

Lovemore Togarasei & Joachim Kügler (eds.)

# THE BIBLE AND CHILDREN IN AFRICA



University  
of Bamberg  
Press

## **17** Bible in Africa Studies

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# Introduction

*Lovemore Togarasei & Joachim Kügler*

For the past more than 10 years, Joachim Kügler has been organizing conferences to discuss the use of the Bible in African Christianity under the name International Bible Symposium (IBS). Thanks to these and the presence of many African students pursuing biblical studies under his supervision at the University of Bamberg, Germany, a publication series called Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS) series was born in 2009 with the publication of the first volume by Lovemore Togarasei. Under the general editorship of Joachim Kügler, Masiwa Ragies Gunda and Lovemore Togarasei, the series has now published more than 15 volumes. The conferences continue to be the major sources of the works to be published together with doctoral theses. Although all the earlier conferences were held in Germany, in 2010 a decision was made to alter conferences between Germany and Africa with the objective being to allow many African scholars to attend the conferences. The first African conference was therefore held in Botswana in 2012 hosted by Lovemore Togarasei at the University of Botswana. Responding to a moving contribution of Jannie Hunter at the IBS in Kloster Banz, Germany, in 2010 (documented in BiAS 7), the meeting in Gaborone was addressing the topic of the Bible and Children in Africa.

This topic was planned to be worked on in two main perspectives:

- 1. Children *in* the Bible** | This panel was dealing with the concepts of childhood in biblical texts. We asked for example: How are children conceived in different texts. What is their status in family and society? What is their relation to God? What is the metaphoric use of childhood in biblical soteriology? What is the function and meaning of calling adult persons “children” (of God, or of the Apostle)? What does it mean for children (real and metaphorical) if there shall be “no fathers” on earth (Mat 23:9)?
- 2. African Children of today *and* the Bible** | This panel was to deal with the different life settings African children find themselves in and how the Bible is present in these life settings. We asked for example: What is

their status in family and society? How are traditional concepts of childhood changing under the conditions of poverty, HIV/AIDS and violence? How are the conceptions about children influenced by the Bible? What about children's rights? Can they be established with the help of the Bible? – With the Bible in general or just with specific texts? We also have to ask if the Bible is a book that children really should read on their own. Can parents and teachers simply ignore the fact that certain biblical texts would clearly be labeled as inappropriate for children if they would not be in the Bible? Does that mean that the Bible is merely for adult readers who carefully filter the text for children and then tell them *about* the biblical stories? Which role in child education can be attributed to reading the Bible?

These questions, no need to say, were just indicating the field in which the meeting should do its work. Of course participants were free to develop new ideas and new questions in the framework of these two panels. This volume of BiAS is documenting the outcome of our work at Gaborone as it comprises papers that were presented at that conference. The editors, however, also integrated some additional contributions, as we understand our meeting as an intensive moment of discussion which is part of an open network of debate, and not as an exclusive or elitarian event.

That children are tomorrow's leaders or that the young are the future are old adages. The future of every society lies in its children. As a result, successful societies spend time and effort investing in children. The same should be true of the church as a society. It needs to invest in bringing up children who will take over leadership and keep the faith alive tomorrow. But Christians have to go even further and care for the Human Rights of children on the basis of biblical faith. Believers as well as biblical scholars have to make clear that children are neither the property of their parents nor of a specific group or society but are free persons by virtue of being God's children through creation and salvation.

Unfortunately, it is only recently that theologians have started paying attention to issues pertaining to children.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, this volume is timely. With rapid globalization and the accompanying fast erosion of traditional values and institutions, the stage of childhood faces many challenges. Marriage rates are decreasing while divorce rates are increas-

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<sup>1</sup> It is only in 2006 that Keith J. White published a book on child theology.

ing. Many children are therefore raised in single –often mother-headed–families. There is also a new phenomenon in Africa of in-vitro fertilization (IVF) children, where the identity of the child’s father is not known. This phenomenon raises ethical questions that the church has to deal with. Even children born in ‘stable’ families are not spared from the trauma that accompanies childhood due to current socio-economic developments. Many children are now born to professional parents who rarely have time for them. This makes the stage of childhood a time of crisis calling for reflection from multiple perspectives.

But for theologians to reflect clearly on children and God, for biblical scholars there is need to clearly articulate what the Bible says about children and childhood. Thus the call for papers for the conference that gave birth to this volume asked the above mentioned questions on the biblical concepts of children and childhood.

It is answers to these questions that can help develop ways child theology is to be understood and practiced today. When readers are clear about what the Bible says about children, they can therefore know how to relate with children as believers. It should be clear, however, that a simple hermeneutics of imitation will not help much. If we want to cope with the challenges of modern times we cannot simply adopt models from ancient times. And if we want to pay respect to the Human Rights of children we cannot simply look upon them as property of their father, family or society, as do some of the texts in the Bible. Instead we must recognize that there is a development within the Bible and have to decide which kind of biblical child-concept is more helpful for us and our children. And we have to learn that some of the texts in the Bible are not meant to teach us how to act, but to tell us what we should *not* do and how we should *not* see and understand things. This hermeneutical problem since long is debated in feminist biblical studies but it seems quite new in child theology. We are just beginning to realize that there are not only “texts of terror” for women (Trible 1984) but also for children. Our conference tried to make a start but it is clear that more work has to be done.

Due to the contextual approach of Bible in Africa Studies, the working program of our meeting did comprise also issues to do with the place of children in Africa today. Because of their vulnerability, children are usually the worst victims of social problems and challenges of any community. In Africa, children suffer the consequences of a continent in

turmoil. Hunger, diseases, lack of clean water, wars, etc. are some of the challenges children in Africa are facing. The advent of HIV and AIDS has aggravated children's problems as many of them have been left as orphaned and with the responsibility of caring for other children. Thus another theme of the conference dealt with the different life settings in which African children find themselves, and how the Bible is present in these life settings.

The chapters in this volume address a number of the questions and issues raised above. In the very first chapter, Solomon Ademiluka analyses biblical stories of the delinquencies of David's children considering the relevance of these accounts to issues of children and childhood in Africa today. In chapter 2, Canisius Mwandayi assumes a Christian audience as he addresses the way landlords in selected suburbs of Gweru in Zimbabwe treat university students who lodge in their houses. He uses laws of the resident alien in Lev. 19:33-34 to call for a better treatment of the students. This is followed by Nyasha Madzokere's chapter 3 that reflects on the plight of children during the tumultuous years of Zimbabwe's economic downturn. Using Mark 10:13, Madzokere calls for a reading of the Bible that allows children to come to Jesus, as the kingdom of God belongs to them. Taking the clue from the same Markan text, Moji Ruele makes a theological call of liberation of African children from the various challenges that they are facing. In chapter 5, Lovemore Togarasei analyses the status of children in Pauline communities, while in chapter 6 Joachim Kügler asks under which circumstances it can be attractive for adults to stress their status as "children", and dwells on cultural semantics of breast-feeding in Christian and pre-Christian (mainly north African/Egyptian) sources.

The Old Testament has been considered very close to Africa as its culture shares a lot with traditional African culture (Adamo 2005, Holter 2000). Francis Machingura and Godfrey Museka contribute to this argument as they look at the interaction of the Old Testament and Shona tradition on children in chapter 7. In chapter 8, Musa Dube and Abel Tabalaka use their experience with their children to make a philosophical and ideological interrogation of Bible translations for children. Showing how the Bible is engaged in favor of, and/or against, certain practices in Africa, Johannes Wessels discusses the subject of family planning in chapter 9, asking how the idea and ethics of responsible parenthood can be linked with the Bible. In chapter 10 Stephanie Feder considers how

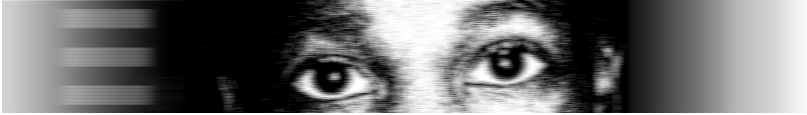
the term ‘child’ has been used in colonial and postcolonial times. Johannes Hunter discusses the responsibility of the Bible in the effects of migration on children and families in Namibia in chapter 11.

Parenting methods have a tremendous effect on children and childhood. Thus in chapter 12, Richard Maposa and Fortune Sibanda make theological reflections on responsible parenting using the case of Zimbabwe. The last chapter of the volume contributes to the topic of children and learning. In it Lovemore Ndlovu advocates for an experiential learning approach to the teaching of the Bible to children.

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## **The Deuteronomists' accounts of the delinquencies of David's children**

Relevance for contemporary Africa

*Solomon Ademiluka*

### **Introduction**

From a narrative reading of the David narratives, David rose from a lowly beginning; in terms of age, the youngest of the sons of Jesse from the tribe of Judah in ancient Israel. From this background, David rose to become a political figure of international repute, after making political and religious reforms. He created a sort of an Israelite Empire, the size of which was to be known again only in the reign of Jeroboam II about two centuries later. He was not only remembered throughout the history of the nation, but Israel continued to yearn for an age like that of David. Unfortunately, David will also continue to be remembered in connection with the delinquencies of his sons and the effects of their antisocial behaviors on the Israelite society.

This chapter examines the Deuteronomists' illustration of juvenile delinquency arising from parental neglect, and the concomitant effect on the society, with a view to adapting the teaching thereof to contemporary Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria where there is rampant juvenile delinquency arising from parental neglect, not only of children, but also of the traditional culture with its values. In view of this purpose, the work employs the narrative approach, as against the historical-critical method; in other words, the David narratives are appropriated in their canonical form.

## The Man David

David was the youngest son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah; he was the second king of Israel. In scripture the name is his alone. According to the narratives, he was brought up to be a shepherd. Like Joseph in the patriarchal age, David suffered from the ill-will and jealousy of his brothers (2 Sam. 17:28). David was to father a line of notable descendants as the genealogy of Jesus shows (Mat. 1:1-17). David was the king anointed by Samuel to succeed Saul when the latter was rejected from kingship.<sup>1</sup> In Saul's depression, it was David that was sought to minister to his melancholy through music. Saul's jealousy of David, for the fear that the latter might succeed him instead of his own son, Jonathan, grew into hostility so much that he made several attempts to kill the young man. As a result of this, David became a fugitive living in the forest.

At the death of Saul, David returned to Judah where his fellow-tribesmen anointed him king in Hebron over Judah. He was then thirty years old, and reigned in Hebron seven years and a half. Subsequently, he was anointed king over the twelve tribes in Hebron from where he later transferred his headquarters to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> David did not only occupy the imposing city of Jerusalem; his reputation also crossed international boundaries. King Hiram of Phoenicia, for example, sent him materials and men to build him a palace consonant with his position of prestige (2 Sam. 5:11-12). David made impressive military achievements. Following his initial victory over the Philistines, he conquered the Moabites, certain Aramean states such as Zobah and Damascus, and the Edomites east of the Dead Sea. These conquests extended the borders of Israel from deep in the Negev north to the Euphrates River with the exception of Phoenicia with which Israel was allied. On the west David pushed as far as the

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<sup>1</sup> For our purpose, we shall not be concerned here about the controversy on the composite nature of sources on how David became king.

<sup>2</sup> This favourable presentation of the rise of David to power, contained in 1 Sam. 16 – 2 Sam. 5, is often viewed as a manipulation of the Deuteronomists'. Recently McCarter described the whole corpus as "The Apology of David." In his own opinion, the history of David's rise to power in its present form has a theological "leitmotif." Its purpose is to legitimize David's accession by appeal to the divine will of a king whose right of accession might be questioned. This document, which has affinity with Hittite apologetic literature, must have arisen in Jerusalem during the reign of David himself (P. Kyle McCarter, "The Apology of David," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:4 [1980]: 489-504).

Philistine Pentapolis in the southern coast and all the way to the Mediterranean farther north, while to the east he occupied everything as far as the Great Desert. As Bright (1981:201) affirms, David's conquests had transformed Israel into the foremost power of Palestine and Syria. In fact, she was for the moment probably as strong as any power in the contemporary world. Bright further states that, by ancient standards, David's empire was of quite respectable size. His domain lacked but little of being the equivalent of Egyptian holdings in Asia in the heydays of the latter's empire.

Once the solidarity of the kingdom was established within and without politically, David took steps to strengthen the moral and spiritual standard of the nation. First, he brought the Ark back into use from its resting place at Kirjath-Jarim. David, in fact, was determined to house the Ark in a more befitting structure than the tabernacle; he was to build a temple for it if he were not forbidden (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

### **The Delinquencies of David's Sons**

In the view of the Deuteronomists, however, it would seem that David conquered the outside world but paid little attention to his own family, hence his sons became delinquents holding the society to ransom. The first recorded instance was a case of incest among his children, the rape of Tamar by Amnon her half brother (2 Sam. 13:1-21). In the Hebrew society the effect of Amnon's action on Tamar was enormous. She would become a desolate woman, isolated from society and disqualified from marriage (Baldwin 1988:250). David must have known this, yet he did not take any action on the matter. The New English Bible (NEB) adds from the Septuagint, "but he would not hurt Amnon because he was his eldest son and he loved him" (2 Sam. 13:21) (Payne 1970:308).

The Old Testament has stipulations for all kinds of offences. For the rape of a young girl, it prescribes fixed compensation to the amount of the normal bride price, and that the culprit should marry the girl. If the father disagrees to the marriage, he should still pay the normal bride price (Exod. 22:16-17). This stipulation might be due to the fact that the value of the girl was diminished by the loss of her virginity, which would make it impossible for her father to marry her to another person for the usual bride price. Though Amnon could not have married his sister in

view of Leviticus 18:9 (Tamar's suggestion of marriage in her dilemma notwithstanding<sup>3</sup>), he should have been made to pay the compensation, among other disciplinary measures. But their father did nothing; and, as Marshall (2008) rightly observes, David's failure to punish Amnon was one major factor that disastrously split the royal family asunder.

Having waited for two full years after the rape of his sister, Absalom decided to revenge on her behalf. He called a feast, got Amnon eliminated and fled (2 Sam. 13:23-39). This event reveals other aspects of David's indulgence. When Absalom requested that all his brothers be present at his banquet, a thoughtful father would have smelt danger. Absalom must have been bitter not only against Amnon, but also against David for not doing anything about the rape of his sister in two full years. But David did not think he had any reason to suspect Absalom. Now, all that he did was not to allow Absalom to return home until Joab, the commander of the army, intervened after three years. Although, when he returned David did not allow him to come to his presence in two years, when at last he did, the father welcomed him with a kiss (2 Sam. 14:33), instead of the death penalty stipulated by the law (Exod. 21:23-5). Commenting on David's attitude here, Wood (1979:176) says David loved his family dearly, noble quality, but he allowed this to stand in the way of proper discipline. That Absalom lacked discipline is further shown in the fact that when Joab would not willingly help him to come before his father two years after his return, he set the latter's field ablaze (2 Sam. 14:30). This indicates that Absalom had grown into a full-fledged criminal.

Absalom had become not only a criminal but also a crafty politician. Having settled down after his return from self-exile, he began to plan to undermine the authority of his father by building up his own prestige. In this, his sense of theatre and flair for publicity (cf. 2 Sam. 15:1), together with his already impressive public image, ensured a high degree of success. Absalom the politician had a predetermined policy which he ruthlessly pursued. Combining cunning with diligence he did not only attract attention to himself but, in fact, "stole the hearts of the men of

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<sup>3</sup> Several commentators agree that marriage among relations might have been the practice in the patriarchal age (cf. Gen. 20:12), but not in the monarchical period. Hence, Tamar spoke out of frustration, just to escape from Amnon (e.g. Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, PC Bible Study v4.

Israel" (2 Sam. 15:6) who did not see through the pretentious self-advertisement of Absalom. At the end of four years his well-laid plans for a coup came to fruition. He approached his father with the pretense to go to Hebron to pay a vow for his return. David had all reasons to suspect his son. He could not have been ignorant of the manner in which Absalom rode about Jerusalem daily in a convoy (2 Sam. 15:1). Moreover, it was in this way he asked for leave when he assassinated Amnon. Yet David was unsuspecting. This implies he did not pay adequate attention to the activities of his children, a confirmation of the Deuteronomists' accusation that David was an indulgent father (1 Kgs. 1:6).

Having obtained leave to "Go in peace," Absalom ironically went away to prepare for war against his father. Baldwin paints the preparation graphically. From this time on Absalom took control, with his messengers posted in such a way that the trumpet would sound throughout the land as each takes up the call with the words, "Absalom is king at Hebron" (15:10-11). The *coup d'état* announced almost simultaneously in this way to all the tribes made any opposition appear useless. Meanwhile the two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests suspected nothing, and therefore gave the proceedings an air of normality. By the time they realised what was happening, they were swept up in the confusion of events, powerless to intervene (Baldwin 1988:259). The unsuspecting David was taken unawares. All he could do was to order the evacuation of the city immediately because he was in no position to defend it. The king and his loyal servants had to flee to the fords of the wilderness. In the inevitable war that was about to ensue between the opposing forces of father and son, another aspect of David's weakness is revealed in the plea which he gave to Joab: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (18:5). Obviously it is loaded with the desire for Absalom's safety, the safety of a son who was after the father's life. David's attitude here is unwholesome, to say the least. Certainly, as an experienced soldier, he would not envisage a war without casualties, but he did not want his son, the commander of the rebel force, to die. It was little surprise therefore that David broke down emotionally when the news of the death of Absalom reached him, and he wished he had died instead (18:33). As Baldwin (273) observes, the father who had never taken steps to correct his ambitious and spoilt son now indulges in self-torment on the news of his death. It reveals a huge and terrible hole in that part of David's soul where there should have been self-confidence

and self-esteem. In other words, when allowance has been made for all that a loving father goes through on the death of his son, there remains an aspect of David's behaviour which is unsound. He was not prepared to face reality, taking refuge in a wish that he could not fulfill. Hence, because the king was grieving for his son he had no word of appreciation for the victorious army. He could not have ignored the army more completely if it had returned defeated. As Joab put it to him, David would sacrifice all his followers if Absalom could only live (19:5-6).

The last effect of David's recorded failure as a father was a succession dispute in the royal family. In the latter years of his reign Israel had been committed to the monarchy. As Bright (207) affirms, the new Israel was so much David's own achievement, so much centered on his person, that many must have realised that only an heir could possibly hold it together; one of his sons would have to succeed him. But David had not declared which of them. Hence, bitter rivalries emerged and the palace was rocked with intrigue. David had supposedly promised Bathsheba that her son, Solomon, would reign after him (1 Kgs. 1:13, 17), but had not done anything about it further, and had meanwhile grown old and feeble. This ambiguity encouraged Adonijah, the oldest surviving son who had grown up with little fatherly discipline (1:6), to snatch at the coveted price.

What ensued was really a palace intrigue. Adonijah got Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army to side with him, and in a method similar to Absalom's, declared himself king. It took the effort of Nathan the prophet, who Adonijah had sidelined, to wake David up to his earlier promise concerning Solomon. With the authority of the dying king, Nathan, Zadok and some other notables got Solomon anointed king to succeed his father.

Thus, the Deuteronomists' illustration is to the effect that David's indulgence towards his children brought calamity upon his family and, by implication upon the society. It appears David was completely oblivious of societal expectations on him in respect of his responsibility towards his children. According to Masenya (2010:732), in Israelite traditions, the father as the head of the family had extensive and unquestionable authority over his children. It was unconditionally accepted that the man should exercise his authority over the whole family (Gen. 3:16). And the children were obliged to obey their parents. It was the parents' right to demand this obedience. In addition, Israelite culture was rich in prov-

erbs, many of which instruct on the proper discipline of the child, using the root *musar* (discipline, training, instruction). Parents should discipline their children for only then do they have hope on them (Prov. 19:18); and when they grow up they will remain disciplined persons (22:6). Naturally, children want to be stubborn and disobedient, hence parents should use even the rod on them (22:15). In fact, not using the rod on a stubborn child implies hatred on the part of the parents (13:24). They should not hesitate to use the rod because it will not kill a child (23:13); rather the rod and reproof will give him/her wisdom. Otherwise, such a child will bring shame to his/her parents (29:15). While the book of Proverbs in its canonical form is commonly dated in the exilic/post-exilic period, scholars also admit that the traditions contained in it may date from Solomonic, and perhaps even pre-Solomonic times (Proverbs 2007); hence, David might not have been ignorant of them. In his position as king, David would have been expected to uphold these instructions and serve as an example to his subjects. Unfortunately, he did not, and as Proverbs 29:15 predicts, David's children brought him not little shame.

