing and wholeness. The lament psalms provide an opportunity for such a discovery. These young people find solace in the biblical laments. They realize that they can cry out to God for justice without being accused of lacking faith. The prayers of lament become powerful meaning making tools for these young people who are caught in situations that make no emotional or cognitive sense. The laments psalms encourage imaginative, gut-wrenching expressions of their deepest longing for God's justice in an unjust world.[415]

In the African context, one finds such gut-wrenching cries in the African Independent Churches (AICs) and charismatic movements of the mainline churches. People cry out to God for a change in their situation, many times with tears and sweat. They pray fervently in the power of the Spirit, call on the name of Jesus, and invoke the "blood of Jesus" for a breakthrough in their lives. Children are often among those who offer such prayers of anguish and of hope. Such deepest cry for God's help should not be

[415] Karen Marie Yust, "(Non)Cosmetic Ministry: Reclaiming Hope Among Abused Adolescents," in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, eds. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 123-136.

discouraged. However, churches and individuals should also be helped to take concrete steps in addressing injustice. Spirituality of a just hope consists in both praying for justice and acting to ensure that justice is done.

The lament psalms constitute either the breaking of silence against the enemy or the breaking of silence against God – when God is perceived to be distant from or unresponsive to the people's plight. Finding voice from underneath to speak against the perceived silence of God or the hegemony of an oppressor causes things to change. When the powerless find voice, done at great risk, things happen differently among the powerful. For instance, Job's friends encourage submissiveness, but he refuses. He would not be silent any more. He demands an answer from God, who remains silent for a long time. Finally, when God breaks his silence, he questions Job's depth of knowledge, which leads Job to admit his limitation and to repent of the things he has said. But there is still change; God eventually restores everything Job had lost during his time of suffering.[416]

Quite often, powerful institutions, particularly the church and other religious institutions, help to create a culture that silences the voices of children. The scandals of sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church and subsequent cover up mechanizations, for instance, leave a scar on the church's conscience about its failure to protect children and to listen to them. Since this grave matter came to light, the Catholic Church and its episcopal conferences have been working toward healing and renewal, first for the victims of abuse and their families, and for the church as a whole.[417] Another example, in

[416] Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," 22-23.

[417] See Charles J. Scicluna, Hans Zollner, David John Ayotte, and Timothy J. Costello, eds. *Toward Healing and Renewal: The 2012 Symposium on the Sexual Abuse of Minors Held at the Pontifical Gregorian University* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012); Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Circular

the African context, is the trokosi system that forces girls as young as five years old into service at a shrine in place of an older, usually male, family member. These children remain in servitude for many years, usually spending their entire childhood, adolescence, and even significant part of their adult life at the shrine. For many of these children, leaving this protracted life of servitude comes through the intervention of non-governmental organizations and state institutions. However, leaving the shrines is only the beginning of a long road to true freedom. Having been silenced for so long, these girls, now become women, would spend a lifetime overcoming the imposed silence.

These examples show how religious institutions sometimes crush children to insensitivity and teach them not to notice or value self. An antidote for a recovery of self is the speech that is necessary to selfing.[418] The examples also invite theologians and pastoral workers to be enormously attentive to power relations and the ways in which silence is imposed, as well as what it costs to break off the chains of such imposed silence.[419] The lament psalms present an example of how a community might practice subversive activity of finding voice. In a society that increasingly shuts children down in terms of public speech, the church in all its theological and pastoral practices should serve as the community where the silenced are authorized to voice their thoughts and rediscover themselves.[420]

Letter to Assist Episcopal Conferences in Developing Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minor Perpetrated by Clerics," Vatican City, May 3, 2011, Vatican.va; Benedict XVI, "Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father to the Catholics in Ireland," Vatican City, March 19, 2012, Vatican.va.

[418] See Alice Miller, *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth*, revised ed., trans. Simon Worrall (New York: Basic Books, 2009); Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of Children*, new ed., trans. Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum (London: Pluto, 1998).

[419] For a good analysis of power in pastoral ministry see Annemie Dillen, ed. *Soft Shepherd or Almighty Pastor: Power and Pastoral Care* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014).

[420] Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," 25.

The sufferings and painful experiences of children in Africa (as elsewhere) cannot be explained away through speculative theodicies.[421] Their pain does not need to be explained. It needs to be honored and answered[422] through a spirituality of a just hope; that is, through a culture, a lived experience of seeing, listening, and acting.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Calling for a Ferocious Commitment to Children

In his post-synodal exhortation *Africae Munus*, Benedict XVI makes an appeal to the church in Africa (and to the universal church) to take care of children in vulnerable situations. He explains that the church is a mother and could never abandon a single one of her suffering children.[423] His appeal may even be interpreted as the church's pledge to children – to take care of them, to ensure their safety, and support their flourishing. Compassionate care for needy and vulnerable children is a central human obligation. This human obligation is rooted in divine commitment to the most vulnerable in society. The divine ferocious and tenacious concern summons humans to oblige themselves to the same care for one another, especially the vulnerable.[424] In the Old Testament, God's ferocious and tenacious concern for his people is often likened to a she-bear robbed of her cubs.[425] A she-bear is very dangerous if one interferes with her cubs. "The attachment of a she-bear to her cubs is an intense one where the cubs are to be valued and protected in every circumstance." Children "are to be cared for in the same way the she-bear cares