### **The Relevance of the Deuteronomists' Accounts for Contemporary Africa**

Just as ancient Israelite folklore emphasised the need to properly discipline a child, in the traditional African setting high premium is placed on the development of good character in every person right from childhood, and this is well represented in various aspects of traditional African culture. Good character is taught through a combination of precepts and oral literature such as proverbs, poems, songs, folktales, myths, etc.

Awoniyi (1975:364) examines character from the perspective of the traditional culture of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. According to him, the principles of traditional education are based on the concept of *omoluabi* (i.e. person of good character). To be an *omoluabi* in Yoruba traditional thought is to be of good character in all aspects of life. The concept encompasses virtues such as respect for old age, loyalty to one's parents and local traditions, honesty in all public and private dealings, devotion to duty, sociability, and so on.



Similarly, Abimbola (1975:394) considers character in Yoruba traditional culture from the perspective of the concept of *iwa* (character). *Iwapele* (gentle, patient, respective character) is what is expected of every reasonable person in the society. The person who has *iwapele* will not collide with any of the powers, both human and supernatural, and will therefore live in harmony with the forces that govern the universe. This is why the Yoruba regard *iwapele* as the most important of all human values, the greatest attribute of any person. The concept of good character is taught copiously in *Ifa* (oracle) literary corpus. A particular verse teaches that patience is the most important aspect of *iwa*; hence the saying, “*Suuru ni baba iwa* (patience is the acme of good character). Out of all of the attributes which a man/woman with good character must have, patience is the most important because the person who is patient takes time to consider things properly before embarking on action.

Furthermore, in Africa it is generally accepted that it is the responsibility of parents, especially the father who is the head of the family, to impart good character in the child. Metiboba (2003:132) enumerates some of the ways in which the family achieves this role in the traditional setting. Attitudes, values and other patterns of character conducive to anti-social behaviour (e.g. delinquency and crime) found by the child in the larger society are discouraged in the child from the home setting. One of the ways the family does this is to check the kind of primary relations which the child makes outside the family. Good parents pay attention to the type of friends their children make. In this way, they are able to discourage them from associating with persons of unworthy character. This preference greatly checks the child’s chance of becoming a deviant or criminally oriented in character later in life.<sup>4</sup> In the Deuteronomists’ narratives, this is one area in which David failed. He did not pay adequate attention to the movement of his sons. In the traditional African setting, he would have been observant enough to discourage the friendship between Amnon and Jonadab. We recall it was the latter who taught Amnon the cunning he used to seduce Tamar.

African folklore does not only reflect the expectation placed on parents to inculcate good character in their children but, in fact, has a way of taunting parents who fail in this regard. The Yoruba, for example, often refer

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<sup>4</sup> I remember how, in my adolescent years, my father stopped me from associating with certain persons because he did not consider them to be of good character.

to a child of notorious anti-social behaviour as an *abiiko* (a child not properly brought up by his/her parents). As Awoniyi (375) rightly observes, nothing mortifies a Yoruba parent more than to call his/her child an *abiiko*. A child is better called an *akoogba* (a child who refuses discipline), where the failure is that of the child, and not of the parents. Accordingly, in Yoruba traditional perspective, David's children were *abiiko*, not *akoogba*. This is what his children, particularly Absalom, would have been called in town. And David, being king, his chiefs might have said it to his face, similar to the manner in which the antisocial behaviour of Eli's children was reported to him (1 Sam. 2:22-25). If David were not a king, in Africa he would be a subject of public ridicule on account of his sons' delinquencies.

In view of the fact that discipline was given high regard, the African traditional setting used to be an orderly society where most people were law abiding citizens. For example, it was in this manner that William Clarke (1972:255) found the Yorubaland during his four years of exploration there. Hence, he says, "During a sojourn of four years I never saw a street fight between two men ..., heard of but one case of adultery, very few cases of theft and murder." According to him, this was because the penal code was very effective in the administration of justice; it deterred offenders and prevented a repetition of crime. Murder and theft, where such occurred, were rewarded with death. He cites the example of a notorious rogue at Ijaye who happened to be one of the brothers of the chief. When he would not desist he paid for it with his own life at the very hand of the chief himself. The relevance of this illustration is that, unlike David, the chief of Ijaye enforced the law of the land even when his own brother was involved. In this regard, David failed completely. He failed to enforce the law, the custodian of which he had made himself on account of his religious reforms. There is every probability that David would have enforced the law against rape and murder if it were not his own sons that were involved. After all, he passed the death sentence on the proverbial rich man who snatched the lamb of a poor man (2 Sam. 12:1-6).

However, the situation is no longer the same in contemporary Africa; so much has changed, thereby making the Deuteronomists' accounts of the delinquencies of David's children more relevant today than ever before. Unlike in the past, today there is rampant juvenile delinquency, much of which is as a result of parental neglect. In Nigeria today, for example, the

youth are given too much freedom too soon, unlike in the past. For example, in many homes once children enter higher institutions, the parents no longer check their movement; hence, as Ogundipe (2011) rightly affirms, peer influence now seems to be more robust than parental control. Perhaps, this is why most cases of armed robbery of homes, banks and on the highways involve youth, some of whom are teenagers. It is also children of this age group that are often hired as thugs by some politicians during elections to inflict havocs not only on their opponents, but also on the society at large. They are the ones engaged in the *Boko Haram* insurgency which has ravaged Nigeria since 2011.

With the emergence of home video and social networks parents have increased responsibility towards their children. With these facilities children may sit even in their homes and get involved in series of crimes. We are all familiar with the kinds of inhuman activities that are learnt from home video. Apart from all the categories of cyber crimes being committed by teenagers today, the youth are often absorbed in manipulation of social networks to the neglect of home responsibilities and even their studies. In this regard, parents have to educate their children on the advantages and disadvantages of these facilities; they have to monitor the type of films their children are allowed to watch. Children should not be allowed to devote too much of their time to social networks and films.

Perhaps more importantly, there is the need for a return by all to the traditional African precepts and concepts by means of which traditional values and virtues used to be taught to children. One way of achieving this is to encourage the youth to maintain links with their traditional homes where some of these values are still being preserved. In contemporary Africa, many parents have lost contact with their traditional roots so much that their children do not even have an idea of their nativity.

However, the responsibility of curbing juvenile delinquency in Africa resides not only in parents, but also in government at all levels. In this regard it must be acknowledged that the Nigerian Government has not been totally passive. There are institutions designed to handle juvenile cases, namely the Remand Homes and Remand Centres established for the reformation of notorious delinquents. The Borstal Institutions being administered by Nigerian Prisons Service receive offenders from age 16 to 19 who must be discharged out of the place on or before the attainment of 21 years of age. The policy thrust and measures of the pro-

gramme involve provision of educational and vocational opportunities to meet the diverse needs of young persons (Ogundipe 2011). It is necessary, however, to urge government to sustain and strengthen these institutions to make them achieve the purposes for which they were established. This call becomes imperative in view of the habit of successive governments in Nigeria to neglect educational institutions. The Borstal Institutions have very laudable objectives, and will continue to play a pivotal role in curbing juvenile delinquency in Nigeria if government empowers them through adequate funding and attention. In this regard, the observation of the Controller-General of Prisons, Nigeria, Olusola Adigunle Ogundipe, is apposite. According to him, the Borstal Institutions recognise that “Young persons are less likely to continue to offend if their physical, emotional, educational and social needs are met throughout, with protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, exploitation or poverty and opportunity for development of full potentials and achievement” (Ogundipe 2011).

The Nigerian Government still has to do more to achieve the above objective, particularly by providing employment opportunities for the youth. Currently we are in a situation where graduates continue to roam the streets years after finishing studies from their various higher institutions. Hence, even children that are well brought up by their parents face the temptation of joining bad gangs if they are not gainfully engaged. No wonder, most often graduates of higher institutions are among paraded armed robbers.

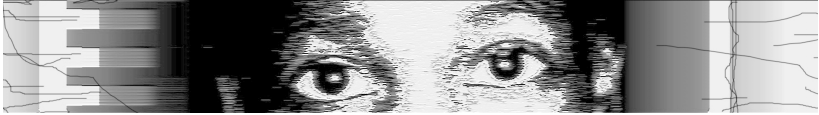
## **Conclusion**

Going by the canonical form of the Deuteronomists' accounts, David was remembered by the Israelites as their ideal king. He created an “Israelite Empire,” and achieved international recognition, not only for himself but also for his country. His were the first religious reforms in Israel. But David neglected his own home. He had a care-free attitude towards his sons so much that they became delinquents causing havocs in the society. These narratives of David and his children have enormous relevance for contemporary Africa in view of the rampant delinquencies of our time, much of which is as a result of parental neglect. Most cases of armed robbery of homes, banks and on the highways involve children of twenty years of age or even below. From David's failure African par-

ents must learn to pay close attention to their children's movement, friends, and all forms of engagements. However, the responsibility to curb juvenile delinquency resides not only in parents but also in government. In Nigeria, government is playing an important role through the reformation centres, but it has to do more by providing job opportunities for young graduates, for, as a popular adage goes, "The devil finds work for idle hands."

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## **Leviticus 19:33-34 – the forgotten injunction**

A case study of ‘alien’ students<sup>1</sup> in Senga and Nehosho suburbs of Gweru, Zimbabwe

*Canisius Mwandayi*

### **Introduction**

The Priestly material in Leviticus has for a long time been a devalued part of the Hebrew Bible. The general trend of modern scholarship tends to be characterized by a deep-seated bias that views impurity rules as primitive and irrational taboos, and sacrifice as controlled savagery that is empty of any spiritual meaning. The central message, however, of the book of Leviticus expressed in the formulation, “You shall be holy because I, the Lord, am holy” (Lev. 11:45) is still relevant for Christians today. The book, in other words, is a literary expression of God’s desire that his holiness be reflected in the daily lives of his covenant people. Such a call to holiness is what this paper sees as having been violated as some landlords and landladies of Senga and Nehosho suburbs of Gweru in Zimbabwe, borrowing the language of Amos, “lie upon beds of ivory” (6:4) while poor students are packed like sacks in bundles of 6 to 8 peo-

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<sup>1</sup> While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child would define a child as a human being under 18 years of age, unless the law of his or her country deems him or her to be an adult at an earlier age, the definition used in this paper is a contextualized one. The understanding of who a child is in this paper is the one shared by Chinyangara et al (1997) who argue that in Zimbabwe, a young person is viewed as a child until he/she participates in the social and economic roles enjoyed by adults, not according to the law. In the African sense, the definition of a child is a social construct and thus value laden. It is not calculated in terms of chronological age but by what role the child can or does play in society at any given stage. The definition of the child thus becomes situational. On the basis of such an understanding one can therefore label university students ‘children’, especially as they are still dependent on their parents.



ple per room and charged exorbitant rentals ranging from \$50-\$70 per student in their houses. The paper begins by examining the way of life which was lived by aliens in the midst of the Israelites through reading behind the injunction in Leviticus 19:33-34. The insertion of such an injunction into the laws of Israel shows that aliens were victims of various kinds of abuse. By way of analogy, the paper relates the ill-treatment of such aliens in Israel to the life experienced by 'alien' students living in the aforesaid suburbs. It concludes by arguing that such students deserve better treatment and fair rental charges during their period of study at Midlands State University (MSU).

### **Leviticus 19:33-34**

The admonition: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:33-34) actually falls within a block of material that is referred to as the "Holiness code." The Holiness code is one of the various thematic units found within the book of Leviticus. A quick look at the whole book of Leviticus shows that the first chapters, that is 1 – 7 cover the sacrificial system. Chapters 8 - 10 recount the installation of Aaron as high priest and the Aaronides as the priestly clan within Israel. Chapters 11 - 15 cover the dietary system, the dietary laws as well as the ritual purity laws. Chapter 16 describes the procedure to be followed on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. Chapters 17 through 26 constitute what is called the "Holiness code" because of its special emphasis on holiness. Elaborating on this Lawrence Boadt had this to say, "It gets this name from the stress it places on God as holy, and the need for the levites to imitate God's holiness, and to keep themselves separate from merely profane behaviour unworthy of their special calling" (1984:189-190). Most scholars, for example, H.C. Brichto, G.H. Davies, K. Elliger and others think that this block of material comes from a different priestly school. Though in its present form, the book of Leviticus looks post-exilic, a number of scholars, as averred by J. Alberto Soggin (1987), tend to assign the 'holiness' material to the pre-exilic period. The book was re-edited and some material were added to the holiness material, for example, the sacrificial code (chapters 1-7), the ordination rite (chapters 8-10),

the legal purity code (chapters 11-16) and other materials like the commutation of vows in chapter 27. Thus, as observed by V. Zinkurature et al (1999), the book of Leviticus in general, is a product of many hands which through the centuries adapted the Mosaic statutes to the needs of a later time.

Not underestimating the complexities involved in trying to date the book of Leviticus, what stands out clear is that there is a marked difference between Leviticus 1 through 16 and the Holiness Code. According to Leviticus 1 through 16, Israel's priests are designated as holy: a holy class within Israel, singled out, dedicated to the service of God and demarcated by rules that apply only to them. Israelites may aspire to holiness, but it is not directly stated. Though there is no clear cut allusion to this, there are some texts in the Holiness Code that come closer to the idea that Israel itself is holy by virtue of the fact that God has set Israel apart from the nations to himself, to belong to him, just as he set apart the seventh day to himself.

To get a clear picture of the Holiness Code one needs in the first place to understand the Priestly conception of holiness. The biblical term for holiness, as averred by Theodore Friedman (2008), is *kodesh*; Mishnaic Hebrew, *kedushah*, and that which is regarded as holy is called *kadosh*. Friedman goes on to note that in line with early rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," Jewish exegetes have consistently taken the verb *kadesh* to mean "distinguished, set apart" (Friedman, 2008). What the foregoing root meanings show is that the word 'holiness' carries with it the connotation of separateness or distinctiveness. That which is holy, in other words, is separate. It is withdrawn from common, everyday use. In the Priestly view, only God is intrinsically holy. God can impart holiness to, he can sanctify persons and places and things when they are brought into a specific kind of relationship with him, a relationship that is best described as a relationship of ownership. As affirmed by Chingota (2006: 160), holiness in the priestly understanding is an attribute of Yahweh that must find expression in the actual life of the community.

Since what is holy is what is in God's realm, it means that which is or falls outside of God's realm is common. The Hebrew word for "common" is sometimes translated by the English word "profane." In simple terms, profane simply means not holy; not sacred. A profane object simply implies that it is common; it is available for everyday use. It is not

separated or marked off for a special kind of treatment because it is unholy. For a common object to become holy, one needs a special act of dedication to God, an act of sanctification to transfer the thing to God or God's realm or God's service.

The foregoing remarks on the boundary between the holy/sacred and the profane functions to demonstrate how Israel itself as a holy entity, should lead a life that is distinct from certain profane ways of other peoples. Israel as a nation had been set apart to the service of God. To remain a holy nation, however, Israel was tasked to create and maintain certain structures of time (the festival and sabbatical calendars), space (the temple and its component courtyards) and human relationships (social ethics). In regard to time, the priestly conception is that there are ordinary, common, profane days, work days. In addition to that there are also certain holy days: for example, the New Year or the Passover holidays which are separated and demarcated from common time by special rules that mark them as different. Holier than these days is the Sabbath, which is demarcated by even further rules and observances. And the holiest day is Yom Kippur, known as the Sabbath of Sabbaths. This day is separated from all other days by additional rules and observances in keeping with its profound holiness.

In regard to space, the priestly writers present the sanctuary in such a way that holiness increased as one moved deeper into the sanctuary. From such an understanding, the area or the land outside the Israelite camp is regarded as common or profane land while the Israelite camp bears a certain degree of holiness. The outer courtyard or the outer enclosure of the sanctuary bears a slightly higher degree of holiness. It is accessible to Israelites who are pure. The sanctuary proper, which is in closer proximity to God, bears a slightly higher degree of holiness. Given that it was holier than the outer courtyard, it meant it was accessible only to the priests, who are said to be the holy ones within Israel. The inner shrine bears the highest degree of holiness. Being the holiest arena, it was accessible only to the holiest member of the nation, the high priest. The working principle reflected here is that holiness increased as proximity to God increased. This finds echo in Gesternberger who says that Yahweh's person and his immediate surroundings, accordingly also the 'house' in which he dwells, are energy-laden to the highest degree (Gesternberger cited in Hass, 1997).

The foregoing areas that were of concern for Israel to remain a holy nation basically touch the vertical relationship of human beings with God. Human beings were called to a life of total and faithful commitment to God. Holiness was exemplified by obedience to commands such as: *Keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary. I am the Lord* (Lev. 19:30); *Do not clip your hair at the temples* (Lev. 20:27) and others. Thus through obedience to these statutes laid out for them, human beings would attain the holy status that was required of them. Besides the strive to maintain the vertical relationship with God, human beings were called also to maintain the horizontal relationship with other human beings if they were to be truly a holy people. At the horizontal plane, holiness was to be manifest in the social, economic and political aspects of human life. More concretely, as noted by Chingota (2006), holiness was supposed to show itself in the respect for parents and the elderly (Lev. 19:3, 32) care for the less privileged (Lev. 19:9-10, 14) as well as hospitality or good neighbourliness (Lev. 19:16-18, 20-22, 33-34). In the political sphere, holiness was to be seen in the administration of justice in the courts of law (Lev. 19:15) and in the economical sphere, exploitation of the poor was strongly prohibited (Lev. 19:19, 23-25). In short, holiness was to be seen in the flow of life, a life characterised by integrity, honesty and love for one another. As indicated previously, it is one aspect of this horizontal relationship between human beings that this paper is concerned about, namely: good neighbourliness towards the stranger or alien.

Taking now a closer look at our key text which is Leviticus 19:33-34, it is necessary perhaps to first note that chapter 19 as a whole, is a rhetorically powerful and a wide-ranging section. Remarking on the wide-ranging nature of this chapter, Everett Fox (1995: 600) says that it extends holiness to virtually all areas of life – family, business, calendar, civil and criminal law, social relations and even sexuality. In brief, one would say that most of the laws here deal with relations between people or what we may simply term social ethics.

From a literal perspective, it is basic to note that this chapter is structured in such a way that verses 3-32 are discrete subsections, each ending with “I am YHWH your God” while verses 33-36 serve as two appendices. This chapter is closed by a summary in verse 37 (Schwartz cited in Fox, 1995: 600). The use of an emphatic ending “I am YHWH your God” by the Priestly author/s possibly serves to illustrate that each

of those injunctions are not just arbitrary commands but actually carry the full authority of Yahweh himself. As regards its literal style, it stands out clear that it is largely apodictic – “You are not to [...]” and tends to focus more on the negating of certain kinds of behaviour. While one finds in this chapter strong prohibitions of certain kinds of behaviour, there is too a moving positive plea for the proper treatment of the elderly, the poor and in general, one’s neighbour which in this case encompasses also the sojourner or foreigner as reflected in verses 33-34.

While the terms ‘alien’, ‘foreigner’, ‘sojourner’ and ‘stranger’ have loosely been used in the process of translation to mean one and the same thing, such an arbitrary fluctuation of words, as pointed out by H.M. Carson (1996, 380), tends to obscure that different groups of people are actually in view. Beginning with the term ‘stranger’, he argues that its etymology is the word *zar* whose root is *zur* meaning ‘to turn aside’ or ‘to depart’. Thus for him, it can simply be used in reference to an outsider (1 Kings 3:18), meaning one who usurps a position to which he has no right and a further extension of it makes it equivalent to alien or foreigner, that is, one who does not belong to the house, community of nation in which he finds himself (Carson: 1996, 380). In certain instances one finds the word ‘stranger’ being virtually equated with the word ‘enemy’ (Is. 1:7; Jer. 5:19).

Taking another look at the term ‘foreigner’, Carson argues that it is derived from the word *nokri* which can be used in reference to someone of another race but such a term has come also to acquire a religious connotation due to the association of other nations with idolatry (Carson: 1996, 380). Due to this association of other nations with idolatry, it is not surprising therefore to find the biblical text coming out in full force against anything foreign. Solomon, for example, is condemned for marrying foreign wives. Ezra proscribes against mixed marriages and even in New Testament times, the hard exclusiveness of the Judaizing movement proved a great hindrance to acceptance of Gentile converts.