[421] See Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown, 1991).
[422] Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," 32.
[423] Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 68.
[424] Walter Brueggemann, "Vulnerable Children, Divine Passion, and Human Obligation," in The *Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, Terrence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 399-422.
[425] Example: Hosea 13:8; see also 2 Samuel 17:8, and Proverbs 17:12.

for her cubs; in the same way God is evoked to care in powerful, even reckless ways for those whom God loves."[426]

The church in Africa needs to assume the same ferocious and tenacious role of caring for all children on the continent, regardless of the children's religious, cultural, or familial background. In their educational, health, and other social institutions, churches in Africa have to pledge themselves to zero tolerance of any form of abuse, both within church institutions and in society as whole. Unborn babies, unwanted children, orphans, albinos, street children, abandoned children, child soldiers, child prisoners, children forced into labor, children ill-treated on account of physical or mental disability, children said to be witches or warlocks, children sold as sex slaves, and traumatized children without any future prospects – these are children who need the church's ferocious and tenacious commitment, and she cannot afford to fail.

Going forward, "the church we want" is a children's church, an African church with a renewed commitment to listening to children; a church accustomed to accountability, accompaniment, and action in regard to children. We look forward to an African church of Vatican III that reclaims lively faith, does justice, and seeks liberation with and for all children and their families.[427] In many instances, this work has already begun. The church's educational, health, and other institutions of care already offer hope to children on the continent. Most of these institutions, especially those committed to health and care, are established and run by religious congregations and charity organizations with international relationships. These efforts deserve high praise. In other

[426] Brueggemann, "Vulnerable Children, Divine Passion, and Human Obligation," 400.

[427] The expressions, "the church we want" and "the African church of Vatican III" harken back to the community of African scholars whose work focus on new understandings of the church in Africa. See Orobator, ed. *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*.

instances, as in the area of theology, the work of tenacious commitment has barely begun. The recommendations made below are thus meant to encourage and support existing efforts as well as challenge a fresh start for new ventures.

The first recommendation is to secure the rights and wellbeing of children in faith communities, families, and society. There is no substitute for this effort. The church can be at the forefront in creating awareness about children's rights, starting with faith communities. All churches in Africa must also adopt a zero-tolerance stance on violence, abuse, trafficking, and exploitation of children. In this work, the churches will fare well by seeking collaboration with families, governmental institutions, and non-governmental organizations committed to the wellbeing of children.[428]

Second, increase collaboration with different religious traditions in addressing the needs of children on the continent. Islam, African Traditional Religions, and Christianity (to mention just the three dominant religions) all have interest in children's wellbeing. A more systematic inter-religious dialogue and action about the wellbeing of children could garner a lot of support on the continent and beyond.

Third, encourage greater involvement of children and young people in church and community as well as a more systematic approach to children's faith formation. Given the opportunity and support, children can contribute significantly to the faith and life of their communities.

Fourth, focus on practical theological education on children and family life in Africa. The church's institutions of higher education, including seminaries, colleges, and

[428] Many of the works cited in this study (especially in relation to chapter three) will be good resource for the church in understanding discussions on the rights of children. Stephen N. Achilihu is priest of the Catholic diocese of Aba (Nigeria) and child rights activist. His work – *Do African Children Have Rights?* – will be particularly helpful. See also The African Child Policy Forum, *The African Report on Child Wellbeing*.

universities can take up this challenge and offer degree and certificate programs in theology of childhood and family life.[429] For the theological education on children in particular, the goal should not only be to theologize about children's experiences, but also to explore how to create opportunities for children to theologize their own experiences, their aspirations, hopes, anxieties, and challenges, as well as the way they see and reflect on the myriads of issues that beset their communities.

Finally, establish institutes or centers that are committed to practical theological research on children and family life in Africa. These centers will be a great support for the goals set out in the above outlined recommendations.

These recommendations also generate topics for an ongoing theological research on children in contemporary Africa. The theme of childhood cannot remain off the academic radar of African theologians. A ferocious commitment to children and to just hope demands an intentional and persistent theology of the child in contemporary Africa and in the world church.

[429] The Petra Institute for Children's Ministry offers certificate programs for individuals in children's ministry. The church in Africa, particularly the Catholic Church, can learn from the work done at Petra, http://www.petra.co.za, accessed, August 26, 2016. Another example is the M. A. program organized and run by the Child Theology Movement in collaboration with the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, Compassion International and the Global Alliance for Advancing Holistic Child Development; see Keith J. White, *Introducing Child Theology: Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development* (Malaysia: Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

Appendix A

Letter of Permission

St. Teresa's Catholic Church
P.O. Box EL. 27
Elmina
Ghana
2nd September 2015.

Dear Fr. Anthony Adawu,

RE: PERMISSION TO USE YOUTUBE VIDEOS

The organizers of the Faith Community Video Project hereby grant you the permission to analyze our YouTube videos for research purposes. We do understand that your research will be shared with the academic and general public for a greater understanding and appreciation of the lives of children in Africa. These videos are widely disseminated in our community and online for the purposes of education and faith formation with the permission of parents and consent of children who participate in the project.
We have benefitted from the sharing of your previous works in our surrounding communities. These works have been a great source of inspiration to children, families, and our faith communities. We are confident that your present research will yield similar benefits.