Pointing lastly to another connotation of the term ‘sojourner’ Carson observes that the word is rendered in Hebrew text as *ger* whose root *gur* means ‘to sojourn’. In some instances, however, one finds the use of the alternative word *tosab* being used in the simple sense of a settler (Carson: 1996, 380). Thus the sojourner, for him, simply means one whose permanent residence is another nation as contrasted to a foreigner whose stay is only temporary. For Carson, the Israelites are a typical

example of sojourners given the fact that they stayed in Egypt (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 22:21).

While Carson appears to stress on the distinction between foreigner and sojourner on the basis of their kind of stay, arguing that for the former it is temporary whilst for the latter it is permanent, it may be better actually to view it as a fluid distinction given the fact that Israelites did not permanently settle in Egypt. The word sojourner actually carries the connotation of not being static but something in a state of transition. What all this boils down to is the fact that the terms ‘foreigner’, ‘alien’, ‘stranger’ and ‘sojourner’ can interchangeably be used without shifting so much the message of the biblical text calling for the compassionate treatment of such people in Israel’s midst.

### **Aliens among the Chosen People**

When the people of Israel gained a footing in Canaan, they found themselves faced with the question of what to do about foreigners. Among the foreigners living in Israel were those who had accompanied them on their flight from Egypt (Ex 12:38); there were also Canaanites like Rahab; and lastly there were those who came later to Israel like Ruth the Moabitess and Uriah the Hittite. At the time of King Solomon there were about 150,000 such aliens in Israel (2 Ch. 2:16) or about a tenth of the country’s total population. The bulk of these aliens were unskilled labourers as evidenced in the fact that during the building of the temple some were carriers of the material needed, some were stonemasons in the mountains and others were overseers to keep the people working (2 Ch. 2:17; 1 Ch. 22:2; 2 Ch. 8:7-8). As can easily be deduced from such a social world of these texts, the life of aliens in Israel was not an easy one. It was practically a life of slavery. As evidenced in the Bible, before David and Solomon extended the hated corvee to fellow Israelites, aliens among the Israelite groups were the ones who were languishing all the time. As is the general case and which is to be assumed of the aliens in Israel, the work of an alien is often hard and poorly paid, and this cascades even to the issue of living conditions. An alien lives more or less like a squatter since he may not be able to afford good housing. Since his life is almost dependent upon his master, he is pushed to grab anything which is provided by that master. In addition to any material difficulties an alien may face, there are emotional challenges. Being an uprooted

person thus deprived of the comfort of his native language, family and friends, an alien is faced with the reality of being alone. This loneliness is all the more painful because it is seldom a personal choice but a result of circumstances (*Aliens, Strangers and the Gospel*, 2012).

Licensing as it were the ill-treatment of aliens among the Israelites was the often misunderstood issue of their election as God's chosen people. While the issue of being chosen had nothing wrong in itself, the Israelites often tended to overstretch its meaning. This finds an echo in the words of Kalilombe who says:

From the notion of Holy People and the pre-occupation to express this holiness and protect it, a tendency developed towards an exclusivist ghetto-mentality. The law ran the danger of legalism and intransigence, as is witnessed by Ezra's fierce treatment of "mixed marriages" (Ezra 9-10), (Kalilombe cited in Mwandayi, 2011, 147).

Under such a scenario, little or no sympathy at all was thus shown towards anything which fell outside the framework of God's Chosen People. In God's eyes, however, the Israelites were neither better nor worse than other peoples. Though indeed the law of God and his providence had vastly dignified Israel above any other people they were not therefore supposed to think that they had a right to trample upon people of other nations and to insult them at their pleasure (Henry, 2001-2012). This is why Leviticus 19:33-34 and other sections of the Torah, for example, Exodus 22:21; 23:12 and Deuteronomy 16:19 call upon the Israelites not to oppress the stranger but rather to love him. This teaching is reiterated by the prophets who continually reminded the Israelites of how they should behave towards strangers (Jer. 7:6; Mal. 3:5; Ez. 47:22-23). The Israelites too were reminded by the Prophets that they should not think of themselves as better off than other nations or peoples. The prophet Amos, for example, reminded the Israelites that the distant or foreign peoples were just as much objects of Yahweh's solicitude as they themselves and that God was concerned with what these nations were doing to one another in as much as He was concerned with Judah and Israel (Amos 1-2).

The sojourner, in God's eyes, was supposed to have many privileges. The gleanings of the vineyard and the harvest field were to be left for him (Lev. 19:10; 23:22). Such a law finds also an echo in the book of Deuteronomy which unequivocally states:

When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, [or gather the grapes of your vineyard] do not go over them again. That [which remains on the

tree] shall go to the stranger, the orphan and the widow [...] Always remember you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment (Dt. 24:20-22).

The alien is included also in the provision made of the cities of asylum to which any Israelite could flee to escape death at the hand of the avenger of blood (Nu. 35:15; Josh.20:9). An alien is actually ranked with the fatherless and widow as being defenceless and so God is his defence and will judge those who oppress him (Dt. 10:17-18; Ps. 94:6; 146:9; Mal. 3:5).

The laws proscribing the ill-treatment of aliens, as we saw, are embedded in a larger ideological framework concerning the need for the Israelites to separate themselves and to be holy like their God, *imitation dei*. The command to shun any form of ill-treatment of the foreigner and rather to love him is connected with this theme of *imitatio dei*, of imitation of God. As God has a special love for aliens and strangers and defends their cause by giving them food and clothing, so Israel was to imitate her God so as to be holy for the Lord. Thus, just as other Israelite laws in general, the injunction to treat the stranger well was aimed at sanctifying, rendering holy or making like God those who chose to abide by the terms of this law.

A peculiar added reason to note as the basis for the Israelites to take good care of the aliens in their midst was that they too were once aliens in the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:34). The experience of slavery and liberation was thus supposed to act for the Israelites as the impetus or wellspring for moral action. Such a rationale which connects the experience of Egypt to the impetus for moral action is not only reflected in the book of Leviticus but can be found scattered also in other parts of the Torah. Exodus 22:20 reads: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." A following chapter in the same book of Exodus captures the same rationale when it states: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (23:9). Likewise, in Deuteronomy 5, to the command that the Israelites were supposed to observe the Sabbath and ensure that all in their abode rested as they did is the repeated reminder that they were once slaves in the land of Egypt and that the Lord God had freed them from there. Taking also a swipe against bribes, the book of Deuteronomy further reminds the Israelites that God stands by the defenceless and that since they were once strang-



ers in the land of Egypt they too were supposed to befriend the stranger (Dt. 10:17-19).

Since the call was almost for the total integration of the alien in the life of the Chosen People, it meant the alien too was bound to some religious obligations. He was bound, for example, by the law which forbade leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:19). The alien was also bound by the prohibition against eating blood (Lev. 17:10, 13) and was to abstain from immorality (Lev. 18:26). The Law, however, exempted the alien from keeping the Passover but if he so wished then he had to be circumcised first (Ex. 12:48). In most of the things the alien was to be considered as virtually on the same level with the Israelites (Lev. 24:22) and also had to anticipate a sharing in the inheritance of Israel as reflected in Ezekiel's vision of the Messianic Age (Ez. 47:22-23).

Despite the full consciousness of these demands by Yahweh, the life of the aliens in Israel remained at the mercy of the Israelite people. The gap between those who claimed to be the rightful owners of the land (Israelites) and those who worked for them (aliens) continued to widen and thus even spilled into the New Testament times. Since the aliens were considered as having no *prima facie* right to the land, they continued to become poorer and poorer, constituting the bulk of the landless class of Israelite society.

### **'Alienhood' – the case of MSU Students**

While the colour of skin and the language may differ, humanity is basically the same everywhere in terms of behavioural tendencies. The autochthonous people always feel they are a special class and new comers are generally viewed as of lesser value to merit so much care and concern. They are rather regarded as deserving to be exploited as much as possible. Neglecting what was demanded of them by the Mosaic covenant, as we saw, the Israelites exploited the strangers who were in their midst and this is the same thing that we find happening today when we take a look at what some landlords of Nehosho and Senga locations of Gweru city are doing to students who ask for a place to stay during their period of study at Midlands State University.

By virtue of most students not originating from Gweru, they have been reduced to a life of alienhood. The kind of life lived by aliens in Israel fits

so well with the plight of such students. An alien, as we saw, lived more or less like a squatter since he/she was not able to afford good housing. Since his/her life was dependent upon his/her master, he/she was pushed to grab anything which was provided by that master. In addition to any material difficulties an alien could face, there were emotional challenges. Being an uprooted person thus deprived of the comfort of his native language, family and friends, an alien was faced with the reality of being alone. This loneliness was all the more painful because it was seldom a personal choice but a result of circumstances. Such conditions of life tended to be worse when they had to be endured by youngsters seeking to build their tomorrow. Now given that the life being lived by most students at MSU is akin to that of aliens in Israel, it justifies the appropriation of the Biblical text (Leviticus 19:33-34) on the basis that Zimbabwe can less arguably be defined as a Christian nation, a nation thus build on Biblical principles.

Randomly sampling at least 20 former and current students, I realised that the challenges faced by such students generally tend to be the same. For fear of victimisation, however, those students I interviewed requested to remain anonymous. The recurring challenges shared by students during the interviews include the issue of being made to occupy a small room in disproportion to their bigger numbers. Rooms which under normal circumstances would accommodate at most two to three people are made to accommodate five to seven students. Even if the room is already full, in an act of “mercy” yet in actual fact one would be thinking of getting more money, the students may be asked by the landlord/lady to create room for another student on the pretext that it would be a temporal arrangement but once that space has been created the landlord/lady simply ignores the situation and the students have to get contended with it.

The second greatest challenge is the amount of the rental charges each student is asked to pay. Despite their great numbers, each student is required to fork out amounts ranging from \$50-\$70 and this has to be paid right on time otherwise the student risks being thrown out. Even during their vacation time, students are required to pay their rentals in full. Simple arithmetic would show that a landlord/lady leasing three to four rooms wrecks in something like \$2 000,00 every month-end. Some of the landlords/ladies, I am told, have actually moved out of their

houses to stay in low density areas near town, where the upper echelons of the society live.

Other worrisome issues to students include failing to afford any time and space for privacy. Due to the mixed nature of the students, some may simply want to go on talking the whole night, disturbing those who might be willing to study. Bearing in mind also that university students are generally a sexually active group, some may want some kind of privacy with their lovers. Since the situation hardly allows such a chance, some resort to what the students themselves term as 'bushing out' whereby a lover pays for his/her roommates to find accommodation elsewhere for a particular night so as to afford him/her some time with his/her lover. Some students complain of some landlords/ladies who use the opportunity of school time to search in the bags of their student tenants and rob them of their valuables. Once the students complain they are threatened of being thrown out hence most bear silently such rough conditions of living, only longing to be done with their university studies and forget this kind of hell living. The feeling of being uprooted from the security of their actual families also gnaws them and this may end up affecting their university studies.

Appeal to the Biblical principle on aliens in trying to address the issue of 'alien' students in the above given suburbs is justified in the sense that a number of landladies of this area are often seen in church uniform which presupposes that these residential areas are fairly Christian communities. Given that Christians identify themselves as the New Israel, it means the call to holiness, *imitatio dei* falls squarely upon their shoulders. There is no way their Christian life should fail to reflect this aspect otherwise there may be need to re-catechise them on what it takes to be a Christian. Since the Christians of today claim to be the new Israel, it means God's message to the Israelites of old applies to them too. Despite their being raised to a dignified position they are not therefore supposed to think that they have a right to trample upon alien people among them and to insult them at their pleasure. Apart from the need to hearken to Leviticus 19:33-34, there is need for Christians to read other sections of the Torah and some Prophetic books, for example, Exodus 22:21; 23:12; Deuteronomy 16:19, Jer. 7:6; Mal. 3:5; Ez. 47:22-23 which call upon the Israelites not to oppress the stranger but rather to love him.

While for now the landlords/ladies of Nehosho and Senga locations may appear to be getting away with it, they seem to be underestimating the harm that they are causing to the whole nation of Zimbabwe. Regardless of their level of education, students still need parental guidance but when those who are supposed to assume the role of parents are seen to be treating them in a dehumanizing way, they lose the compass of life and the outcomes of such a scenario harm not only the future life of such students but the whole nation. While it is something commendable that the landlords/ladies of the locations under discussion open their doors to MSU students in their moments of need, the love of money has soiled what originally was a good start. In as far as they just think of enriching themselves and are not concerned about the welfare of their student tenants, they share in the neglect of children and youth that is going on in an uncaring world. It is in this context that one appreciates the words of Isaac C. Lamba (2004, 3) when he noted that the goal of a productive world of peace is often marred by selfish individuals in positions of influence, who have no tangible commitment or concern for the enrichment of the human condition of youth in order to launch them into meaningful adulthood. What escapes the minds of these landlords/ladies is that every university student has a right to a dignified life free from exploitation and discrimination in a world that needs to be protected for them.

It is an undeniable fact that productivity in every nation originates from university students properly guided in the cultural, social and economic virtues and aspirations of the nation, which must exclude any dehumanizing treatment. What it means then is that these youngsters should be afforded that opportunity to realise their aspirations but when they are treated as aliens in their own motherland it spells nothing other than doom not only for themselves but the whole nation. The support and guidance that needs to be given to university students and children in general should not be divorced from the UN Millennium Development Goals which provide the road map for human development. It is actually in this spirit that the Heads of State and Government attending the UN Special Session on Children (2000) conceded that children's greatest needs and aspirations point to a world that facilitates a rich human development based on 'principles of democracy, equality, non-discrimination, peace, social justice and the universality, indivisibility, interde-

pendence and interrelatedness of all human rights, including the right to development (Lamba: 2004, 3).

It is unfortunate indeed that some of the landlords/ladies of the locations under discussion are manipulating on the failure of MSU to provide adequate accommodation for all its students but such failure by the university can hardly be said to be an intended negligence on the part of the university. Just as in other areas that pertain to the welfare of youths, lack of adequate resources often stands in the way of the noble desire to improve the welfare of students. Echoing a similar sentiment the UN Secretary General noted that goals for youth improvement have been hampered by inadequate government funding – a most critical factor in developing youth capabilities and capacities, and a serious challenge for the UN global agenda in the creation of a world fit for children (Lamba: 2004,3).

## Conclusion

To conclude, though Zimbabwe is largely a Christian nation, it appears there is still a long way to go before its inhabitants really get transformed from being mere bearers of the name Christian to real doers of what that name entails. The rivalry, for example, between adherents of different parties in the political sphere speaks volumes of where we stand as a nation if we are to be measured in terms of our commitment to Christ. Such rivalry and less concern for the other which are often fuelled by political inclinations cascade down to how the young are brought up. As a result of the political climate in Zimbabwe, many of the older generations are suspicious of the young generations especially university students, labelling them as after the agenda of change. This culminates in students being treated anyhow or even as objects of abuse like in the case of MSU students that formed the basis of discussion in this paper. Given that they are the future of the nation and that many are actually coming from struggling families, they surely deserve better treatment through fair rental charges during their period of study at Midlands State University. The call to holiness surely remains a challenge to the Zimbabwean nation and no matter how people ignore it, the sound of its echo is becoming louder and louder as we live in this global village.

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## “Let them come to me!”

A Critical Reflection on the Plight of Children in Zimbabwe from 2000-2008 in light of Mark 10:13

*Nyasha Madzokere*

*Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future.  
Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation.*  
(Nelson Madiba Mandela 1994)

### Introduction

Children are a treasure to every society in the whole world. They are an asset of great treasure not a liability as the now deceased and most celebrated African statesman, Nelson Madiba Mandela, reiterated in the above key statement. They should be provided with all the basic necessities to live life holistically. They should not be subjected to any form of abuse. Children’s rights range from right to decent life, health, education, to food, shelter, clothing, security and peace to mention just but a few. In Zimbabwe these rights are enforced by the United Nations Declaration of Children’s rights, the African Charter for Children’s rights, the Lancaster House Constitution and the recently adopted new Constitution of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a signatory to various conventions of the United Nations which enforce and uphold children’s rights. Paradoxically, the Zimbabwean government in *woord* not in *daad* promotes such rights. The country has a very nasty record locally, regionally and internationally with regards the observation of such rights. The Zimbabwe crisis of 2000-2008 which attracted a lot of research from quite a number of scholars was characterized by gross human rights violations. (Raftopolous 2004, 2009). The leadership of the country, in a bid to pro-



tect their political power, bred disasters which totally buried children's rights. Why should a country which is a signatory to the noted conventions that protect children's rights in contrast top the list among violators of the same rights? Such violations were not only detrimental to men and women but the children who are the most vulnerable in every society. Advocates of the rights of children anywhere the world-over put it in red and white that, "children's rights are human rights" so they should strictly be observed by everyone. Zimbabwe, with an approximate population of eighty percent Christians (Sibanda & Madzokere 2013), should draw lessons from Jesus Christ who through his teachings and deeds deserves to earn the designation- a human rights activist par-excellence. He deserves such an accolade because of his role in the healing of the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the discomfoted, casting out demons of those possessed, raising the dead, restoring sight for the blind, cleansing the lepers and, above all, loving the despised and down-trodden in every society especially women and children (Madzokere 2014). This chapter challenges the government of Zimbabwe for its tarnished record in as far as human rights are concerned. The human rights violators in the country should draw lessons from Jesus Christ who demonstrated love to the children (Mark 10:13) by welcoming them heartily. The children were shunned and despised by the disciples but Jesus' *pro-paidia* attitude should be yelled. The study takes a contextual re-reading of Jesus' story to advocate for a radical Christo-centric approach to children hence the caption, "Let them come to me!". It is divided into the following sections: The Children in the Bible, The Children's rights in quandary in Zimbabwe, Children's rights in Summary, Violations of Children's rights during Farm invasions (*Jambanja*), Children's rights suffocation during Operation Restore Order(*Tsunami*), Children's rights deprivation during the Recurrent Disputed Elections, Children's rights thrashed during the 'Bloody' Presidential residential Run-off Election, "Let them come to me!": embracing a Christo-centric approach to Children and last but not least the conclusion.

## Children in the Bible

This section discusses the scriptural texts that make references to children in the whole Bible. Through the application of exegesis to a selected scriptural texts, the chapter would examine the children biblically from

the both the Old and New Testament. The study would select a sizeable number of scriptural texts from the Hebrew Bible. Jannie Hunter (2012) in his book chapter entitled, "*The Bible and the quest for Developmental Justice: The case of Orphans in Namibia*" committed a section on the above topic to show that the Old Testament and even New Testament values children. A closer reading of some scriptural texts from the *Torah* reveals that children were greatly valued in the Jewish society. Children were beacons of the society for they marked continuity of generations. Abraham was going to be the father of a great nation through procreation (Genesis 12:1ff). This is the reason why God commanded Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and multiply". (Genesis 1:27-28). God valued procreation because that was the way society would grow and record continuity. Children were a blessing to the society, so failure to bear children was regarded as a curse. (Exodus 18:2). This explains why Rachel was really worried after failure to bear a child for Jacob. She then desperately asked Jacob to take Bilhah her maid for a wife to bear children for her husband (Genesis 30:1-5). Bareness in this situation was regarded a curse from God so to try to quell it maids were to be taken as wives (Genesis 30:1). Children were expected to be groomed in such a way that they obey their parents and were to strictly follow the teaching of the commandments of the Yahweh as tabulated in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1ff). The *Torah* teaches that the children were to be protected from abuse or anything that was of detrimental effect to their wellbeing. The children were to be groomed in tandem with the teachings of the Law (*Torah*) of Moses because to do so would result in sin which would be an abomination to Yahweh. Performance of sin by children marked signs of failure by parents to train them which would result in a curse for the whole society. (Leviticus 19:29).