We wish you all the best in your endeavors.

Yours faithfully,

Benedict Nana Tandoh
Project Director
(+233 24 4987407)

Fr. Michael Panful
Rector
(+233 20 516 5941)

Bibliography

Aborampah, Osei-Mensah. "Women's Roles in the Mourning Rituals of the Akan of Ghana." *Ethnology*, 38, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 257-271.

Adawu, Anthony. "Examining Transformations in Adolescent English Second Language Writers' Ideational Meanings: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis." *International Journal of TESOL and Learning,* 2, no.1 (2013): 41-60.

Aderinto, Saheed. "Introduction: Colonialism and the Invention of Modern Nigerian Childhood." In *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, edited by Saheed Aderinto, 1-18. New York: Palgrave, 2015.

Aderinto, Saheed, ed. *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Agbenyiga, DeBrenna LaFa. "Defining Childhood: A Historical Development Perspective." In *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric?* Edited by Robert Kwame Ame, DeBrenna LaFa Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt, 15-35. New York: Lexington Books, 2011.

Allen, Holly Catterton, ed. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*. Eugene: Cascade, 2008.

Ame, Robert, DeBrenna Agbenyiga, and Nana Araba Apt, eds. *Children's Rights in Ghana: Reality or Rhetoric?* New York: Lexington, 2011.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford, 2014. Kindle Edition.

Arabome, Anne. "When a Sleeping Woman Wakes: A Conversation with Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium about the Feminization of Poverty." In *The Church We Want:*

African Catholics Look to Vatican III, edited by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, 55-63. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016.

Archilihu, Stephen. *Do African Children Have Rights? A Comparative and Legal Analysis of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2010.

Aries, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by Robert Baldick. New York: Vintage Books, 1962 [1960].

Aye-Addo, Charles Sapong. *Akan Christology: An Analysis of the Christologies of John Samuel Pobee and Kwame Bediako in Conversation with the Theology of Karl Barth*. African Christian Studies Series 5. Eugene: Pickwick, 2013.

Bakke, Odd Magne. *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Translated by Brian McNeil. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Baldry, Anthony, and Paul Thibault, eds. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis* London: Equinox, 2005.

Ballard, Paul and John Pritchard. *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*. Second Edition. London: SPCK, 2006.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *A Theological Anthropology*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967.

——. "On the Concept of Person." *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986): 18-26.

——. "A Résumé of My Thought." *Communio* 15, no. 4 (1988): 468-473

——. *Unless You Become Like This Child.* Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.

——. “Jesus as Child and his Praise for the Child.” Translated by Adrian Walker. *Communio* 22 (Winter 1995): 625-634.

——. *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory Vol 1, The Truth of the World*, translated by Adrian Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.

——. “Joy and the Cross.” *Communio*, 31 (Spring 2004): 332-344.

——. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol 1 Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009.

Battle, Michael. *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*. New York: Seabury Books, 2009.

Baugarten, Elisheva. “Judaism.” In *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*. Edited by Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, 15-81. New Brunswick:Rutgers, 2011.

Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999.

——. *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: The History and Experience*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

Benedict XVI. *Spe Salvi* [Encyclical Letter: Saved in Hope]. November 30, 2007. Vatican.va

——. “Homily at the Opening Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.” Vatican City. October 4, 2009. Vatican.va.

——. *Africae Munus* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace]. November 19, 2011. Vatican.va.

——. “Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father to the Catholics in Ireland.” March 19, 2012. Vatican.va.

Berlin, Adele and Marc Zvi Brettler. "Psalms: Introduction." In *The Jewish Study Bible*, Tanakh Translation, 1280-1284. New York: Oxford, 2004.

Berryman, Jerome. *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009.

Bidwell, Duane R. "Eschatology and Childhood Hope: Reflections from Work in Progress." *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 20 no. 2 (2010): 109-127.

Bidwell, Duane R., and Donald Batisky. "Abundance in Finitude: An Exploratory Study of Children's Accounts of Hope in Chronic Illness." *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 19 no. 1 (2009): 38-59.

——. " The Role of Identity and Wisdom in a Spirituality of Hope among Children with End-stage Renal Disease." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin K. Lawson, 399-418. Eugene: Cascade, 2012.

Bishops of Africa. *Message of the Synod: First Special Assembly for the Church in Africa.* May 6, 1994, Vatican.va.

——. *Message to the People of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*. October 23, 2009, Vatican.va.

Bishops of Africa and Madagascar. *Common Declaration of Bishops of Africa and Madagascar: Respect, Love, and Serve Africa in Truth!* Accra, June 11, 2015. http://aleteia.org/common-declaration-of-the-bishops-of-africa-and-madagascar/

Boivin, Michael J., and Bruno Giordani, eds. *Neuropsychology of Children in Africa: Perspectives on Risk and Resilience*. New York: Springer, 2013.

Bradley, Candice and Thomas S. Weisner. "Introduction: Crisis in the African Family." In *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*, edited by Thomas S. Weisner, Candice Bradley, and Philip L. Kilbride, xix-xxxii. Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1997.

Bray, Rachel, Imke Gooskens, Lauren Kahn, Sue Moses, and Jeremy Seekings. *Growing up in the New South Africa: Childhood and Adolescence in Post-Apartheid Cape Town*. Cape Town: HSRC, 2010.