The second division of the *TaNak* (*Nebiim*-Prophets) also alludes to children and their vitality. In 1 Samuel 1:1ff there is a painful story of Elkanah with his two wives, Hannah (childless) and Peninah (with children). There is a problem of bareness in this family which for the scriptural texts already alluded to in the *Torah* was regarded a curse. Hannah went through torturous, tormentous and sorrowful moments in her life as she struggled to have a child. This is a great sign that children were a treasure in a family. Without the children a family was rendered futile and so Hannah had to pray to Yahweh for mercy. Peninah mocked her at all times because of her barrenness. Life for Hannah was very sour

just like in any society today especially African as noted by Shoko (2011), who notes that among the Shona, *kushaya mwana chiseko chenyika* (failure to bear a child is a curse). Bareness would result in worst ridicule, torment, abuse and at times being chased away back to your parents' home by the husband. If it is a husband who is barren, the wife might go back to her parents or might be requested by the elders of the family to secretly have sexual intercourse with the young brother of the husband for procreation to take place. This practice is called *kupinda mumba mamukoma* (to bear children for a barren brother). This would be a desperate way of trying to solve the problem of bareness. (Shoko 2011). Yahweh in the case of Hannah had to answer her prayers and blessed him with Samuel. This marked a transition in her life because now she was happy and blessed to show the vitality attached to children. This showed that children were considered a blessing from God. This also means that children should grow in a way that pleases God, otherwise they would be an abomination to society like the children of the priest Eli (Hophni and Phinehas) who, because of their corrupt practices, were condemned by God to death (1 Samuel 1:2).

The third division of the *TaNaK* (*Kethubim*/ Writings) as well makes references to children who should be valued always. In Psalms 127:3, children are referred to as a “heritage of the Lord”. In Proverbs 13:22, one is referred to as a “good man” as long as he demonstrated the ability to leave inheritance for his children’s children. This means that one is also regarded a “bad man” if he fails to leave inheritance for his children’s children. A critical reading of the above scriptural text shows that parents, in particular the fathers, are supposed to work hard to accumulate material possessions for their personal use and also for preservation for immediate generations and after. This would be assurance for the sustainability of such if the parents would be no-more. A critical reading of the New Testament with specific reference to the Synoptic Gospels shows how Jesus valued children visa-vis the disciples who shunned them (openbible.info 2013).

### **The Children’s rights in quandary in Zimbabwe**

The period 2000-2008 was referred to as the “*Zimbabwe crisis*” because of the nature of chaos and calamity politically, socially, economically and spiritually not only for the adult population of Zimbabwe but the young

generations (the vulnerable children) hence the caption, "*The children's rights in quandary in Zimbabwe*". The children of our country during this time were seriously subjected to gross deprivation of their basic entitlements. There was a record of gross violations of human rights due to political, social, economic and humanitarian crises that bedevilled Zimbabwe during this period.-(Raftopolous 2004, 2009). The violation of both adults and children's rights was exacerbated by the 'disasters' that the country created artificially. Such artificial disasters were the Fast Track Land Reform programme (FTLR) of year 2000 to date, generally known as *Hondo yeminda/ Third Chimurenga/ Jambanja*, Operation Restore Order in 2005 commonly known as *Murambatsvina* or *Zimbabwe Tsunami*, the Recurrent Disputed Elections of year 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 (Zhou & Makahamadze 2012) and the 'Bloody' Presidential election of June, 2008 generally termed '*Militarized*' (Masunungure 2009). These disasters are going to be discussed to find out how they resulted in the violation of children's rights. It is crucial at this juncture to state in summary the rights of children and see how they were violated in Zimbabwe. The total deprivation of all such rights during 2000-2008 (*time of chaos and pandemonium*) in Zimbabwe therefore takes centre stage.

## The Children's rights in summary

This chapter relies on the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993 whose preamble states clearly:

The basic principles of the United Nations and the specific provisions of certain relevant human rights treaties and proclamations. It reaffirms the fact that children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection, and it places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. It also reaffirms the need for legal and other protection of the child before and after birth, the importance of the respect for cultural values of the child's community, and the vital role of international co-operation in securing children's rights.

A definition of the term 'child', responsibility of the state and the summary of the rights of the children are tabulated below ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)). This summary is utilized below when the article discusses how these rights of children were violated during the era of turmoil (2000-2008) in post-independent Zimbabwe.

- A child is recognized as a person under the age of eighteen, unless the national laws recognize the age of majority earlier.
- It is the State's obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination and take positive action to promote their rights.
- The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with the responsibility, fail to do so.
- Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development.
- The child has the right to a name at birth.
- The State has the obligation to protect, and if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of the child's identity. This includes name, nationality and family ties.
- The child has the right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed to be incompatible with the child's interests.
- The child also has the right to maintain contact with both parents if separated one or both.
- Children and their parents have the right to leave any country and to enter their own for purposes of reunion or the maintenance of the child-parent relationship.
- The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have opinion taken into account in any manner or procedure affecting the child.
- The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information, make ideas or make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers.
- The State shall respect the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance.
- Children have a right to meet others, and to join or form associations.
- Children have the right to protection from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence, and from libel or slander.
- The State shall ensure the accessibility to children of information and material from diversity of sources, and it shall encourage the mass media to disseminate information which is of social and cultural benefit to the child, and to take steps to protect him or her from harmful materials.

- Parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, and the State shall support them in this.
- The State shall provide appropriate assistance for parents in child-raising.
- The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programs for the prevention of abuse and treatment of victims.
- The State is obliged to provide special protection for a child deprived of the family environment and ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is available in such cases.
- A disabled child has the right to special care, education and training to help him or her to enjoy a full and decent life in dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.
- The child has the right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. The child has a right to benefit from social security including social insurance.
- Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- Parents have the primary responsibility to ensure quality of the standard of living of their children.
- The State's duty is to ensure that this responsibility can be fulfilled by offering material assistance to parents and their children.
- The child has a right to education, and the State's duty is of ensuring that primary education is free and compulsory, to encourage different forms of secondary education accessible to every child and to make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity.
- The child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his or her health, education or development.
- Children have the right to protection from the use of narcotic and psychotropic drugs, and from being involved in their production or distribution.
- The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.
- It is the obligation of the State to make an effort to prevent the sale,

trafficking, abduction of children or any form of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

- No child shall be subjected to torture, cruel treatment or punishment, unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty.

Most of the rights tabulated above were seriously violated during the Zimbabwe Crisis from 2000-2008 which forms the core of this article. The Jesuit authors Stanislaus and Alexander Muyebe (2001) categorically follow suit and show the importance of observing these rights because, 'children's rights are human rights'. The thought provoking questions raised in this article are as follows: How were these rights of children tabulated above violated during the disastrous and turbulent period of year 2000-2008 in the history of Zimbabwe? How did such humanitarian crises in the country affect the rights of children? What lessons can be drawn from the story of Jesus and children as recorded in the Gospel according to Mark chapter 10:13? What lessons can be drawn from the attitude of the disciples of Jesus towards the children? How can Jesus story serve as a deterrent to the violators of children's rights in the country? These questions are examined in this article in a bid to contextualize biblical teachings to the Zimbabwe situation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Children's rights during farm invasions (*Jambanja*)**

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLR) implemented by the government of Zimbabwe from year 2000 had gross violations of human rights and worst still deprivation of the rights of the vulnerable children. The FTLR as the name depicts was characterized by violence which was haphazardly applied to the elderly and youth across the board (Manzungu 2004, Tofa 2012). The children from the least age group up to those within the age of majority suffered a lot due to political violence which was seriously prevalent. The children were killed mercilessly in the name of politics especially those who were supporters of the opposition parties.(Machingura 2010, Sachikonye 2011). The opposition parties attracted the youths because of their appealing manifestos. They promised youths that the problem of unemployment was going to be a thing of the past. During this time, the unemployment rate in the country was approximately around eighty percent. (Madzokere & Machingura 2014). Industries had closed down across the whole country and efforts to

overhaul them were not forthcoming. The situation was hopeless so there was need to inject hope in hopeless youths of this era. It had led to serious permanent signposts of abject poverty and hunger in the whole country (Madzokere & Machingura 2014 *ibid*). The children's right to live a descent life was now a nightmare. Such levels of abject poverty made children susceptible to diseases, starvation and malnutrition which sometimes led to loss of life. Statistics show that during the *Zimbabwe crisis* there was a skyrocketing rate of child mortality due to such precipitating factors. The government of Zimbabwe, as signatory to various United Nations Conventions that promote children's rights, had totally failed to live up to its mandate. Under the FTLR, however, ZANU-PF party militias, often led by veterans of Zimbabwe's Liberation war, carried out serious acts of violence against farm owners, farm workers and their children. (Sachikonye 2004). They used occupied farms as bases, camps for attacks, against residents of surrounding areas. The youths were recruited to terrorize whoever was suspected to be a supporter of the opposition party. In these camps or bases there was serious sexual abuse of girls which was very detrimental to their lives as most of them fell victim to HIV & AIDS. (Madzokere & Makahamadze 2013). The police did little to halt such violence, and in some cases were directly implicated in the abuses. Those who should preserve life spontaneously became perpetrators of such rights abuses. Police officers are law enforcers but now were more enforcers of violence to the very people they should protect. The FTLR was masterminded on partisan basis because if you were a supporter of the opposition or suspected to be one, then you were not supposed to benefit at all. In year 2000 many people – men, women and children – who were identified as 'enemies of the state' were killed in broad day light (Tofa 2012). The right to life for children and their parents was seriously violated because of FTLR. Zimbabwe's several hundred thousand farm workers were largely excluded from the FTLR, even as many lost their jobs, driven from the farms where they worked by violence or laid off because of a collapse in commercial agricultural production. Even those people allocated plots on former commercial farms appeared in many cases to have little security of tenure on the land, leaving them vulnerable to future partisan political processes or eviction on political grounds, and further impoverishment (Sachikonye 2004). Whatever that took place during this time had detrimental effects to the rights of vulnerable children. What transpired during these times of chaos and turbulence negatively affected children who



automatically found themselves without schools for they were simultaneously closed by war veterans who took over various commercial farms where the vacated owner no longer could manage the school he or she was running (Sachikonye 2004). The right to education was jeopardized because FTLR disrupted the education system which, because of resettlement, saw families moving to inaccessible areas where there were no schools or far away from schools. This meant that children had to walk long distances to school which negatively impacted on their performance in school. In some of these resettled farms, teachers were harassed by the war veterans as they were implicated to be supporters of the opposition parties so were living in fear and at times in hiding. They could not perform their duties freely so that affected the schools' results. In such remote areas hospitals were nowhere to be found so people could not get health facilities yet living in a disease prone environment. (Raftopolous 2009, Sachikonye 2011). The FTLR affected children's rights to life and education. In the same manner the disciples shunned the children who came to Jesus, the government of Zimbabwe this time deprived the children of their basic rights. Their right to shelter was also thwarted because in the resettled farms people created 'temporary structures' which were prone to negative external forces (rain, wind, coldness) so they lived in danger. Most of the children braved the cold winter, torrential rainfall being a menace and so succumbed to life threatening diseases. This way, the state had failed to live up to its obligation to ensure child survival and development. Because of FTLR controversial nature, the resettled farmers were advised by government not to erect permanent structures for they could be removed from the farms to go back to their original places of residence at any time. Overall, the FTLR instead of promoting the rights of the children, brought about a lot of suffering and violation of children's rights. The violators of children rights had the same attitude of the disciples of Jesus Christ who rebuked children when they came to Him. Jesus Christ welcomed the children heartily to the total disapproval of the disciples' attitude.

### **Children's rights during Operation Restore Order (*Murambatsvina*/ *Tsunami*)**

Apart from the FTLR, the children were deprived of their rights by Operation Restore Order nicknamed *Murambatsvina*. Some scholars and

media practitioners referred to it as the *Zimbabwe tsunami* because of its nature of destruction which typified the Haiti tsunami which left the country in rubble. (Matanda & Madzokere 2012). This was an ambitious project which was implemented by the government of Robert Mugabe in 2005 immediately after the Parliamentary elections which saw the opposition getting overwhelming support from the civil population (Sachikonye 2011). The reasons for its implementation rally around two schools of thought—the *pro-state* and *anti-state*. The *pro-state* school as the name denotes is in support of the government masterminding of the Operation. This school argues that the leadership of the country embarked on a noble exercise to clear off the urban and growth points of crime, dirt and illegal shanty dwellings. (Chirongoma 2009). The *anti-state* school of thought as the name depicts is totally against the Operation because, for this school, the *Zimbabwe tsunami/ Murambatsvina* was a political gimmick employed by government to punish the urbanites who had voted enormously in support of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This school argues that Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front party (ZANU-PF) realized that it was fast losing the urban support to the opposition as evidenced by the shocking results of the Parliamentary and Presidential elections of 2000 & 2002 (Chirongoma 2009). To try to address this political challenge, ZANU-PF strategically implemented *Murambatsvina* to silence the adamant urban voters who had ditched Robert Mugabe's party. This Operation was a politically motivated strategy done for political survival. (Zhou & Makahamadze 2012). An estimated 700,000 people were directly affected and 2.5 million people were indirectly affected by such an operation. This operation led to serious humanitarian crises where the poor urbanites found themselves living under no roofs on their heads. This was worse for children who were now susceptible to the negative external forces – wind, rain and cold. Just like the FTLR, the Zimbabwe tsunami caused a lot of suffering to the children and people of other age groups. It was unbearable for those who were infected and affected by HIV&AIDS (Chirongoma 2009). The state failed its duty to protect children from the evils of this Operation. The children's survival and development were made a nightmare due to the *Zimbabwe tsunami*. Quite a number of children lost their lives due to failure to have shelter, starvation, and disease. It should not be referred to as *Murambatsvina* (Operation clear-off the filth) but *Murambavanhu* (Operation clear-off the people) because people not filth were the victims of such an evil perpetrated by the

leadership of the country. Anna Tabaijuka (2005)-the United Nations Special Envoy visited Zimbabwe and compiled a critical report which condemned such a project as one of the worst in Africa and beyond. *Murambvanhu* (Operation clear-off the people) as implemented by the violators of basic children's rights, saw the social, mental, physical, moral and spiritual development of such children, in particular, being jeopardized totally. Such a development led many families to have a forced migration from the cosmopolitan cities to the rural areas because they were now homeless. They were now struggling to fend for their families and look for descent accommodation at the same time during such horrible times of escalating inflation and abject poverty. The parents could not afford to give their children descent clothes, send them to creches, schools, colleges or universities because of the economic nightmare which prevailed during this time. These children could not afford to access health facilities as parents were now burdened by the worst problem of homelessness hence there was suffocation of children's rights (Madzokere & Matanda 2012). By depriving children of their basic rights, the government of Zimbabwe resembled the disciples of Jesus who blocked the children who came to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was angered by the disciples' attitude towards the children so he challenged them to stop rebuking them.

### **Children's rights during the recurrent disputed elections in Zimbabwe**

The rights of children were not violated by the FTLR and the *Zimbabwe tsunami* only but also by 'recurrent' flawed elections that took place in the country in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008. (Good 2002, Kagoro 2008). The words "recurrent & disputed" used here are selected accordingly because these two words summarize what transpired in these series of elections which were held in our country. The Zimbabwe elections are generally characterized by politically motivated violence which takes place before, during and after the voting process (Masunungure 2009, Makumbe 2009). How did these series of elections deprive the children of enjoying their basic rights? There was a lot of rivalry between the strongest parties, ZANU-PF and MDC-T, which created hatred among the Zimbabweans who belonged to either of these two parties or other various parties. Elections are instituted in any country to ensure that

democracy prevails but in Zimbabwe, election time is the worst time for people because it means that people would be fighting each other for political survival. The spirit of political survival overrides that of national survival so people kill each other to remain in power or get into power. Due to political violence, many people died from 2000 to 2008. In the midst of turbulence, children also fell victim to politically related massacre especially if their parents happened to be members of the opposition parties. The children and the adults were killed without any protection from the law enforcers and the leadership of the country. The leaders of the country were the chief culprits who, because of being champions of political survival, massacred many people in order to remain in power. The statistical data show that there were quite a substantial number of children, wives and relatives of politically aligned people who were killed mercilessly. This was detrimental to peace, development and human rights record of the country. Many people were maimed during this period before, during and even after the elections as a way of silencing dissenting voices (Raftopolous 2004, 2009). Children were caught in the crossfire in all such series of flawed elections where their rights were jeopardized especially right to life, shelter and food (Mangena & Chitando 2011).

### **Children's rights during the 'Bloody' Presidential Run-off Election**

After Mugabe lost the election in March, 2008 to Morgan Tsvangirai of MDC-T, he decided to employ the worst tactics to frighten his rival. He employed the state institutions – military, police and intelligence – to dish out systemic violence to the masses (Chitando & Togarasei 2009). The political violence was leashed out beserkly to the supporters of the opposition party. This time in the history of Zimbabwe politics, the MDC party was the 'peoples party' because of the overwhelming support that Morgan Tsvangirai got against his rival Robert Mugabe of the ZANU-PF party. This is the first time Robert Mugabe lost an election from the time the country got independence in 1980. In a state of shock and despair, Robert Mugabe championed the merciless killing of whoever was suspected a supporter of the opposition party. The killing targeted children, adults and the elderly in the same manner. The protection of power was valued more than the preservation of life. There were serious human rights violations during the run-up to this 'sham'

election. There was an Operation nicknamed *Makavhotera papi* (*where did you put your vote?*). Violence seems to have become an entrenched ‘disease’ if not a culture in the Zimbabwean society and most of the violence is election-related (Machingura 2010, Masunungure 2009). The masses were terrorized by those who claimed to be the promoters of democracy yet they were the perpetrators of chaos and calamity. These disasters turned Zimbabwe from a jewel to a war-torn zone in Africa which showed gloom rather than glory of 1980. The pathetic and merciless situation was the beating of a Mudzi child during the run-up to the Run-off Presidential election in May, 2013 which was posted internationally on media networks to show the world the notorious level of abuse of children rights. (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2008). The ZANU-PF destroying machine was not selective as long as one was labelled an opposition force. The rights of both adults and young were totally jeopardized due to the ‘*bloody*’ election of June, 2008 (Masunungure 2009).

### **“Let them come to me!” – embracing a Christo-centric approach to children**

Jesus Christ was a human rights activist par-excellence as demonstrated by his hearty welcome of children. Taking Jesus’ attitude towards children at face value might appear as usual but a critical analysis of such shows a radical and unsettling type of attitude as a true reflection of his life and parabolic teachings. He said to his disciples, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them for the kingdom of God is theirs”. The disciples of Jesus shunned them but that made Him “indignant”. Jesus Christ was angered by such attitude shown by his disciples to the children. Van Aarde (2004) in his article entitled: “*Jesus’ Affection towards Children and Matthew’s Tale of Two Kings*” argues that children referred here should be regarded as the “expendable class” in such a society just like “street urchins”. They were ostracized and despised in a socially stratified society. The disciples employed the tactics of exclusion and powerlessness to stumble block children from Jesus Christ. This scriptural text on Jesus’ affection towards children should be regarded historically authentic because of its multiple and independent attestation in early Christian literature. Jesus defended the cause of the fatherless children in the Synoptic Gospels which should be correctly interpreted in light of his hospitable attitude towards children. Among first century

Greeks and Romans, children were regarded of little value or importance even the word for them is neuter. There was considerable pessimism about a child due to his or her smallness, underdevelopment, and resulting vulnerability, as well as ignorance, capriciousness, and irrationality, qualities that were to be set aside through rigorous education and harsh discipline (Gundry 2008). Van Aarde (2001) in his book, *"Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as the child of God"* reflected on the socio cultural and theological implications of the fact that Joseph did not play any meaningful significance in the life of the historical Jesus. He argued that the baptism of Jesus as recorded in Mark 1:9 fits well in social context of someone who went to John the Baptist to "wash himself" of "systemic evil" to "plead for the widow" and "defend the fatherless". According to this particular view in Mark (1:10-11), the ("Joseph-less") Jesus the child of Mary (Mark 3:31-35; 6:3) was believed to be the child of God. By this remark, Aarde argues that Mark anticipates in his account in Mark 10:1-12 and 13-16 that Jesus the child of God pleaded for the ("patriarchless") widow and the (fatherless) street child. In this way Jesus was sounding very feminist to defend the children who suffered from the oppressive jaws of patriarchy. The latter passage, about Jesus blessing the children and seeing them as central to the kingdom (core of this article-Mark 10:13-16), is often referred to as the *Gospel for Children* (*Evangelium Infantium* in Latin). It could only be referred to as "gospel" (good news), if it addresses issues that affect children for liberation purposes. The disciples were entrenched in patriarchy which made them despise other human beings created in the image of God. The tenets of patriarchy are oppression, domination, segregation, discrimination, subjugation and suppression. Jesus Christ came to the world so that he would dismantle all aspects of human life which promote the above tenets of patriarchy. Jesus Christ instead rebuked the disciples so that children might freely come to Him. Most scholars in the New Testament argue that Mark 10:16 is a very striking verse because Jesus Christ was symbolically performing the role of a High priest here- on the day of atonement children were blessed. This is why the chapter advocates for a Christo-centric approach to the children. This approach is displayed by Jesus Christ who had a 'open-door' rather than a 'closed door' policy towards children. He preached and lived love as evidenced by his parables and miracles in the Gospels. He was also the preacher of peace, justice, equality and unity. He welcomed children who were shunned by the disciples because they were jealous of them and were regarded useless just like women. He

preached the kingdom of God realized on earth through the teaching on parables and performance of miracles. He fed the hungry; he healed the sick, raised the dead, and comforted the discomfited. He promoted the right to life, security, health, food, education, shelter. In theory and practice, Jesus was *pro-populo* to enhance social, political, economic and spiritual growth unlike the Government of Zimbabwe and disciples of Jesus. The Zimbabwe Government deprived the children of their rights as evidenced by the chronicled disasters in this chapter. Through the embracing of the Christo-centric approach, the Government of the Zimbabwe would respect the rights of the children which would promote their growth and development. This becomes very beneficial to the country for children are the backbone of any nation for its legacy and future.