Brennan, Patrick McKinley, ed. *The Vocation of the Child*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Brown, Raymond E., SS. *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week: Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986.

——. *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*, expanded edition, Ronald D. Witherup, SS, Chapter 18. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2008. Kindle Edition.

Browning, Don. *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Browning, Don, and Marcia Bunge, eds. *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*. New Jersey: Rutgers, 2011.

Browning, Melissa. "Theology and Morality on the Streets: An Examination of the Beliefs and Moral Practice of Street Children in Light of Christianity and African Traditional Religions*."* In *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, edited by Christian Scharen & Aana Marie Vigen, 142-160. London: Continuum, 2011.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.

——. *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

——. *Hope Within History*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1987.

——. *Reality, Grief and Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

——. "Vulnerable Children, Divine Passion, and Human Obligation." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, Terrence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 399-422. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

——. "Voice as Counter to Violence," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 36 (2001): 22-33.

Bujo, Bénézet. *African Theology in its Socail Context*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1992.

——. *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*. New York: Crossroad, 2011.

——. "Foreword." In Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, ix-xii. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013.

Bunge, Marcia J. "Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children's Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies." In *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, edited by Trygve Wyller and Ugah S. Nayar, 27-50. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007.

——. "The Vocation of the Child: Theological Perspectives of the Particular and Paradoxical Roles and Responsibilities of Children." In *The Vocation of the*

Child, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan, 31-52. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

——. "What Child Theology Is and Is Not." In *Toddling Toward the Kingdom: Child Theology at Work in the* Church, edited by John Collier, 32-34. London: Child Theology Movement, 2009.

——. "Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson, 3-25. Oregon: Cascade, 2012.

——. "Christian Understandings of Children: Central Biblical Themes and Resources." In *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, 59-78. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

——, ed. *The Child in Christian Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

——, ed. *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*. New York: Cambridge, 2012.

Bunge, Marcia, with Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds. *The Child in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Bychkov, Oleg. "Introduction." In *Theological Aesthetic After von Balthasar,* edited by Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor, xi-xxvii. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008.

Calahan, Kathleen, and Bryan Froehle. "A Developing Discipline: The Catholic Voice in Practical Theology." In *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, edited by Claire Wolfteich, 27-51. New York: Paulist Press, 2014.

Capps, Donald. *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology,* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Capshaw, Katherine. *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Chopp, Rebecca. *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007.

Corsaro, William. *The Sociology of Childhood*. Fourth Edition. Los Angeles: Sage, 2015.

Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

——. *Children of Crisis*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003.

Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. "Circular Letter to Assist Episcopal Conferences in Developing Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minor Perpetrated by Clerics." May 3, 2011. Vatican.va.

Cook, Philip. "Introduction." In *Religious Dimensions of Child and Family Life: Reflections on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,* edited by Harold Coward and Philip Cook, 1-10. Canada: Center for Studies in Religion and Society, 1996.

Couture, Pamela. *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

——. *Child Poverty: Love, Justice, and Social Responsibility* St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007.

Crawford, Emily, Marian O'Dougherty Wright, and Ann Masten. "Resilience and Spirituality in Youth." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene C. Roehlkepartian, et al., 355-370. London: Sage, 2006.

De Mey, Peter. "How Do Children Become Active Subjects Within the Domestic Church? Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Roman Catholic Ecclesiological Discourse on the Domestic Church." In *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education,* edited by Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt, 295-306. Leuven: Uitgevrij Peeters, 2010.

Denny, Christopher D. "Which Holy Child? German Romantic Rivals to Balthasar's Theology of Youth." *Communio* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 673-693.

Dillen, Annemie. "The Child 'as a Child': A Theological-Ethical Investigation of the Concrete and Relational Giving of a Child." In *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, edited by Trygve Wyller and Ugah S. Nayar, 83-103. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007.

——. "Standing up for Children in Europe: The Contribution of Catholic Theology," *Bulletin ET*, 19 (2008): 4-25.

——. "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality: A Practical Theological Reflection." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 1 (2012): 61-75.

——, ed. *When 'Love' Strikes: Social Sciences, Ethics, and Theology on Family Violence*. Leuven: Peeters, 2012.

——, ed. *Soft Shepherd or Almighty Pastor: Power and Pastoral Care*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2014.

Dillen, Annemie, and Didier Pollefeyt, eds. *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education.* Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010.

Dillen, Annemie, and Didier Pollefeyt. "Introduction: Children's Studies and Theology, An Hermeneutics of Complexity." In *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives*

in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education, edited by Dillen and Pollefeyt, 1-14. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010.

Dunlop Sarah, with Kinga Dabrowska. *Visualizing Hope: Exploring the Spirituality of Young People in Central and Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: YTC Press, 2008.

Eaton, John. *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and a New Translation*. London: T&T Clark, 2003.

Ensor, Marisa, ed. *African Childhoods: Education, Development, Peacebuilding, and the Youngest Continent*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion. A Contemporary Theodicy*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

Filip de Boeck and Alcinda Honwana. "Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity and Place." In *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa,* edited by Honwana and De Boeck, 1-18. Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Flynn, Gabriel, and Paul D. Murray, eds. *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford, 2013.

Foley, Edward Amarkwei. "*Evaluating the 'African' in the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child."* Paper presented at the Conference on the Status of Children's Rights in Africa: 25 Years After the Adoption of the Charter. November 2015.

Forrester, Duncan B. *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000.

Francis. “Introductory Remarks at the Ordinary Synod on the Family.” Vatican City. October 5, 2014. Vatican.va.

——. “Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.” Vatican City. October 17, 2015. Vatican.va

——. *Laudato Si’* [Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home]. May 24, 2015. Vatican.va.

——. *Amoris Laetitia* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family]. March, 19, 2016. Vatican.va

Fretheim, Terence E. “‘God was with the Boy’ (Genesis 21:20): Children in the Book of Genesis.” In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 3-23. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Ganzevoort, R. Ruard, Maaike de Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath, eds. *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies*. Boston: Brill, 2014.

Garcia, Marito, Alan Pence, and Judith L. Evans, eds. *Africa’s Future, Africa’s Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theology and Women’s Development.* Cambridge: Harvard, 1982.

Gottlieb, Alma. *The Afterlife is Where We Come From: The Culture of Infancy from West Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Green, Douglas J. “Psalm 8: What is Israel’s King that You Remember Him?” July 2003. Accessed August 1, 2016, http://files1.wts.edu/uploads/pdf/articles/psalm8-green.pdf

Grieken, George Van, FSC. “Soul for Soul: The Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy.” In *The Vocation of the Child*, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan, 357-380. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Grimes, Ronald. *Rite Out Of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts*. Oxford: Oxford, 2006. Kindle Edition

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. “A Hermeneutic of Hope.” The Center for Latin American Studies, Vanderbilt University – Occasional Paper No. 13. September 2012.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo and Gerhard Ludwig Müller. *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*, translated by Robert Krieg and James Nickoloff. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015.

Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 2003.

Hart, Jason. “Children's Participation and International Development: Attending to the Political.” *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16, no. 3 (2008): 407-418.

Hart, Roger A. *Children’s Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. New York: UNICEF, 1997. Kindle Edition.

Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz. *Toward an African Narrative Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.

Henriot, Peter SJ. "The Joys and Hopes, Sorrows and Anxieties of Africa," In *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years After Gaudium et Spes,* edited by Erin Brigham, 177-187. New York: Lexington Books, 2015.

Herbert, Russell. *Living Hope: A Practical Theology of Hope for the Dying.* Peterborough: Epworth, 2009.

Hermans, Chris, and Mary E. Moore, eds. *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Herzog, Kristin. *Children and our Global Future: Theological and Social Challenges*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Himonga, Chuma. "The Right of the Child to Participate in Decision Making A Perspective from Zambia." In *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, edited by Welshman Ncube, 95-128. Dartmouth: Ashgate, 1998.

Honwana, Alcinda, and Filip De Boeck, eds. *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Trenton: First Africa World Press, 2005.

Huber, Wolfgang. *Violence: The Unrelenting Assault on Human Dignity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.

Hull, John. "The Child as Gift." In *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, edited by Trygve Wyller and Usha S. Nayar, 185-192. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007.

Humbach, John A. "Towards a Natural Justice of Right Relationships." In *Human Rights in Philosophy and Practice*, edited by Burton M. Leiser and Tom. D. Campbell, 41-61. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001.

Ilo, Stan Chu, Joseph Ogbonnaya, and Alex Ojacor, eds. *The Church as Salt and Light. Path to an African Ecclesiology of Abundant Life*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2011.

Imoh, Afua Twum-Danso, and Nicola Ansell, eds. *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Imoh, Afua Twum-Danso, and Robert Ame, eds. *Childhoods at the Intersection of the Local and the Global*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

International Labour Organization (ILO). *Global Child Labour Developments: Measuring Trends from 2004 to* 2008. Geneva: ILO, 2010.

——. *Children in Hazardous Work: What we Know, What we Need to Do*. Geneva: ILO, 2011.

——. *Accelerating Action against Child Labour in Africa: Building on Experience and Results*. Geneva: ILO, 2013.

Jensen, David H. *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood.* Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Jenson, Robert W., and Eugene Korn, eds. *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

John Paul II. "Address to the Bishops of Ghana." Kumasi. May 9, 1980. Vatican.va.

——. *Familiaris Consortio* [The Apostolic Exhortation on The Role of Families in the Modern World]. November 22, 1981, Vatican.va.

——. *Ecclesia in Africa* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year, 2000]. September 14, 1995. Vatican.va.

Kabeberi-Macharia, Janet. "Female Genital Mutilation and the Rights of the Girl-Child in Kenya." In *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, edited by Welshman Ncube, 249-264. Dartmouth: Ashgate.

Kantembe, Peter Chipililo. "Nurturing Children's Spirituality in Hospitals: Childhood Studies and Their Theological Implications for Child-Centered Pastoral Care in Hospitals in Malawi." PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2015.

Katongole, Emmanuel. *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

——. "The Church of the Future: Pressing Moral Issues from Ecclesia in Africa." In *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, edited by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, 161-173. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016.

Kaveny, Cathleen. *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Kelleher, Margaret. "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method." In *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, edited by Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh, 201-224. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Kelly, Anthony, CSsR. "Hope for Unbaptized Infants: Holy Innocents after All?" In *The Vocation of the Child*, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan, 218-222. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Keshgegian, Flora A. *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World.* New York: Continuum, 2006.