## Conclusion

Nelson Mandela's statement summarizes it all on the vitality of children in every society in a globalized world. Zimbabwe as a signatory of various conventions of the United Nations only in *woord* not in *daad* honors the rights of the children which show a paradoxical situation. The chapter tackles various aspects with regards the vitality of children in the Bible. A summary of the rights of a child and definition of the term 'child' was chronologically tabulated. A look on the Zimbabwe crisis of year 2000-2008 was covered with the chief objective of finding out how the disasters impacted negatively on the rights of children. The last section looked at the radical orthopraxis philosophy of Jesus Christ that exposed his disciples' attitude towards children which was endocentric and exclusivist. The chapter concludes with a recommendation that the Government of Zimbabwe should draw lessons from Jesus' demonstration of love to the despised children to the total disapproval of the disciples behavior and attitude hence the title of the chapter, "Let them come to me": embracing the Christo-centric approach to Children.

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## **“Let them come..., for to such belongs the Kingdom of God”**

The problems of the African Child in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

*Moji A. Ruele*

### **Introduction**

Many scholars have long brought in their own disciplinary concerns to the study of the problems faced by the African child in general; chief among them are education, sociology and psychology. However, since the years prior to the end of colonialism and the coming of independence to Africa, there has been renewed interest in bringing the study of Contextual Theology to the secular world. This resulted in Contextual Theology emerging as an intriguing and exciting area, not only of intellectual activity but as the one that has shed new light on the character of humanities and a new way of engaging the problems faced by the African child today. It is in this respect that I use Contextual theologies to understand the problems faced by the African child today. In order to locate and delimit the area through which Contextual Theology approaches the problem of the African child today, I start by referring to an article “Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity, and Place” in a book entitled *Makers and Breakers, Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Alcinda Honwana & Phillip De Boeck (2005). Alcinda Honwana & Phillip De Boeck (2005:1-8) note that in Africa, young people constitute the majority of the population and are at the centre of societal interactions and transformations. Yet children and youths are often placed at the margins of the public sphere and major political, socio-economic, and cultural processes. Many poor African children have little or no access to education, employment and livelihoods, healthcare and basic nutrition. Over the past two decades, the spread of HIV and AIDS

created a crisis of unprecedented proportions for African children. A question to ask within this stressful environment is, how do African children make sense of their daily lives? This paper attempts to use an *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach and the Bible for understanding the problems of the African child.

### **An African Liberation-Inculturation Theological approach and its significance**

In talking about the problems of the African child and the Bible, I have coined a theological phrase- an *African liberation-inculturation theological approach* to reflect on their challenges. I acknowledge that coining such a concept brings in a diverse range of meanings to this debate. This is why it is essential to begin by defining what it means and how I use it in this paper. First, I must state that it falls under the broad concept of Contextual theologies. Contextual theologians often use the term “Contextual theology of liberation” to describe oppressive and painful cultural, moral values system that characterises a particular context at a given time in a given place and how to respond to such challenges. As a phrase, *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach makes an interface of the processes of *Liberation* and *Inculturation* as understood in the African context. Jeff Astely (2002:3) writes that Contextual theology is about the church reflecting on the basis of its existence in a given context. Furthermore, all Theologies are always rooted in context. Thus, they are by nature contextual (Jeff Astely, 2002:52).

Basing on the above understanding, what then is *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach? It is when African people-children in this case, look at the symbolic features of their context, see difficulties or oppressive cultural values that deprive them of certain liberties and seek liberation. Oppression, though painful, is a necessary feature that leads to liberation. Liberation here specifically refers to a process of attaining liberty and social justice by the African child. It is about setting free the African child by replacing an oppressive culture with a liberation one. An American sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1952:18), argues that culture, that is, values, norms and symbols provide a linchpin of the solution to the problem of social order. It is in this regard that I use the African cultural norms and values with Christian ones in a process known as *Inculturation*. *Inculturation* refers to the adaptation of Christian values to

non-Christian cultures, or defining Christian tradition from an African context in a process of liberation. As a process, *Inculturation* uses Christian faith and African culture, to understand the problems of the African child. The phrase *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach therefore, refers to the adaptation of the Christian gospel to the socio-economic and political context of the African child for the purpose of liberation. As a method of theological reflection, *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach draws from the Christian tradition and African culture and context of the African child as its sources.

I would state briefly how I use this method when reflecting on the African child and the Bible. In doing so, the problems of the African child and the Bible become the starting point. In talking about the Bible in relation to the African child, I also make a contextual critical reading of the Bible. I will argue that whereas the Bible talks about the Child in general, here it must be put into context to talk specifically to the problems of the African child. Through the *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach, I also bring in a three pronged approach of taking the following: (a) reality of the pre-text as provided in the African culture (b) Community/context of the contemporary African child him/herself (c) treating the Bible as a liberating text. Three basic situations also come up. The first situation is the culture of the African child and its similarities to the Hebrew culture. In the second situation, the African child is assisted to use the Bible as a symbol of hope. In the third situation, I as an academic assist the African child to use the Bible in his/her context. With these three situations, the African child is able to hear the Word of God in the Bible and within reality. I would argue that when one of the three situations misses interpretation of the Bible, it loses meaning and becomes irrelevant to the African child. Through this approach, I maintain that when the three elements, *Bible, community and real life situation* are integrated, the Word of God in the Bible becomes meaningful for the African child. It helps the African child to overcome fears. Through this approach, I conclude that when the community takes note of the basis of the real-life problems of the people-an African child in this case, then, the Bible becomes a liberating text (Carlos Mesters, 1988:197). The most important thing with *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach is that it recognizes the bedrock of the Christian response to the problems of an African child and also make a practical reflection on the causes of their problems. This is a new method of doing theology

through which the liberation of the African child becomes primary. It also works in partnership and in dialogue with the social sciences through what Clodovis Boff (1986:11) calls socio-economic analytic mediation. According to Boff, *socio-economic analytic mediation* helps those who read the Bible to know who the poor are in society, and what the causes of their poverty are. It is in this regard that *African liberation-in-culturation theological* approach helps us to have an accurate knowledge of the concrete socio-political and economic conditions of the African child to whom they convey the Christian message from the Bible.

### **Theorizing a child from contemporary culture, African Tradition and the Bible**

#### *(a) Contemporary set up*

In order for one to understand the problems faced by the African Child, one must first look at how different scholars define it. G. Van Bueren (1995:32) describes childhood as a very complex social construct and suggests that any attempt to define and demarcate it is inevitably artificial. According to Van Bueren, childhood is a social institution, or an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted. J.S. Lafontane on the other hand notes that, whilst childhood is a biological fact of life, the ways in which it is understood, contextualized and made is a fact of culture (Lafontane 1979:7). N. Postman, (1994:13), however, distinguishes between the biological and the social aspects of childhood. For N. Postman (1994:13), childhood is a social artefact, but not a biological category. His view is shared by J. Fionda (2001:26), who notes that childhood constitutes a construct within which children are made. Thus, although the term ‘childhood’ suggests a strong association with children, childhood itself has always been dominated by adults. Consequently, children, their lives, hopes and aspirations have often been rendered invisible because these aspects of children have been overlaid with adults’ visions of their proper place in society. In basic terms, childhood may be seen as the biological or psychological phase of life somewhere between infancy and adulthood (Fionda, 2001:13). Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child (ACRWC), recognizes the child’s unique and privileged place in African society. It notes that African children

need protection and special care. It also acknowledges that children are entitled to the enjoyment of freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, thought, religion, and conscience. Its aim therefore, is to protect the private life of the child against all forms of exploitation. It also calls for protection against all forms of exploitation or sexual abuse, including commercial and illegal drug use (africa\_union.org 2012).

### *(b) African Traditional set up*

The concept of childhood in African traditional set up can best be understood in the words of John Mbiti (1975:87). He notes that the arrival of child in the family is one of the greatest blessings of life. Africans therefore greet this event with joy and satisfaction. At first the pregnant woman informs her husband and steps are immediately taken to ensure the safety of the child. Pregnancy is therefore a joyful period for the whole family. If the child is the first born, it assures every one that she is able to bear children. The woman's marriage is also largely secure and she is treated with respect by all relatives than before. Children are also considered the seal of every marriage and once the marriage has produced children, it is very rare for families to break up. On the other hand, if no children are born, marriages often break up. Children are believed to prolong the life of their parents as they perpetuate their names. According to John Mbiti (1975:87) children do not only continue the physical life, but also keep the state of their parent's personal immortality. Children are also the glory of the marriage, and the more a person has children the bigger is his glory. This traditional view of children has economic benefits. Children also add to the social stature of the family as both girls and boys have their usefulness in the eyes of their families. At home there are duties which the children are taught. They help work in the house, fields, and look after cattle. Thus, children are introduced gradually to the physical, economic, social and religious lives of their families.

### *(c) Biblical set up*

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible provide evidence of the importance of children. Finsterbusch (2004:7-1), for example, states that children play a very significant role in the book of Deuteronomy as part of the holy gatherings such as covenant assemblies and festivals. Both the Old and New Testaments present children as the images of God. It is



in this nature and love of God that people have a gift of having children (Gen, 1:27, James, 3:9). Men and women are therefore, God's laboratory of creating children. Several examples bear testimony to this fact. First, it is through the child Isaac that the making and blessing of a nation occurs. Second, the deliverance of enslaved people is foreshadowed in the rescue of a baby (Moses) found in the bulrushes. The contributions of the children to the Kingdom of God are modelled in the youthful David who killed the giant Goliath; the girl, Esther, who became a Queen to protect her people. Psalm (127:3) states that they are rewards from God. The role of children in the lives of people comes vividly in Psalm (39:13) which says, "for you created my most being, you knit me together in my mother's womb". Job (31:15) points out that children belong to God and parents manage them on his behalf. In the New Testament, throughout his ministry, Jesus lifted up the humblest children as a model of those seeking to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matt 19:14; cf Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). Probably this is because Jesus himself experienced childhood from the perspective of a low-income family (Leviticus, 12:8; Luke, 2:22-24). At the time religious leaders and Jesus were discussing the important issue of divorce, the disciples felt that this was no time for despised children to disrupt serious adult matters. Jesus surprised the disciples by calling a little boy. This left the disciples perplexed and surprised. In recognition of the children, Jesus also reminded his listeners as follows, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew, 18:3). Furthermore, he reprimanded the disciples to refrain from being *childish* and instead become *childlike*. By this, Jesus was probably speaking of humility, lowliness of heart and mind- a teachable spirit. Jesus continued, "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew, 18:4). In Mark, 9:33-37, Jesus states that in order to welcome Him, one must welcome God's children. He said to them, "Whoever welcomes the little children in my name welcomes me." This suggests that caring for children is a privilege which God entrusted to all adults. Jesus rebuked His disciples from preventing children from touching him (Mark 10:13-16). This was to show that Jesus loves children passionately. It is clear therefore, that both the Old and New Testaments describe children as part of both the religious community and covenant community.

## **A Child in African and Hebrew cultures: A comparison**

Having discussed both the African and Hebrew cultural understanding of the child, I now compare and contrast how the two cultures bring up the child. The first striking similarity is that in both cultures, parents have a great duty of bringing up and caring for children. In both cultures bringing up a child starts in the home and continues in community through structures such as informal education. According to John K. Marah (2006:9), the process of traditional education in Africa was intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the ethnic group. That is, ‘schooling’ and ‘education’, or the learning of skills, social and cultural values and norms were not separated from other spheres of life. As in any other society, the education of the African child started at birth and continued into adulthood. The education that was given to the African youth fitted the group and the expected social roles in society. Girls were socialized to effectively learn the roles of motherhood, wife, and other sex-appropriate skills. Boys were socialized to be hunters, herders, agriculturalists, blacksmiths, etc., depending on how the particular ethnic group, clan or family derived its livelihood. Scanlon (1964:3) states, “the education of the African before the coming of the European was an education that prepared him to be a responsible adult in his home, his village and his tribe.” African initiation schools, for example, are highly spiritual and religious institutions. In traditional African society, child sexual abuse was unheard of. It may, however, have been happening but the society at large had created a system where children were protected through many avenues, including stringent taboos. Customs in many African societies required every child (boys and girls) to attend initiation schools. Initiates were/are taught customary laws, values and conduct. In traditional African societies, parents were not only the primary socializing agents for children, but they were totally accountable for the protection of children (Hunter, 2012:70). Despite the advent of modernization, many tribal authorities still view adults who have not undergone initiation as children. It is only after initiation that children have the right to make independent decisions. This is part of the entire process of socialization. It is unfortunate that, with time, some parents have abdicated their responsibilities to bring up children to friends, teachers and religious groups.

Like the African society, the Hebrew society has a unique education system since the times of David and Solomon. In this system, parents

were expected to train children and bring them up into adults. The Law of Moses, in particular, was the cornerstone of how parents were to bring up children. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy, the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment instructs children to respect their parents. Proverbs (23:13-14; 29:15) instructs parents to bring up children properly as training children in godliness is primarily their responsibility. In the book of Ephesians (6:1-2), the apostle Paul has a special word for children, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother so that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” One other feature found in both African culture and Hebrew is circumcision of male offspring.

God said to Abraham: “you, you shall keep my covenant, every male child among you shall be circumcised (*mul*); and you shall be circumcised (*namal*) in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant. And the uncircumcised (*Arel*) male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” (Genesis, 17:9-12).

The surgical removal of the foreskin of the male penis (Leviticus, 12:1-3) was said to be a sign of the covenant Yahweh made with Abraham (Sider and Unruh, 2007: 128-137). African tribes are also known to initiate their children in large numbers. As part of the initiation process, males are circumcised and females are at times given genital operation during this transition. Both the Hebrew and African cultures taught children at centers and initiation schools practical jobs, leadership skills, kindness, knowledge and honesty. Art and industry, handicrafts/work formed part of the child’s early development. In both cultures, practical skills were taught to ensure prosperity and success of the child (*economic empowerment at a tender age*). Short stories, parables and proverbs were also used to teach these children loyalty, responsibility, art of life, wisdom and how to behave even when in power (*morality and values*). In both traditions deviant behaviour such as prostitution, dishonesty and others were also discouraged. Those who did not comply with the instructions of the elders were told that they would suffer misfortune. Children were seen as pillars of society and future leaders.

## **Problems of the child in contemporary Africa**

This section of the paper deals with the problems faced by the child in Africa today. It notes that the general problems faced by the African child results from political structures and economies marked by the institutionalization of gross social inequalities. As a result, this has made freedom for the African child so scarce in the continent. James Riley Estep J.R. (2007:144-147) for example, points out that there is a historic link between poverty and violence to children, both physical and emotional. Given the unfavourable conditions of life, the African child would rather ask with Psalm 137: how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange/ foreign land, or complain with an old black spiritual lamentation from slave days: How can I play, when I'm in a strange land? Below I discuss some of the problems giving the child little cause for rejoicing, such as abject poverty, HIV and AIDS, lack of proper education and child abuse.

### *(a) Poverty*

Different scholars define the concept poverty in many different ways. This might be because poverty is essentially a relative rather than an absolute phenomenon (Sleeman, 1976:55). Gutierrez (1973: 163) notes that poverty is an equivocal term. But the ambiguity of the term does nothing more than expressing the ambiguity of the notions themselves which are involved. The term 'poverty' designates in the first place material poverty, that is, the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of the name. In this sense, poverty, is considered degrading and is rejected by the conscience of contemporary persons. Even those who are not, or do not wish to be, aware of the root causes of poverty believe that it should be struggled against. Contoure Pamela (2000:11), for example, notes that poverty is a social, economic and political problem of enormous proportions and complexity, and children are its most vulnerable victims. On a similar note, Jennifer Coulter Stapleton (2007:18) notes that poverty refers to inadequate persistent income or inability to purchase goods and services necessary for quality of life. It means falling below the standard of living enjoyed by one's contemporaries. Bill Ehlig & Ruby Payne (1999:10) on the other hand, note that that persistent poverty also entails lack of cultural and social capital (the web of relationships, connections, opportunities, skills and the cultural know-how) that enables children to learn to function productively in

society. This makes poverty an unbearable variable. The main problem with poverty is that it threatens and sometimes destroys valued relationships and denies the world the gifts of those whose lives never reach their potential. Poverty is a major problem in the African continent. In fact the African continent includes some of the poorest part of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, environmental conditions such as global warming and desertification exacerbate the conditions of poverty. This may lead to starvation as families may not have financial resources to support themselves. The problem with starvation is that it also leads to malnutrition and underweight children. Poverty also forces families to rely on food donations. Poverty in Africa also results from political instability and wars. Many children in Africa are poor because they are born in poor families. Others are poor because their countries are poor. Children living in poverty are doubly vulnerable. They suffer material deprivation, hunger, illness, dilapidated schools and unsafe housing. They are also powerless against the adults and institutions who all too often neglect, demean, and abuse them and government that fails to provide justice. Throughout many African countries, countless children, mostly under the age of fourteen (14), have left their families in search of work elsewhere. Some departed "voluntarily" or at the urging of their parents to escape the severe poverty in their home areas. Others were ensnared by labour traffickers. Pamela Contoure (2000:24) notes that children in Africa live in material poverty and the poverty of tenuous connections in a social ecology: a web of family and friends, local and national institutions and culture. Compounding the tragedy of poverty is that it is preventable, however, there is lack of moral vision, political will, and motivation to address the problems associated with poverty. That is the reason why the question is not why Africa is poor remains in the minds of many theologians and ethicists. It is in this regard that poverty represents profound theological and missiological crises and challenge to the Church as an institution that is morally expected to show compassion to the needy. Christians often have a tendency to give material poverty a positive value, considering it almost a human and religious ideal. It is seen as austerity and indifference to the things of this world and a precondition for a life in conformity with the Gospel. Geographically, more than 70 percent of malnourished children live in the third world countries with, 26 percent of them in Africa and 4 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people in extreme poverty has increased with Sub-Saharan Africa becoming the

home to 70% of the poorest people in the world. This region has the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) in the world, with more than 60% of the population spending less than US\$1 a day. (data.unaids.org 2014). This also makes children in Africa the most visible victims of malnutrition. Children who are poorly nourished suffer up to 160 days of illness each year. Under nutrition magnifies the effect of every disease, including measles and malaria. By causing poor health, low levels of energy, and even mental impairment, hunger can lead to even greater poverty by reducing people's ability to work and learn, thus leading to even greater hunger. This vicious cycle of poverty is sometimes compounded by teenage marriages in some African societies. Indeed, girls who marry young in Africa are mostly from poor families and have low levels of education. Traditionally, if they marry men outside their village, they must move away, which may cause loneliness and isolation. As these girls assume their new roles as wives and mothers, they also inherit the primary job of a domestic worker. Because the husband has paid a hefty dowry, the girl is also under an immediate pressure to prove her fertility. Girls often embrace their fate and bear children quickly to secure their identity, status, and respect as an adult. As a result, these young girls have high total fertility rates but have missed the opportunity to be children – to play, develop friendships, bond, become educated, and build social skills. Africa news. (bluegecko.org 2014).

### *(b) Lack of proper education*

In order to understand how lack of education can be a problem for the African child, it is important first of all to define education. Many different scholars define education in many different ways. R.S. Peters (1967:3) for example, defines education as a ceremony of initiation where a person already initiated (the teacher) introduces uninitiated people (the pupils) to the knowledge that the society wants them to master, know and remember. Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. A good education is important to improve the life of every child. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1949 stipulated that,

Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (Unicef, 2003:12-14).

It is, however, unfortunate that many children in Africa lack financial resources to be able to go to school. A large portion of the African population has people who live below the poverty line, and thus many families cannot afford to take their children to school because it is expensive. The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to the child in some African countries. This has caused underprivileged children not to have formal education. Poor children are twice as likely to drop out of school, abscond, held back in grade, or be suspended or expelled as are non-poor children. According to a survey by UNICEF staff on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) on child labour and school attendance from 18 countries, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest share of child labourers worldwide. In the 18 countries in this region with data on child labour, 38 per cent of all children between 7 and 14 years of age are engaged in work that can be considered harmful to their development. Among these children, slightly more than half (20 per cent of the total) also attend school while another 18 per cent are only engaged in labour (see the graph below). Overall, 60 per cent of all children between 7 and 14 years attend school; 21 per cent of all children are neither in school nor do they engage in labour. These children may, however, perform work that is not considered labour, for example household work for less than 28 hours per week. Although many children manage to combine work and school attendance, there is a clear trade-off between the two activities. The following graph plots the child labour and school attendance rates in 18 African countries. In countries with a high share of child labourers, school attendance tends to be low. At the extreme ends of the distribution are Swaziland, with a school attendance rate of 78 per cent and a child labour rate of 10 per cent, and Niger, with a school attendance rate of 30 per cent and a child labour rate of 72 per cent. A disaggregation of the data on child labour, shown in the graph below, reveals large disparities that are hidden by the national averages. Overall, 38 per cent of children between 7 and 14 years of age from the 18 countries analysed are engaged in child labour. Children between 7 and 10 years are somewhat more likely to be

labourers than children between 11 and 14 years. This is due to the definition of child labour: A boy or girl up to 11 years of age only has to spend one hour on economic work to be considered a child labourer. Older children have to spend at least 14 hours on economic work to be counted as child labourers. Because of the inclusion of household chores in the analysis, we are able to see that the share of child labourers among girls is the same as among boys, about 38 per cent. On the other hand, the area of residence is strongly associated with child labour: Rural children (43 per cent) work much more than urban children (25 per cent). The highest share of child labourers is found among the poorest 20 per cent of all households. In this group, 45 per cent of all children are engaged in labour. By comparison, a child from the richest household quintile is almost half as likely to be working (24 per cent child labourers). Lastly, the education of the primary caretaker is also associated with the probability of child labour. If the mother or caretaker has at least primary education, her children are less likely to work than children of caretakers without a formal education (Gibbons, Elizabeth, et al 2005).

### *(c) HIV and AIDS*

HIV and AIDS is an epidemic within other epidemics such as poverty, gender injustice, and social discrimination of certain groups, war and violation of children's rights such as the right to education (WCC, 1997:14-15). The impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic is immense on the African child because there are a large number of children in Africa who are infected and or affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Children have lost their parents. Parents have lost their children and the poor grandparents have lost their sons and daughters to this deadly epidemic. This has increased the number of orphans and vulnerable children and causing a large number of the young ones to be without parents or guardians. The pandemic has resulted in a high number of child-headed households. Furthermore, because these children are not adequately taught, they have a high chance of contracting the HI virus while taking care of their sick parents or by being engaged in "sex games". Janie Hunter (2012:70) notes that HIV and AIDS and poverty may count as the biggest, but numerous other problems are also faced in the wake of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and poverty, apart from problems that all children face anyhow whilst growing up. As a consequence of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa, one report stated,



it is estimated that more than 18 million people have died to date, of which over 3 million were children. Additionally, more than 25 million adults are currently infected which will result in the continued increase in the number of orphaned children. To date, more than 15 million children have already been orphaned as a result of the epidemic. Another 1 million children are currently infected with the disease. (Hunter (2012:70))

HIV and AIDS are sometimes compounded by poverty. Hopwood, Hunter and Keller (2007:14) indicate that greater pressure will be created by HIV and AIDS epidemic on the extended family support system as the first impact will be felt on the household level and then will have an effect on the community and on economy. In this situation, children are normally the first to suffer. They are disrupted because of the death of one or both parents.

#### *(d) Child Abuse*

Child abuse is still a common phenomenon in many countries, with a considerable variation in prevalence across countries and regions; with the highest prevalence in African countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child abuse includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and negligent treatment and exploitation (WHO Press 2006). In general, one distinguishes four forms of child abuse: emotional or psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. There are however, various forms of child abuse, and below I discuss just a few. According to Hancock, Maxine & Karen Burton Mains (1987:13) the first and the most common is physical abuse which occurs when an adult deliberately hurts a child or makes them do physical labour at a tender age. It also occurs when parents/any elder relative or stranger harms the child in any way. It has been estimated that 158 million children, aged 5-14, are engaged in labour, as of 2006. More than one third of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are working. The second type of child abuse is emotional abuse which normally occurs when a parent withholds affection and warmth from a child, or parents verbally abuse children. For example, saying words like 'stupid', 'ass', 'fool', make a child feel worthless. It also occurs when parents/adults do not attend to child needs, even when showing children pornographic pictures. Thirdly, there is neglect which occurs when a parent does not attend to child basic needs, e.g. food, clothing and medication. This may contribute to children moving on to

the street. Finally, there is sexual abuse, one of the largest crimes against children. It occurs when parents/adults attempt to caress/fondle children's private parts to derive sexual pleasure- attempts to have sexual intercourse. Sexual abuse of children and youth is perhaps the most disturbing manifestation of sexual violence. It is, however, unfortunate that many people have a difficult time imagining that an adult could wilfully exploit a child sexually, especially an adult related to the child. As a result, this common childhood experience is frequently overlooked. It is particularly difficult to admit the reality of child sexual abuse, so eyes and ears are closed to its victims who seek help. If no one sees it, then it "does not exist". There are few accurate statistics regarding sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children as these crimes are often covert, secret and associated with intense feelings of shame that prevent children and adults from seeking help and reporting them. Although statistics in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation are broad estimations and should be treated with caution, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 are estimated to have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence and exploitation involving physical contact (Hancock, Maxine & Karen Burton Mains 1987:13). In 2000, it was estimated that 1.8 million children were being sexually exploited in prostitution and pornography. Around 1 million children are thought to enter prostitution every year (Hancock, Maxine & Karen Burton Mains 1987:13). Although the majority of the child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse are girls, both girls and boys, of all ages and backgrounds, everywhere in the world, fall victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. However, the highest prevalence rate of child sexual abuse geographically was found in Africa.

### **Towards an African Liberation-Inculturational theological approach to the problems of the African child**

As stated above, this paper attempts to use an *African liberation-inculturational theological* approach to reflect on the problems of the African child. *African liberation-inculturational theological* approach would be tailored as a child centered theology that will constantly look into the problems of the African child. It notes that the African child cannot rejoice without care. As Abitol and Louise (1995:23) rightly say, "A nation needs some form of intervention when a majority of her youth wakes up in the morning

facing nothing but despair, fear and frustration.” The problems faced by the African child and youth present a huge challenge to the Church and the African society as a whole. It is, however, unfortunate that for too long, these problems have been ignored or overlooked by religious institutions. I will argue in this paper that for an *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach to work, there is also a need for making a hermeneutic interpretation of the problems faced by the African child. The *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach recognizes that the interpretation of the Bible must always be dependent on the mindset and concerns of its readers and victims, the African child in this case. It therefore gives privileged attention to those aspects of the Bible that deals with the problems of a child. D. Robinson (1997:6) points out that in once colonized territories, the Bible has often served in a threefold way: (i) as a channel of colonization, parallel to and connected with education and the overt or covert control of markets and institutions; (ii) as a ‘lightning-rod’ for cultural inequalities persisting after the demise of colonialism; and (iii) as a channel of decolonization.. In the case of this paper, the Bible comes in as a ‘lightning-rod’ for cultural inequalities between the child and the elder. *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach invites people to respond to the gospel in profoundly concrete ways. It does this by looking at the socio-economic, cultural and political viewpoints of the people and by reading from their situation. It is because of that reason that when *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach finds that the African child lives in oppression, it goes back to the Bible to look for nourishment capable of sustaining them in the struggles of their lives. The Bible is very relevant because it teaches us that God identifies with the poor. Within that vision of faith, the Scripture is then transformed into a dynamic vehicle for liberation of the African child. The main principles guiding *African liberation-inculturation theological approach* are that:

1. God is present in the history of his people, bringing them salvation. He is the God of the poor and cannot tolerate oppression or injustice. This comes out clear in the book of Proverbs which states that “Those who oppress the poor insult their maker” (Proverbs 14: 31).
2. It follows that exegesis cannot be neutral, but must, in imitation of God, take sides on behalf of the poor and be engaged in the struggle to liberate the oppressed.

For the African child whose life is bedevilled with problems that deny him freedom, the Bible becomes a vehicle of liberation. The liberating Word of God is fully relevant-above all because of the capacity inherent in the "foundational events" (the exodus from Egypt, the passion and resurrection of Jesus) for finding fresh realization in the course of history. African liberation - inculturation theological approach brings a sense of a liberating praxis rooted in justice and love, and a fresh reading of the Bible which seeks to make of the Word of God more relevant and contextual to the needs of the African child. In all these ways, it underlines the capacity of text to speak to the world of the African child today. This kind of reading of the Bible highlights situations of oppression and inspires a praxis leading to social change. The *Inculturation* aspect of this method in particular, ensures that the biblical message takes root in a great variety of the African cultural terrains. The theological foundation of *Inculturation* is the conviction of faith that the Word of God transcends the cultures in which it has found expression and in the cultural context in which the African child lives. This is an important learning activity resulting with critical consciousness between practice and theory concerned with justice and injustice which also shows poverty as a form of culture and a necessary ingredient of liberation. *Inculturation* suggests that, we can only know justice by doing it, in unity of action and reflection of the Bible. It also presents culture as a tool of resisting new oppression, as Emmanuel Martey (1993:13) notes that cultural resistance has always been an integral part of the African struggle for liberation and dignity. Perhaps the post-independence African theorist who more than anyone else stressed culture as a factor of liberation is Amílcar Cabral (1979:39-40). According to Cabral, "the domination of people can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of their culture." In this case, child poverty and marginalization is a form of culture that also brings social injustice. *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach like other biblical theological methods takes the Bible as a primary source for doing theology. It also regards the Bible as a liberating text. That is why *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach goes to the scripture bearing the whole weight of problems, sorrows, and hopes of the poor African child, seeking light and inspiration from the divine Word. This is a new way of reading the Bible which is often referred to as the hermeneutics of liberation (Tamez Elsa, 1976:9). Therefore, when interpreting reality, *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach draws from the Bible the most eloquent themes

such as God the advocate of the poor and Liberator of the oppressed, the prophecy of new and just world, the kingdom given to the poor, and other verses relating to freedom in making a case for the poor African child. In this case, the plight of the poor African child would always be done from the scriptural viewpoint. Examples are then drawn from the Old and New Testament on how God always stood with the poor in general. *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach then invites the poor to make a contextual reading of both the Old and New Testament in order to address their problems (Gutierrez Gustavo, 1973:45). In this case biblical history is important because it models and illustrates the human quest for justice even today. For example, Israel's liberation from Egypt as narrated in Exodus (8:1) and Jesus' life and death stand out as the two prototypes for the contemporary human struggle for liberation. When using the Bible for an *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach, it becomes very clear that several broad pathways of action in response to child poverty in Africa exist. For example, the Bible shows us that Jesus lived out this mission by teaching, healing, and breaking the oppression of evil. He showed a special attention for those on the social margins; women, children, the disabled, and the outcasts (Sider and Unruh, 2007: 128-137). The Bible shows that whereas there is no doubt that God loves people equally, there is a special place in God's heart for poor and marginalized such as the children (Lev, 23:22; Psalm, 12:5; 140:12; 146:7-9; Proverbs, 19:17; 21:13, Isaiah 3:14-15; 25:4; Luke 1:52-53 and many other texts). Jesus' concern for the poor and children in particular comes out clearly in the book of Luke, when He announced his mission by quoting from Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free". I would argue that *African liberation-inculturation theological* approach is one way through which we in contemporary Africa are empowered by the Spirit of Christ to fight the problems of the children in Africa. One significant way of doing this is to make hermeneutics and interpretation of various texts relating to children problems and at the same time locating them in the theological African context. Hermeneutics argues that it is impossible to divorce the meaning of the text from the cultural context of the interpreter. In order to interpret any text, the interpreter unnecessarily and unavoidably brings to the text certain prior understandings or fore-understandings from his/her own culture. This process which is sometimes described by

Gadamer (1975:235-45) with the term “hermeneutic circle” helps one have an interest in issues of power, marginalization and inequality that affects the African child.

The process also helps in transforming socio-economic and political institutions and structures to make them Afro-centric so that they can have a proper hermeneutic debate with the African context and reality. This will also help bring about the religio-cultural dimension of African reality that recognizes the thoughts and actions of communalism and the spirit of sharing that has been destroyed by the advent of western civilization. Martey (1993:7-9) rightly notes that contemporary Africa as a host of three major religions namely ATR, Islam and Christianity has seen a decline of traditional world view and moral value systems leading to *anthropological pauperization* of the African person that occurs at two levels: the *political-socio economic* and the *anthropological religio-cultural*. This kind of *pauperization* of the African person (child in this case) has been expressed in theological circles as *anthropological poverty*, referring not only to “what we have” (affected at the socio-political and economic level), but also who we are affected by at the religio cultural level) (Mveng and Englebert, 1983-220). The African socio-economic and political institutions have been so adversely affected by new cultures in such a way that they now negate the basic concept of *Botho* (authentic humanity or personhood, care and compassion) (Mmualefe 2007:1), which has been one cornerstone of fighting poverty in the continent. As a concept, *Botho* is pregnant with *African* theological meaning because it implies that society is both socio economic, religio-cultural and human centred. In that case, it links morality with socio-economic development, redistribution or consultation which are all necessary ingredients in the fight against poverty of the African child and other social ills. As a result where there is *Botho* there is development. In other words, where there is *Botho* development is perceived as sacred, indispensable and an irreplaceable. No one is therefore able to trample on the rights of others. *Botho* entails social justice. *Botho* also implies that no one is truly human outside the life and fellowship of the family and the community to which he or she belongs. In Africa, particularly, Setswana society, this is reflected in the proverb *Motho ke motho ka Batho*, literally, a person is a person because of others, or the essence of caring for others (Ramosé, 1999:150). It can therefore be argued that the concept *Botho* which is deeply rooted in the African cultural context can help liberate the African

child from poverty and other social ills by transforming community institutions that touch the African child's life directly, such as congregations, private and public schools and other voluntary organizations that deal with the child. Often the congregation as a theological institution also plays an important role because it is the last voluntary organization left in a poor community, and therefore, carries the weight of the community's hope (Contoure 2000:100). Secondly, the concept *Botho* will break the cycle of poverty faced by the African child and promote justice. As a value, *Botho* is in compliance with the teaching of the Bible which teaches that people should act justly (Micah 6:8). As already alluded to in the above point, to promote social justice and at the same time break the cycle of poverty of the African child, requires strong religious and moral values.

## Conclusion

The African child, like every other child, has a burning desire for happiness and enjoyment. To be happy, to enjoy themselves, African children must all be free. African children can, however, only enjoy themselves, when they play and laugh because they have access to all social amenities. Unfortunately, this is not the case today as the African continent has been invaded with all sorts of challenges ranging from abject poverty, HIV and AIDS, lack of proper education and child abuse which are all indications that the children are not valued, are oppressed and require liberation (Odom, 2006:40). In this paper, an attempt has been made through the *African liberation -inculturation theological* approach to show status of the African child in the contemporary, African and biblical setup, as well as how the Bible reveals that God has special concern for the impoverished, the vulnerable and the defenceless poor children. This is affirmed in Jesus' teaching that the Kingdom of God belongs to the children. Therefore, it is proper that for anyone to appropriate the spiritual, physical, social and economic liberation of Jesus' ministry in the African continent today, it must go hand in hand with the liberation of the African child.

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## **The status of children in Pauline communities**

A reconstruction from the Pauline corpus

*Lovemore Togarasei*

### **Introduction**

This chapter is guided by the view that each and every society has a responsibility of preparing its children to take over the reins of power as it were, when the old pass on. Noting the words of Strange (1996:10-11), that children are the assurance or the seed for the future, this it specifically aims to establish the status of children in Pauline communities. The role that Paul and his communities played in the development of Christianity and the Christian doctrine can surely not be underestimated by anyone interested in the history of Christianity. The same is also true of the role that the Pauline teachings continue to have on contemporary Christian teaching and practices. There has been a recent interest in the study of early Christian families in general (Moxnes1997; Cahill 2000) and children in particular (Horn and Martens 2009). On the subject of Paul and children, a number of works have been published. Aasgaard (2007:129-159) examined Paul's ideas on children and childhood and the way he employed them in his letters. Pertaining to their status in Pauline communities and especially in Pauline writings, Aasgaard just raises questions but provides no answers. He says:

Clearly, Paul is attentive to children and to their place in the church, signaled by their holiness. But he does not here, or elsewhere, indicate the kind of status they would have. Considering Paul's frequent use of childhood terminology and his strong interest in practical community life; and also the focus on children in the later household codes, this is striking. Consequently, the issue of the place of children in the communities is almost untouched by Paul. Why this is so we can only guess. It may be that this issue was beyond Paul's horizon as a male and a person of relatively high standing; although this is hard to believe, considering his fre-

quent use of childhood terminology. It may also be that it was beyond the general horizon of his churches, in view of the manifold other challenges they had to face. Or it could be that no sufficiently serious problems concerning children had turned up, at least in the eyes of Paul; with the possible exception of 1 Cor 7:14. Whatever the reasons for this lack, it indicates a limited attention on the part of Paul as far as children and community life are concerned.

Many, however, have focused on how Paul used the term ‘childhood’ in his kinship language (Strange 1996, Moxnes 1997, Osiek and Balch 1997, Frilingos 2000, Balla 2003). Recently and close to home, Ugandan New Testament scholar, Kalengyo (2011:134-151) looked at parenting in the New Testament world and the challenges of parenting in Africa today in which he paid some attention to Paul’s teaching on children. Unfortunately all these works do not give us a picture of the place of children in Pauline communities in detail. What was the status of children in Pauline communities? What role did children play in worship and the general administration of the church? Did children worship together with adults? How did Paul and his Christian communities prepare children as the church for the future? These are some of the questions this chapter attempts to address.

To achieve this article’s objective, I make use of the Pauline writings (Romans- 2 Timothy) and Acts of the Apostles. I belong to the school of thought that accepts only seven letters of Paul (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal, 1 Thess, Php and Phil) as undisputed. However, in this paper I make use of the full Pauline corpus based on my conviction that the disputed Pauline and pastoral letters were written to original Pauline communities and that these communities continued with the Pauline tradition at least on issues like the place and status of children in the church. I admit, however, that this is an enormous task for a number of reasons. In the first place, our sources say very little about children and especially about their place in the life of the church. Second, the little said about children comes from elite males who are likely to have told us their perception of children rather than the reality of children’s experiences. Thirdly, there are the twin monsters of anachronism and ethnocentricity (Eisler 1997:123). There is always a danger that in trying to understand ancient communities, one ends up reading modern practices and one’s own culture into it. I therefore find myself wading in a maze of uncertainties in this enterprise. But in spite of these difficulties, an attempt needs to be made to reconstruct the status of children from what we

have at hand. Our awareness of these difficulties will make us vigilant and try not to fall in these pitfalls.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, we look at cultural influences to Pauline communities' views of children. Considering that Christianity originated in the Jewish milieu but flourished in the Greco-Roman milieu, there is the need to discuss these cultural influences if we are to reconstruct the status of children in these communities. In the second section the paper discusses early Christian families as a way of establishing the status of children in these families. This is then followed by a general discussion of Paul's attitude to children before coming to the core section which then attempts a reconstruction of the status of children in Pauline communities. The last section highlights the findings of the paper in form a conclusion pointing out lessons that can be learnt by contemporary Christian communities.