Kirisiwa, Benjamin. "African Model of Church as Family: Implications on Ministry and Leadership." *African Ecclesial Review* 43, no. 3 (2001): 99-106.

Kress, Gunther. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Edward Arnold, 2001.

Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje. *African Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Lancy, David. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Lansdown, Gerison. *Can You Hear Me? The Right of Young Children to Participate in Decisions Affecting Them,* Working Paper 36. The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2005.

Lareau, Annette *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California, 2003.

Lartey, Emmanuel, Y. *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2013.

Lawson, Kevin, ed. *Understanding Children's Spirituality*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2012.

Lennan, Richard, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, eds. *Hope: Promise, Possibility, and Fulfillment*. New York: Paulist, 2013.

Lester, Andrew D. *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Louisville: John Knox, 1995.

Lewis, Alan E. *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Louw, Daniel. "Homo Aestheticus within the Framework of Inhabitational Theology." In *Religion and Human Rights: Global Challenges from Intercultural Perspectives*, edited by Wilhelm Grab and Lars Charbonnier, 87-129. Boston: De Gruyter, 2015.

Luther, Suniya, ed. *Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003.

Lystard, Robert. *The Ashanti: A Proud People*. New Jersey: Rutgers, 1958.

Macleod, Donald. "Why Have You Forsaken Me?" April 3, 2015. Accessed July 28, 2016, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-have-you-forsaken-me

Magesa, Laurenti. *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013.

Maré, Leonard P. "Psalm 8: God's Glory and Humanity's Reflected Glory," *OTE*, 19, no. 3 (2006): 926-938.

Marshall, Ellen O. *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom: Toward a Responsible Theology of Christian Hope.* Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015.

Marshall, Kathleen, and Paul Parvis. *Honouring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective*. London: St. Andrew Press, 2004.

Martey, Emmanuel. *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009

Marty, Martin. *The Mystery of the Child*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Masten, Ann, and Jenifer Powell. “A Resilience Framework for Research, Policy and Practice.” In *Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversity*, edited by Suniya S. Luther, 1-25. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003.

Matthews McGinnis, Claire. “Exodus as a ‘Text of Terror’ for Children.” In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia Bunge with Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 24-44. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religion and Philosophy*, Second Edition. London: Heinemann, 1998.

——. *Introduction to African Religion*, Second Edition. Illinois: Waveland, 2015.

McAdams, Dan P., Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, editors. *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.

McDonald, Janette, and Andrea M. Stephenson, eds. *The Resilience of Hope*. New York: Rodopi, 2010.

McIntosh, Mark A. *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Indiana: Notre Dame University, 2000.

Melton, Gary, Asher Ben-Arieh, Judith Cashmore, Gail Goodman, and Natalie K. Worley, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Child Research*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2014.

Mercer, Joyce Ann. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. New York: Chalice Press, 2005.

Metz, Johann Baptist. *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007.

Miller, Alice. *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of Children*, new edition, translated by Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum. London: Pluto, 1998.

——. *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth*, revised edition, translated by Simon Worrall. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2003.

——. In the Midst of Chaos: *Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

——. "Children and Religion in Public Square: 'Too Dangerous and Too Safe, Too Difficult and Too Silly.'" In *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, edited by Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright, 31-44. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008.

——. "Children, Chores, and Vocation: A Social and Theological Lacuna." In *The Vocation of the Child*, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan, 295-323. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Moltmann, Jürgen. "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope." *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (2000): 592-603.

Montgomery, Heather. *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives*. United Kingdom: Blackwell, 2009.

Morrison, Heidi. *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt* New York: Palgrave, 2015.

Mtata, Kenneth. "African Personhood and Child Theology." In *Liberation from Mammon: Radicalizing Reformation,* edited by Ulrich Duchrow and Hans G. Ulrich, 229-257. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2015.

Murphy, Francesca Aran. "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Beauty as a Gateway to Love." In *Theological Aesthetics After von Balthasar*, edited by Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor, 5-17. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008.

Muzorewa, Gwinyai H. *The Origins and Development of African Theology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1987.

Mwale, Jones Chitalu. *Relationality in Theological Anthropology: An African Perspective.* Saarbrucken: Lambert, 2013.

Ncube, Welshman, ed. *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*. Vermont: Ashgate, 1998.

——. "The African Cultural Fingerprint? The Changing Concept of Childhood." In *Law, Culture, Tradition and Children's Rights in Eastern and Southern Africa*, edited by Welshman Ncube, 11-27. Dartmouth: Ashgate, 1998.

Newey, Edmund. *Children of God: The Child as Source of Theological Anthropology*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012.

Nichols, Aidan. *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Nwachuku, Daisy. "[Practical Theology in] West Africa." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* edited by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 515-524. Malden: Blackwell, 2012.

Nwaura, Philomena, N. "The Gospel of the Family: From Africa to the World Church." In *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, edited by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, 145-158. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. New York: Orbis, 2005.

——. *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*. New York: Orbis, 2004.

——. *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Ogbonnaya, Joseph. *Lonergan, Social Transformation, and Sustainable Development*. African Christian Studies Series 4. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

——. *African Catholicism and Hermeneutics of Culture: Essays in the Light African Synod II*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014.

Okyere, Samuel. "Children's Participation in Prohibited Work in Ghana and its Implications for the Convention on the Rights of the Child." In *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa*, edited by Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Nicola Ansell, 92-104. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Organization of African Unity (now African Union). *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the* Child. Addis Ababa: African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Accessed January 2, 2016, http://www.acerwc.org/?wpdmdl=9406

Orji, Cyril. *A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2015.

Orobator, Agbonkhianmeghe, E. SJ. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008.

——. "Contextual Methodologies." In *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, edited by Diane Stinton, Chapter 1. London: SPCK. 2010. Kindle Edition.

——, ed. *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The African Synod*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011.

——, ed. *Theological Imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines, 2014.

——, ed. *The Church We Want: Foundations, Theology, and Mission of the Church in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines, 2015.

——, ed. *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016.

Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Ouellet, Marc. *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, translated by Philip Milligan and Linda M. Cicone. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Park, Sung Kyu. *Christian Spirituality in Africa: Biblical, Historical, Cultural Perspectives from Kenya*. Oregon: Pickwick, 2013.

Parkes, Aisling. *Children and International Human Rights Law: The Rights of the Child to be Heard*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Pobee, John, S. *Toward an African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979.

Potworowski, Christophe. "The Attitude of the Child in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar." *Communio* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 44-55.

Prevette, Bill. *Child, Church and Compassion: Towards Child Theology in Romania*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012.

Prevette, Bill, Keith White, Rocalee Velloso Ewell, and D. J. Konz, ed. *Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014.

Poluha, Eva, ed. *The World of Girls and Boys in Rural and Urban Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2007.

Pontifical Council for the Family. *Children: Springtime of the Family and Society*. October 11-13, 2000. Vatican.va.

——. *Compendium on the Family and Human Life*. Vatican City State: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

Population Reference Bureau. *World Population Data Sheet*. 2011. Accessed August 4, 2015 http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf

Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Rahner, Karl. "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood." In Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, VIII: Further Theology of Spiritual Life 2*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971.

Rambo, Shelly, and Catherine Keller. *Spirit and Trauma. A Theology of Remaining*, Louisville: John Knox, 2010.

Rasmussen, Kim. "Children Taking Photos and Photographs: A Route to Children's Participation and a 'Bridge' to Exploring Children's Everyday Lives." In *The*

Sage Handbook of Child Research, edited by Gary B. Melton, et. al., 443-469. Los Angeles: Sage, 2014.

Ratcliff, Donald, ed. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications.* Eugene: Cascade, 2004.

Reinders, Hans S. *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Reyes, Jonathan. "Laudato Si': A Call to Right Relationship." *Columbia*, Online Edition, August 1, 2015. Accessed August 6, 2016. http://www.kofc.org/en/columbia/detail/call-to-right-relationship.html

Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008.

Richards, Anne and Peter Privett. *Through the Eyes of a Child: New Insights in Theology from a Child's Perspective*. London: Church House, 2009.

Roehlkepartain, Eugene C., Pamela Ebstyne King, Linda Wagener, and Peter L. Benson, eds. *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence.* London: Sage, 2006.

Royce, Terry D. "Intersemiotic Complementarity: A Framework for Multimodal Discourse Analysis." In *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*, edited by Terry. D. Royce and Wendy L. Bowcher, 63-110. London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007.

Sands, Kathleen M. *Escape from Paradise. Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

Sanneh, Lamin. *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. Maryknowll: Orbis, 1983.

Sarpong, P. K. *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*. Tema, Ghana: Asempa Publications, 1977.

Scicluna, Charles J. Hans Zollner, David John Ayotte, and Timothy J. Costello, eds. *Toward Healing and Renewal: The 2012 Symposium on the Sexual Abuse of Minors Held at the Pontifical Gregorian University*. New York: Paulist Press, 2012.

Snyper, Robert C. *Akan Rites of Passage and their Reception into Christianity: A Theological Synthesis*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003.

Stinton, Diane, B. *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

——, ed. *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*. London: SPCK, 2010.

Shier-Jones, Angela. *Children of God: Towards a Theology of Childhood*. Peterborough: Epworth, 2005.

Stobart, Andrew J. "Towards a Model of Christian Hope: Developing Snyder's Hope Theory for Christian Ministry." *Theology and Ministry*, 1 no. 3 (2012): 1-17. Accessed February 23, 2016. https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theologyandministry/TheologyandMinistry1_7.pdf

Stone, Howard, and Andrew Lester. "Hope and Possibility: Envisioning the Future in Pastoral Conversation." *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 55 no. 3 (2001): 259-269.

Stonehouse, Catherine and Scottie May. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual*

Journey: Guidance to Those Who Teach and Nurture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Strange, William. *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church*. Carlisle: Paternoter, 1996.

Strawn, Brent A. "'Israel, My Child': The Ethics of a Biblical Metaphor." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 103-140. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Swart, Ignatius, and Hannelie Yates. "Listening to Africa's Children in the Process of Practical Theological Interpretation: A South African Application." *HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies,* 68 no. 2, (2012): 1-12.

Swinton, John. "Disability, Ableism, and Disablism." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, edited by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 443-451. West Sussex: Blackwell, 2012.