### **Cultural influences to Pauline communities' views of children**

The Jewish context from which Christianity originated valued children highly. As a result practices such as abortion and infanticide were unacceptable (Ex. 21:22-25). Barrenness was therefore considered a great evil and a basis for divorce. For this reason women who considered themselves barren saved their marriages by offering the husband a slave girl (e.g. Sarah in Gen. 16:1-2) or a second wife to ensure birth of children. In Jewish society, marriage was therefore primarily for raising heirs to God's covenant and to one's father's household. To die without leaving offspring was as if one had never been to this world. It was then the responsibility of a surviving brother to inherit his late brother's wife and bear children for him (Deut. 25:5-10). The Jewish community also valued children for the sake of posterity. The production of children was a means of securing succession both in the family and in the covenant community (Grant 2000:19). It was then the responsibility of parents to make sure that the children are fully prepared for the future. Education was therefore central in the lives of children. This education was provided at family level with fathers instructing boys while mothers instructed girls. Formal education was basically religious (the study of Jewish scriptures) and was mainly a preserve of boys who were taught to read and write (Osiek and Balch 1997:70-71). The father was the key

figure when it came to religious education. He was exhorted by scripture:

And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Deut. 6:6-7).

Education of Jewish children also took place each week at the synagogue. It is here where children received their basic religious education over and above that provided by the parents.

Apart from the Jewish society, Christian attitude to children and childhood was also greatly influenced by Greco-Roman culture. This is because the world in which Christianity developed its feet and became a religion independent from Judaism was a Greco-Roman world, that is, it was under Roman political control but Hellenism (Greek culture) was insidious (Cahill 2000:19). It is no surprise then that a number of Christian beliefs and practices were to some extent influenced by this culture, Christian attitude to children and childhood being no exception. Kalengyo (2011:134-151) notes that compared to the Jews, Romans and Greeks did not have comparable regard and love for children. His argument is based on the fact that they allowed abortion, infanticide, selling or exposure of children. However, a classical study of marriage in ancient Rome by Rawson (1991:10), shows that children were desired in marriages and that their arrival was welcome especially among upper class families. From an early age, children were taught the values of the society. The family was the primary institution for such education. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle had described the family as the most important kernel of the state (Balla 2003:166). Just like in Judaism, religion was also a core component of the family education curriculum among the Greeks and the Romans. Such education was centered at the hearth, which was the site of veneration and represented the centre of family life (Barclay 1997:67). Children thus learnt very early in their lives which powers to propitiate in the home and this became a source of personal identity which they were not prepared to break or to show no respect. Apart from the family, the education of children also took place informally through their association with peers, family members and other members of the society in general. Formal education was mainly for the upper classes (Rawson 1991:20).

Having observed the status of children in the cultures that influenced early Christianity, let us now turn to consider these early Christian families.

## Early Christian families

It has been shown that the Jewish and Greco-Roman societies from which early Christianity developed, had the family as the centre of the development of children. If we are to understand the status of children in Pauline communities, we therefore need to find out first the nature of early Christian families. This will then help us reconstruct the status of children in such communities.

Scholarly interest in early Christian families can only be traced back to the late 1990s with the publication of Osiek and Balch (1997) and Moxnes (1997). Introducing the *Journal of New Testament Studies* of 2004 which carried a number of articles on early Christian families, MacDonald and Moxnes (2004:3-6) observed that, "The hope is that a direct focus on 'family matters' will shed new light on such diverse topics as rituals, leadership, asceticism, social location, community growth, and the lives of women, children and slaves in early Christianity."

Whereas Jewish and Greco-Roman families were ethnic based, Christian families were not. The crossing of ethnic boundaries from the beginning relativised family and ethnic ties. Thus we find in the teaching of Jesus, the relativisation of ethnic and family values to the extent that one could even not value the burial of a father (Matt. 8:21-22). There are a number of reasons why this was so but for many scholars, this was a result of the early church's imminent eschatology (Barclay 1997:73-73, Grant 2000:19). The early Christians believed history was going to end soon, and that long term societal concerns were no longer necessary. For some this included the need for children. Paul, for example, has no concern for procreation when he views marriage as serving only the purpose of limiting sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:8-9). As Barclay (1997:75) says in interpreting 1 Cor. 7, Paul shows no discernible interest in the raising of the next generation. Other Christians of Paul's time even saw no need to engage in sex, viewing it as polluting (1 Cor. 7:1).

Those who take the position above also note that the early Christians created their own 'Christian' families instead of promoting ethnic families. The saying of Jesus, "whoever does the will of God is my mother



and my brother and my sister (Mark 3:34-35 par.)” as well as Paul’s reference to Christians as “brothers and sisters”, create a new family that was not known in the world of the time. Familial language is therefore common in the description of Christian communities. Believers are not only brothers and sisters (see Paul’s address of fellow Christians as brethren e.g. 2 Cor. 13:11), but Paul also views himself as the father of believers (1 Thess. 2:11). In other references all believers are the wives of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).

Whereas I do not doubt that there are indications of belief in an imminent eschatology in some NT texts, I also believe that it is farfetched to conclude that these texts show that the early church did not care much about the next generations of Christianity. There were typical families in these communities, e.g. Philip and his daughters (Acts 21:9), Timothy and his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5) and of families that got converted to Christianity. There must have been some children in these communities. As already mentioned, it is in these children that this article is interested. This interest comes out of the realization that Paul himself said very little about the status of children in his communities. Of much interest is the question on the instruction and nurturing of the children as the future church. Barclay’s (1997:76) quest for the context in which children were to “experience the ‘engraving’ of the Christian tradition on mind and soul of which Philo and Josephus spoke in relation to Jewish children...” is central to this paper. Barclay proceeds to conclude that Christianity must have been weak and ill-equipped in this sphere of propagating the future Christian generations. But does this statement really hold water? We consider this in the next section.

## **Paul and children**

At the surface, it appears Paul did not pay much attention to children in his letters. For those who take the position that we have so far discussed, this should not be surprising since the apostle generally had a negative view of marriage and family (1 Cor. 7). Barclay (1997:75), for example, notes, “the fact that he (Paul) regards ‘being anxious for the affairs of the Lord’ as incompatible with anxieties for one’s spouse suggests that Paul regards marriage, in principle, as less than helpful to the Christian cause.” Thus, they would conclude, although Paul did not consider marriage a sin, he does not appear to have considered the establishment of a

Christian family a positive contribution to the creation or preservation of the Christian tradition. If so, this view would have prevailed in his communities.

My starting point for questioning the view that the Pauline communities had little regard for children comes from the observation that the earliest Pauline communities were house churches. Paul converted several households e.g. that of Stephanas in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:16). He called those the first fruits of the church of Achaia implying, as Sandnes (1997:151) says, “this house to have embraced the Christian faith *en bloc* through the conversion of Stephanas.” Greco-Roman as well as Jewish families were always under the authority of the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the family, who often dictated to the members of his family. The household of Stephanas and other such households should surely have included children. Paul tells us that he baptized Stephanas’ household himself. Thus it is unlikely that Paul cared less about children. The occasional nature of Pauline letters means that most of the information in them is accidental and therefore the letters do not give us a full picture of all the goings-on in these communities. Sandnes (1997:151-153) finds the Acts accounts of household conversions (Acts 10:14, 16:31-34 and 18:8) to shed further light on what Paul says about household churches. He (Sandnes 1997:153) concludes, “It is no surprise to find that the growth of the Christian faith ran on family lines in a family oriented society.”

My second argument comes from Paul’s widespread use of children and childhood language in the development and expression of his doctrine. Aasgaard (2007:132) notes that there are two ways in which Paul’s childhood terminology can be categorized: concrete and metaphorical. Paul makes little mention of children in the concrete way (1 Cor. 7:14, 13:11, Gal. 1:15). He, however, uses childhood language metaphorically or symbolically very widely: for example, Paul repeatedly speaks of Christians as children of God (Rom. 8:16-17, 21; 9:7-8; etc.) or as his own children (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Phil 2:22; Phlm. 10). In all these different types of usage of children and childhood, Paul generally presents children positively. For example, he shows that children are holy (1 Cor. 7:14), children are faithful and righteous (1 Cor. 14:20) and that childhood is the stage for learning (1 Cor. 4:14-16). Against his contemporaries he viewed even the fetus (Gal. 1:15) and the premature child (1 Cor. 15:8) positively. Thus generally in his writings, children did not function as negative examples for their “lack of reason, irrational behavioral pat-

terns and attitudes, or childishness" as other writers did (Aasgaard 2007:54).<sup>1</sup> Instead, children are treated as models for adults to emulate. All this shows that the Pauline communities valued children and should have considered them the future of the church.

Third, although he has little to say concretely about children in his undisputed letters, in the few passages he mentioned them, Paul points to the fact that children were highly regarded in Pauline communities. In 1 Cor. 7:14 he discourages divorce for its effects on the status of children. He says, "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy" (RSV). I need to acknowledge that the meaning of this text is not clear as other manuscripts of this letter have different expressions. However, what is clear is that, for the sake of the status of children as believers, the Pauline communities discouraged divorce even in the case where one spouse was not a believer. Paul also points out that fathers must teach their children when he reminds the Corinthians to imitate him as their father (1 Cor. 4:14-16). We can deduce then that in the communities he founded, Paul expected fathers to instruct their children and children to imitate their parents.

Fourth, Paul also expected parents to lay up something for their children's inheritance (2 Cor. 12:14-15). In fact, in most of the texts where Paul refers to children and childhood symbolically, the underlining argument is that parents must love their children and provide for them. Thus in one text Paul refers to himself as a mother who has to undergo birth pains for the second time due to his love for his children (Gal. 4:19-20). Considering Paul's attitude to children, what then was their status in these communities and, especially, how were they instructed as the church for the future?

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<sup>1</sup> In texts like 1 Cor. 2:6-3:4, 14:20, Rom. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 13:12 where Paul talks negatively about childhood, he is mostly referring to their immaturity.

## Status of Children in Pauline communities

### *Christian instruction*

Considering Paul's attitude to family life discussed above and his few references to issues pertaining to children, it would appear like there was no effort to secure the future of the Christian tradition into next generations in the earliest Pauline communities. That would mean there were therefore no attempts to instruct children in the Christian tradition. Barclay (1997:75) states, "Thus, the experience of domestic ostracism, the demands of Christian mission, the sense of an impending end and the first signs of a principled Christian asceticism combined to frustrate the routine embedding of the Christian tradition within the structures of the family." I am, however, of a different opinion.

To start with, we have noted above that the family was the primary institution in the world of early Christianity. We have also noticed, both from Acts of the Apostles and from the Pauline letters, that the earliest Christians got converted together with their households. Although little is said about children in these households, the Mediterranean world of early Christianity, among other factors, measured family honour in terms of successful upbringing of children. Also, considering that religion was embedded in family life in this world (Sandnes 1997:154), it can be argued that bringing up children in the family faith was considered successful parenting. Religion kept families, and in turn societies, together. As Sandnes (1997:155) concludes from a study of social harmony in antiquity, "The bond that keeps the family together and safeguards it is 'to share in common the same family traditions, the same forms of domestic worship, and the same ancestral tombs'." The Pauline communities surely took a departure from some familial practices of the time. However, this departure should have been the centralization of the Christ figure in the lives of these families. Instruction of family members in the new faith, especially instruction of children should have been taken seriously.

Besides, since most of the early Christians were Jews, the practice of home education for children should have continued even when they accepted Christianity. Thus in tracing the history of Christian education, Arnoldsen (2006) identifies the home as the first school. He says this continued as the case until sometime in the third century C.E. It should

have been Christian fathers' (as was the case with Jewish fathers) responsibility to instruct children in the new faith.

The Pauline letters and all other New Testament writings clearly show that Christianity soon became the way of life and that all had to be adapted to the new faith. As Kalengyo (2011:143) writes, "It would be wrong to assume that the Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity abandoned the good practices relating to bringing up children." They should have continued with the practice of instructing their children, not only on worldly affairs, but especially in relation to their esteemed faith. Paul tells us that he expected children to be obedient to their parents as he mentions as a vice "disobedience to parents" (Rom. 1:30). Commenting on Rom 1:29-31, Balla (2003:162) is probably right when he states, "Thus it may be argued that Paul's list implies that there is a connection between people failing to honour God and being disobedient to their parents." My argument is that, part of children's obedience to their parents was accepting the faith of their fathers which in this case was Christianity. No wonder that Timothy is given great commendation for the faith he received from his mother and his grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). Timothy's case also serves as a good basis for the argument that Christians passed on Christian education to their children as early as the first decades of the religion. As Cahill (2000:41) points out in interpreting the household codes (discussed at length below), the family as the primary unit of the church was the centre of worship, hospitality, religious education, communication, social services, and mission or evangelization.

The undisputed Pauline letters, specifically the household codes, corroborate the above argument. In Col. 3:20 and Eph. 6:1-2 we find the inclusion of children in the sphere of Christian education. Those who believe the early Pauline communities paid little attention to children due to their belief in imminent eschatology explain this change in terms of this belief fading away. They argue that with the belief in imminent eschatology fading away, the communities therefore started paying attention to the preservation of the faith through child education. I am, however, of the opinion that despite the imminent eschatology that characterized Paul and his earliest communities, there must have been, therein, some form of instruction of the children. My argument is that to judge Paul and his early communities' attitude to children and children's Christian instruction on the basis of the Pauline letters only would not be convincing. This is because the topic of family and chil-

dren is not systematically addressed in the letters. It appears Paul took the topic for granted. Thus my assumption then is that the prevailing practice in Jewish and Greco-Roman societies continued within the Christian families. Thus instruction of the children in Christian faith was always a practice in the Pauline communities. What the undisputed Pauline letters say therefore expresses what must have always been the practice.

Analysing the terms *paideia* and *nouthesia* in Eph. 6:4, Barclay (1997:77) suggests that, in the undisputed Pauline communities, there was a specifically Christian way of raising children, and perhaps, a specifically Christian body of instructions to be imparted to them. The pastoral letters (1/2 Tim. and Titus) believed to have been written much later than the deutero-Pauline but to the same Pauline communities, even show that by that time the family institution was now seen as a church. Thus only those who managed their families well could be entrusted with management of the church (1 Tim. 3:5). Their children were not only supposed to be submissive (1 Tim. 3:5) but also to be believers (Tit. 1:6). One of the qualities of a widow worth of honour is now the bringing up of children (1 Tim. 5:10).

It appears the home was not only the institution for the instruction of children. It should be further highlighted that these communities met for worship in their houses. Scholars (e.g. Botha 2000) have studied the architecture of houses in the Roman empire of the time and have established that there was a great variety of types and sizes of houses that reflected the difference in wealth between the different classes. Wealthier citizens had large houses with large central courtyards. It is possible that in such courtyards of wealth Christians, the early Christians met for worship. Paul makes reference to households of certain Christians (1 Cor. 1:16, 16:15) as we have seen. All this points to the fact that children in these households and children of those who came for worship should have participated in the activities of the church. We can therefore argue that, from the beginning, children were members of the church. Whereas at home the father (or other believing parents as in the case of Timothy) was the instructor, the bishop was also the instructor of children in the worshipping church. Paul's reference to himself as father of the Christian body and the Pastoral letters' equation of the church bishop and family father also give us some insight into the way children were instructed in Pauline communities. If the church overseer was a father, it means it was also his responsibility to bring up not only chil-

dren in the sense of all believers, but also the real young members of the congregation.

### **Participation in worship**

As to the children's role in worship, our sources are not very clear, and our reconstruction can only be based on few references to children in these letters. For example, Strange (1996:71) notes that in 1 Cor. 7:14, Paul gives full membership status to children who have only one believing parent. This shows that Paul counted children as members of a congregation. It can then be assumed that children were not mere observers but full members who participated fully in the life of the church. The deutero-Pauline letters further illuminate this argument in the household codes (Col. 3:20-21 and Eph. 6:1-4) and for this reason they have attracted a lot of scholarly attention on the subject of Christian familial relationships (e.g. see Balla's (2003:165) summary). Although a number of scholars argue for an Aristotelean origin of these ethics, Luz (cited by Balla 2003:169) is of the view that the household code as a literary form may be a Christian creation, originating in the Pauline congregations.

Be that as it may, from them two observations can be made about the status of children in Pauline communities. First, the argument we made above that the early church should have continued with the Jewish and Greco-Roman ways of instruction of children is corroborated by the fact that Christian fathers are here, in the same way, told to "bring them (children) up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." It is therefore clear that in the Pauline communities, fathers (and mothers as in the case of Timothy) were responsible for instructing children in the way of the Lord which in this case was Christianity. The author of Colossians even provided some pedagogy for the instruction of the children if the desired objectives were to be achieved. He told the fathers that children easily loose heart if proper methods of instructing them are not used (Col. 3:21). The second observation is that children, as I indicated above, were full members of the church.

These two texts further give us some idea of the involvement of children in Pauline communities worship services. It appears children and parents worshipped together not in separate rooms as is the case in many churches today. This is supported by the observation that Pauline letters

were read in the assemblies (Col. 4:16) and the instruction to children in these texts means they were part and parcel of the assemblies. Of course the Greek term for children (*teknon*) refers to relationships, and not to age. From the tone of the household codes ("bring them up..." (Eph.6:4) and "...lest they be discouraged..." (Col 3:21), I agree with Best (1998:563) that, "the children addressed must have been old enough to understand what is said, but they could have been small, sub-teenagers, or older teenagers and young adults." The "children were therefore not passive spectators in public worship, but were encouraged and taught alongside the adults in the course of the church's meeting for worship" (Kalengyo 2011:144).

Children must also have participated in Christian rituals such as baptism and the Eucharist. It is not clear whether the communities baptized children but from their address as members of the congregation and the early church's understanding of baptism as birth into the Christian family (Gal. 3:27, 2 Cor. 5:17), if they did not practice infant baptism, children were probably baptized when they reached the age to be able to make decisions and personal confessions. As for the Eucharist, Paul's words in 2 Cor. 11:17ff point to the fact that all members of the congregation (including children) participated. The early church actually celebrated the Eucharist with a meal as Paul's instruction shows. Children therefore participated in this meal.

## **Conclusion**

Although the Pauline corpus does not provide us with detailed information concerning the status of children in these communities, it is only logical to assume that the prevailing practices both in Judaism and Greco-Roman culture continued in these communities. Strange (1996:36) even finds the silence of the letters in this regard significant. I share his opinion that the status of children and issues pertaining to their instruction in the Christian faith did not present any problems that required attention by the authors of the Pauline letters. We can therefore conclude with Bakke (2005:260) that, "Christian theology and ethics protected children's life in a way not found in the Greco-Roman world, and in this sense we can speak of Christianity as a 'child-friendly' religion." As I have argued in the paper, the Pauline communities should have continued with the Jewish and Greco-Roman practice of having the



family as the foundational institution for the upbringing of children socially and religiously. This is one lesson that today's society can learn from families in antiquity. The preservation and passing on of societal values was vested within the family. We have also seen that the Pauline communities valued children and those children were part and parcel of the community even in worship.

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## Why should Adults want to be Sucklings again?

Some remarks on the Cultural Semantics of Breast-feeding in Christian and Pre-Christian Tradition

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### Introduction: Breast-feeding as an Iconic Constellation

The image of a woman giving breast to a child is one of the most important images in human culture – especially in those cultural systems which do not know of industrial substitutes for mother-milk. In the field of cultural studies the basic image of a woman breast-feeding a child can be understood as an icon or an iconic constellation – using terms of Jan ASSMANN (1984: 135). An icon/ iconic constellation can be used in different cultural contexts and can be represented through various media like language, painting or other artefacts.

The iconic constellation<sup>1</sup> of breast-feeding (IBF) is based on a typical and more or less omnipresent experience. As breast-feeding is the most common way of feeding a new-born baby it is related with the beginning of almost every human person's life. By that it is an icon of special cultural strength. When used in cultural contexts the icon usually gains additional meaning while different aspects of the constellation can be stressed more than others. The IBF contains different elements, e.g. the mother or wet-nurse, the milk, and the baby. All these elements and their specific relations can be stressed in a specific way.