Thatcher, Adrian. *Theology and Families*. Malden: Blackwell, 2007.

The African Child's Policy Forum (ACPF), *Report on Child Wellbeing 2013: Towards Greater Accountability to Africa's Children*. Addis Ababa: ACPF, 2013. Accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.awepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ARCW2013-English.pdf

The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum* [Final List of Propositions of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops]. October 23, 2009. Vatican.va.

Thekkekara, Matthew V. SDB. *The Psalms of the First Covenant People of God* Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013. Kindle Edition.

Thomson, Pat, ed. *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Tilley, Terrence W. *The Evils of Theodicy*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown, 1991.

Tracy, David. "A Correlational Model of Practical Theology Revisited." In *The Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions,* edited by Claire Wolfteich, 70-86. New York: Paulist, 2014.

Trujillo, Alphonso Lopez. "The Family: Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity." Vatican City: The Pontifical Council for the Family. 1997. Accessed October 24, 2015. Vatican.va.

Tuakli, Juliette, Alan Miller, Tawiah Agyarko-Kwarteng and Leah Jones. "Situational Analysis of Vulnerable Children in Ghana." World Education, 2006. Accessed, June 12, 2015. http://ghana.worlded.org/Docs/ghana_vulnerability_study_jun06.pdfhttp://ghana.worlded.org/Docs/ghana_vulnerability_study_jun06.pdf

Turkson, Peter. "Remarks on Laudato Si' to Child-Focused Agencies." UNICEF House, June 30, 2015. Vatican.va.

Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD). T*he National Child Participation Guide for Uganda: Creating an Environment for Children to be Heard*. Kampala: MGLSD, 2008. Accessed June 11, 2016, http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1033/The_National_Child_Participation_Guide_Uganda.pdf

UNICEF, *Twenty-Five Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Is the World a Better Place for Children?* New York: UNICEF, 2014. Accessed October 15,

2015, http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CRC_at_25_Anniversary_Publication_compilation_5Nov2014.pdf

United Nations (The League of Nations). *Geneva Declaration of Rights of the Child.* 1924. Accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htmhttp://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm

——. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* 1948. Accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

——. *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*. 1959, accessed November 6, 2015, http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/1959-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-the-Child.pdf

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for our Church, Nation, and World*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1992.

Uzukwu, Elochukwu E. *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to African Worship – An African Orientation*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997.

——. *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches.* Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006.

——. *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*. Oregon: Pickwick, 2012.

Van der Ven, Johannes A., Jaco S. Dreyer, and Hendrik J. C. Pieterse. *Is There a God of Human Rights? The Complex Relationship Between Human Rights and Religion: A South African Case.* Leiden: Brill, 2004

Vatican Council II. *Gaudium et Spes* [The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World]. December 7, 1965. Vatican.va.

Viladesau, Richard. T*he Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*. New York: Oxford, 2006.

Viljoen, Frans. "Supra-national Human Rights Instruments for the Protection of Children in Africa: The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child." *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, 31, no. 2 (1998): 199-212.

Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith*: *How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011.

Wall, John. *Ethics in Light Childhood*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010.

Weisner, Thomas S., Candice Bradley, and Philip L. Kilbride, eds. *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*. Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1997.

Wells, Karen. *Childhood in a Global Perspective*. Second Edition. Malden: Polity, 2015.

Werpehowski, William. "In Search of Real Children: Innocence, Absence, and Becoming Self in Christ." In *The Vocation of the Child*, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan, 53-74. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

——. "Human Dignity and Social Responsibility: Catholic Social Thought on Children." In *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* edited by Marcia Bunge, 79-98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Willis, Bruce. *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra*. Boston: Pyramid Complex, 1998.

White, Keith J. *Introducing Child Theology: Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development*. Malaysia: Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010.

Willmer, Haddon, and Keith White. *Entry Point: Towards Child Theology with Matthew 18*. London: WTL Publications, 2013.

Wolfteich, Claire. *Lord Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

——. "Spirituality." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* edited by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 328-336. Malden: Blackwell, 2012.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

——. *Justice in Love*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Wood, Diane, ed. *The Church and Childhood*. Studies in Church History Series, Vol. 31. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Wyller, Trygve and Usha Nayar, eds. *The Given Child: The Religions Contribution to Children Citizenship*. Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007.

Yirenkyi, Godwin. "Traditional Festivals in Ghana." National Commission of Ghana, 2009. Accessed August 28, 2016, http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=65&archiveid=1829&page=1

You, Danzhen, Lucia Hug, and David Anthony. *Generation 2030: Child Demographics in Africa*. New York: UNICEF, 2014.

Yust, Karen Marie. “(Non)Cosmetic Ministry: Reclaiming Hope Among Abused Adolescents.” In *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, edited by Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright, 123-136. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008.

Dissertation Manual Acknowledgement Form

By my signature below, I, Anthony Adawu assert that I have read the dissertation publication manual, that my dissertation complies with the University's published dissertation standards and guidelines, and that I am solely responsible for any discrepancies between my dissertation and the publication manual that may result in my dissertation being returned by the library for failure to adhere to the published standards and guidelines within the dissertation manual.

Signature of Author

September 30, 2016
Date

Signature of Chair

9/30/16
Date