Therefore the title-question why adults should want to become babies again can be answered in many different ways. The answer depends on

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<sup>1</sup> I suggest labelling breast-feeding as an iconic *constellation* because two persons (and a number of elements) are involved, and the way how they are related is of importance.

which aspect of the icon/ iconic constellation is stressed by the specific context. Who is the feeding woman? Is she the mother of the child or someone else? What is her social or religious status? What is the relation between feeding person and the fed one? What kind of milk does the suckling get? The last question in many cultures is connected with the question of who the feeding woman is. The breast-feeding person was seen as giving her own qualities with her milk. If, for example, you get the milk of a queen or goddess, it may be highly inviting to drink it – even as an adult person. It will make you strong and powerful. If, however, the milk you get shows you as being dependent and helpless then adults would not easily want to become a suckling again. Both aspects can be found in the New Testament and Early Christian tradition. Let us begin with the aspect of the powerless suckling.

### The IBF as an expression of dependency and helplessness

The most prominent New Testament author using the IBF is Paul. The apostle compares his first preaching in Corinth with breast-feeding:

<sup>1</sup> Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ.

<sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. (1 Cor 3:1-2 <sup>NIV</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα· οὐπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε

Paul associates the IBF with a clear message of critique. The recently founded Christian congregation at Corinth is still in the state of helpless babies. They need “milk” (= simple teaching) instead of adult’s food. In their faith they do not have the status of adults yet. The inner conflicts in the congregation indicate that. That is why they continue to need the apostle as feeding authority. They cannot stand on their own feet yet, but remain dependent from Paul’s authority. Without the Apostle’s care and helpful guidance they cannot exist as Christians. In stressing the baby-like dependency of the Christians at Corinth, Paul at the same time stresses his own authority as feeding person to whom the Corinthians have to subordinate. The IBF serves Paul as a rhetoric tool to underline a hierarchical relationship: The baby-Christians at Corinth have to subordinate to the adult, nursing apostolic preacher. Paul is the founder (κτίστης) and by that in a way is the origin of the congregation. In a

cultural context where the founder of a city was often venerated as the god of this city, Paul can claim a specific authority towards his creation.<sup>2</sup>

Paul's use of the IBF stands in a cultural tradition which can be found also in the writings of Hellenistic-Jewish author Philo of Alexandria († ca. 50 CE). Philo, the exegetical philosopher and philosophical exegete, compares the general education preceding the genuine philosophy with maternal milk. It is "tender food" for souls who are still dependent and weak, "still naked like those of completely infant children" (Philo, prob. 160). On the other side adult souls, having come to the manly status of freedom and independence, do not "share in the infantine food of milk" (Philo, migr. 29) anymore.

Turning back to the New Testament, a similar kind of using the IBF can be found in Hebrews. In chapter 5 of this letter we find:

<sup>12</sup> In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

<sup>13</sup> Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:12-14 <sup>NIV</sup>)

<sup>12</sup> και γάρ ὀφείλοντες εἶναι διδάσκαλοι διὰ τὸν χρόνον, πάλιν χρεῖαν ἔχετε τοῦ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς τινὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ και γηγόνατε χρεῖαν ἔχοντες γάλακτος [καί] οὐ στερεᾶς τροφῆς.

<sup>13</sup> πᾶς γάρ ὁ μετέχων γάλακτος ἄπειρος λόγου δικαιοσύνης, νήπιος γάρ ἐστιν·

<sup>14</sup> τελείων δέ ἐστιν ἡ στερεὰ τροφή, τῶν διὰ τὴν ἐξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντων πρὸς διάκρισιν καλοῦ τε και κακοῦ.

Here the milk-food also stands for the immature status of the congregation addressed. And the construction of hierarchy is similar. The community must abide by the teaching of the (anonymous) author of the letter as they are dependent from his "milk". In Hebrews the critique on the congregation seems even stronger than in 1 Corinthians. While Paul was addressing a young congregation, the author here addresses an old

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<sup>2</sup> It can be seen that he is much less displaying his apostolic authority towards Christian communities founded by other apostles. Cf. the careful words in Rom 1:12 ("that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith") where Pauls corrects his quite boastful words in V.11 ("I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong") which were absolutely inappropriate in a writing to a non-Pauline community.

one. It is an awful shame to need baby-like basic teaching, when having already reached an age where one should be teacher. As to the hierarchy between author and addressees one can say: By stressing the conflict between baby-like status and adult age, the author shows that the dependency of the addressees from his teaching is not ideal. They should be independent; they should be teacher on their own and not be dependent from the author's teaching. Thus the shameful milk metaphor in Hebrews is meant to push the addressees to independency.

In all three cases the IBF is used only partially. The focus is on the milk and the helpless status of the baby, while the feeding person is kept somewhat in the background. By not stressing too much the male milk-giver gender irritation are avoided. Paul, Philo and the author of Hebrews not even say clearly who the source of the milk is. Maybe they suggest that they are only a (male) nurse giving the milk of someone else, or they simply don't care about gender issues in their metaphorical use of the IBF.

Later Christian teaching's use of the IBF knows two opposite lines. One line – focussing on Mary breast-feeding Jesus – is stressing very much the human quality of the milk. The other line – focussing on God or the Logos/Son – is dealing with the divine quality of the milk.

The Syrian Church father Ephraim (306-373 CE) is a very good example for this use of IBF, because he knows to combine the two aspects in one and the same text. In his fourth Hymn on the birth of Christ he writes:

Christ

„was the Highest and he drank Mary's milk,  
while all creatures were drinking from his richness.  
He is the living breast giving breath of life.  
Out of his life did drink the dead and were revived.

/.../

While then he was drinking Mary's milk,  
he himself breast-fed the universe with life.

/.../

Out of the great treasure of all creation Mary gave him all she gave him.  
She gave him milk out of what he created,  
She gave him food out of what he called into existence.  
He gave milk to Mary on behalf of his divine nature.  
He sucked it from her on behalf of his human nature.

(Nat. 4, 149-150.153.183-185; cf. Beck 1959. English translation JK)

The link between Mary's milk and the human nature of Christ is more than obvious in this text. As Mary is no goddess but a human being she

is giving human milk to her baby and by doing so she gives proof to the human nature of her son. He is drinking the milk of his human mother and by being weak and helpless like a baby he proves his truly human nature. On the other side Jesus Christ also is of divine nature and as God incarnate he is the one who give to his mother all she can give him. On the divine level Mary cannot be the giving one. Just in the contrary the the <sup>3</sup>divine Logos (= word, plan, concept, logic) functions as the motherly <sup>3</sup>source of all life! He is God-Son, mediator of creation (cf. John 1:3-4) and spender of all natural goods. Ephraim therefore stresses that every human gift that Mary could give her son derived from the divine creation power. In one single text Ephraim uses two different aspects of the IBF. In relation to Mary and her milk he stresses the human nature of mother, milk and baby. But due to the double nature of Jesus Christ he can at the same time use the IBF stressing the supreme divine quality of the milk which the son gives. The idea of divine milk leads to a line of using the IBF as an expression of power and honor.

### **Divine Milk as medium of salvific power**

While the IBF connected with helplessness and dependency is to be found in two texts of the New Testament we have only one single text with a positive connotation of the constellation. This is an astonishing contrast to the importance of this use of the IBF in ancient cultural tradition. In 1 Peter 2:1-3 we read:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

<sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Petr 2:1-3 NIV)

<sup>2</sup> ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξήθητε εἰς σωτηρίαν,

<sup>3</sup> εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος.

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<sup>3</sup> The somewhat surprising transgender aspect can be found already in the OT – although in a different context: Isa 60:16 invites Israel to suck at the breasts of kings in order to take over their power and by doing so weaken them. In the history of religions it is not uncommon that deities transgress gender lines. Concerning God-Son the trans-gendering derives most probably from the fact that he inherited the tradition of Lady Wisdom, prominent in late OT scriptures and early Jewish texts.



In 1 Peter the use of the IBF obviously differs from the cultural tradition which Paul and Hebrews used. The text is not stressing the baby-like dependency of the believers. Just in the contrary the quality of milk-food is seen quite positively and the greediness of the hungry suckling is even used as an example which the believers should imitate. That means, 1 Peter is clearly linked to the tradition of another use of IBF namely the idea of maternal milk transferring special qualities of the mother to the baby. But who is the breast-feeding person here?

The reference to Jesus Christ as the good Lord of the faithful in V.3 may indicate that Christ himself is the source of salvific spiritual milk. The problem that Christ is a man is none. As we could already see from the hymn of Ephraim early Christians had no major problems with the idea of a “male” person playing the breast-feeding role in the IBF.

One example more for this kind of salvific “gender-switching” can be found for example in the post-canonical Odes of Solomon (2nd/3rd century CE). Several times the odes mention divine milk given by God (Father or Son), e.g. 8:16; 14:2; 19:1-4; 35:5. The most explicit reads:

<sup>1</sup> A cup of milk was offered to me,  
and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord’s kindness.

<sup>2</sup> The Son is the cup,  
and he who was milked, the Father,  
and [the one] who milked him, the Spirit of holiness.

<sup>3</sup> Because his breasts were full  
and it was not desirable that his milk should be poured out uselessly,

<sup>4</sup> the Spirit of holiness opened his [= the Father’s] bosom  
and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.

(Odes of Solomon 19:1-4; cf. LATTKE 2009: 268)

The speaker of this ode is most probably a believer referring in V.1 to his coming to redeeming faith. LATTKE (2009: 270) rules out any relation to a special ritual or sacramental tradition like e.g. celebrating Eucharist with milk (instead of wine). And indeed, linking the text with a too specific “Sitz im Leben” would be highly speculative, as we cannot figure out anymore what V.1 is alluding to. From the text itself it is clear that getting a “cup of milk” is a metaphorical expression for finding salvation/ being redeemed. We can conclude from the broader context that the way to redemption is faith. And perhaps we are right to say that coming to redemptive faith was manifested in the ritual of baptism. But how can we know if V.1 is alluding to a kind of baptismal ritual which was linked with getting a cup of milk? It seems much better to refrain interpretation to what is clear from the text itself.

“Drinking the milk” is clearly a way to redemption as the cup means the Son. It is common to identify the container with its content. Thus one can conclude that the Son is the Father’s milk (and not only the container). This means that the believer, by drinking the cup of milk, is taking the Son into him/herself. As the Son is an emanation of the Father (coming out of the Father’s breast by activity of the Holy Spirit) the believer, by hosting the Son is hosting the Father also. Similar concepts can be found already in the Gospel of John (e.g. 17:23). While the Fourth Gospel, however, indicates the unity of Father and Son by the concept of begetting, Ode of Solomon 19:1-4 prefers an androgynous concept of the Father-Son-relation. The message, however, is more or less the same. The Son is not a creation of the Father – if so he would be part of the world – but is an emanation of God, flowing out from inside the Father. As the common concept of milk as transporting the essence of someone can be supposed as cultural background for the Odes of Solomon also, the believer by “drinking” the Son participates in the divine essence of the Father. The unity between Father, Son and believer is the most appropriate “use” of the Father’s milk. If the Son is hosted by the believer, the milk of the Father is not “poured out uselessly” (V.3), but has found his true purpose.

Together with 1 Petr 2:2-3 the milk-texts in the Odes of Solomon are an excellent example for how early Christians used the IBF to express the reception of divine power, grace and redemption. One could add Irenaeus of Lyon (cf. LATTKE 2009: 270) and Clement of Alexandria. The latter develops an outspoken milk-christology. Clements work on the Logos as true pedagogue ends with a hymn where his basic understanding of milk is obvious: The heavenly milk coming from the maternal breasts of the Logos is the medium of salvation and can be seen as the Holy Spirit, or the teaching of Christ or the salvific suffering of Christ or his blood given in Eucharist. On the basis of 1 Peter 2 Clement even rejects any verbal understanding of 1 Cor 3, claiming that Paul does not mean what he says. Clement interprets Paul in the same way as he understands 1 Peter 2, seeing the IBF as an expression of salvific nourishment. We have to remember also of Ephraim’s Hymn cited above, where the son is breast-feeding the whole creation with his milk of life. It would, however, not be sufficient to see 1 Peter as the “mother” of this use of the IBF, as it can be found already in Ancient Egyptian religion. It seems to be a multi-cultural topic even.

## **Divine milk as medium of power in pre-Christian cultures**

As already briefly mentioned above, many cultural systems regard mother's milk not only as a physiological phenomenon but also charge it with deeper meaning. And in ancient cultural worlds the idea that the breastfeeding mother will give something of her character or essence to the baby, is very common. That is also why the use of wet-nurses – widespread especially in upper-class families – was criticised by many ancient authors (cf. SCHREINER 1994: 193-4).

As to Egyptian tradition one can say that when a goddess gives breast to a baby her milk will give the divine power of blessing to the suckling. The milk of Isis is especially connected with the power of divine kingship. Mythological tradition connects her with Osiris the first god-king who was killed, but brought back to life by his sister-wife Isis. Being revived by his sister-wife Osiris becomes the prototype of the "Kingship in the West", i.e. the royal afterlife. On the other side Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, is the prototype of the living king. Any living king is to be understood as „Horus on the Throne“. When the goddess is depicted as Isis lactans she gives not only breast to her mythical son but also to the Egyptian king who is an incarnation of Horus. The royal mythology, however, does not limit the milk-topic to Isis. Maybe she is the most important mother of the king, but she definitely is not the only wet-nurse to the king. Moreover the king is shown as being suckled by different female deities.

In Hatshepsut's "million-year-house", her afterlife-temple at Deir el-Bahari, the goddess Hathor is depicted in her divine appearance as a wild cow (fig. 1), speaking to her royal-divine daughter:

„... I am your mother, creator of your beauty. I have breast-fed you so that you have the rights of Horus, the Royal power over the South and over the North. I give you years in eternity [= your reign shall ever end].

In this text it can be seen clearly that the divine milk transports the power to exercise the divine office of kingship legitimately. Maybe Hatshepsut needed this milk more than others, as she– being a woman– claimed an office which was exclusively determined as a masculine one by the Egyptian tradition. This conflict between personal and official gender is made obvious by the contrast between text and image. While the text refers to the female gender of Hatshepsut, the image follows tradition and depicts the king with a male body.

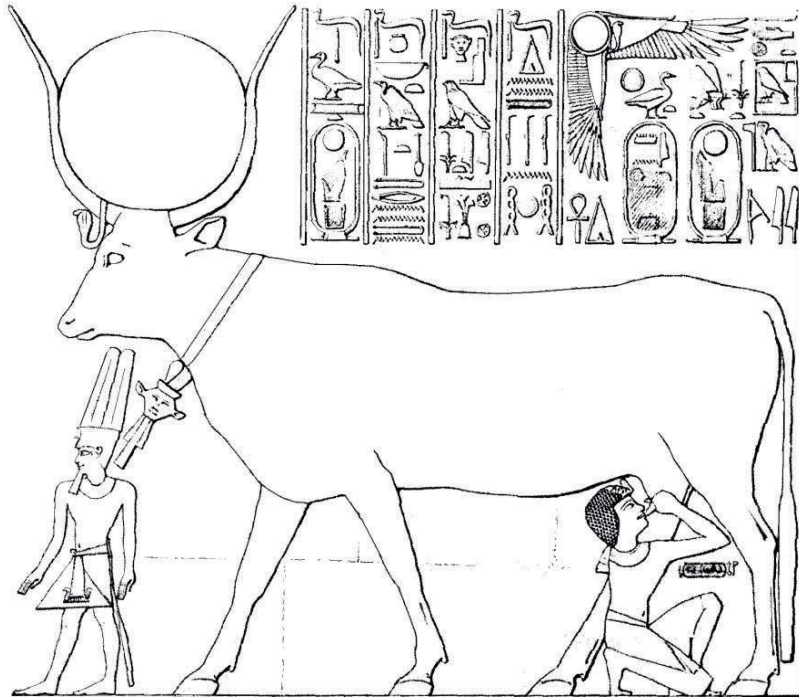


fig. 1

But even kings who did not have a conflict between personal and official gender are often depicted as suckling the heavenly milk of goddesses. The famous birth-relief of Amenhotep III in Karnak even shows four goddesses acting as wet-nurses for the new born king— two in human body, two in body of a cow (fig. 2). While the human mother is watching the scene without doing anything the goddesses transfer their divine power to the new king. By giving him her divine milk they bestow the king with the heavenly power which is necessary for his divine-royal office.

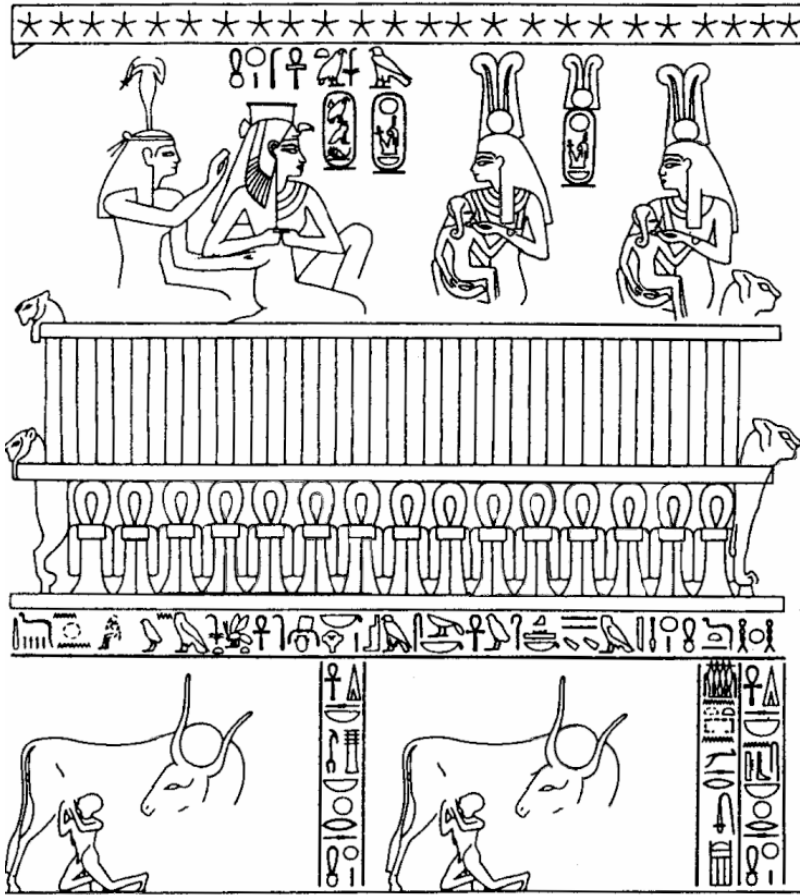


fig. 2

Although the king already was an adult person when he ordered to create the birth-relief on the temple walls, this relief depicted him as a suckling. Looking back to the childhood of the king did not damage the royal image as the most powerful, super-human man on earth. Just in the contrary! As the birth-relief looked back to the mythical childhood of the king it took part in construing his powerful royal essence as god-on-earth, which is central to royal ideology in Egypt. When the king is depicted as the suckling of a divine-mother the intention is not to stress his

natural weakness and dependency as a baby but to stress his royal-divine power which he got through the divine milk of his mother-goddesses.

In much later times the IBF served even Roman emperors to express their divine power and legitimation. Caesar Domitian (81-96 CE) for example erected an obelisk (cf. fig. 3) in his *Iseum Campense*, a sacred area for goddess Isis. The hieroglyphic texts of this obelisk show the Roman emperor in the role of an Egyptian god-king. Among the numerous topics used here to propagate the ruler's divine origin as "perfect god" (*ntr nfr*), we find the IBF also. The inscription on the western side of the obelisk says how Domitian got his power by the gods: The "two Ladies" (i.e. the goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt) gave breast to Pharaoh Domitian and fed him. By doing so these divine wet-nurses transferred power and strength upon him so that he could rule already as a baby "on his napkin" (*tp nwd.t=f*) (cf. LEMBKE 1994: 212).

Apart from such direct political-religious use of the IBF the Hellenistic-Roman culture-world also knows the idea that the milk of goddesses transfers divine power or divine essence. The best known example is Heracles being suckled by Hera. Greek mythology presents Heracles as the son of god Zeus and the human mother Alkmene. Zeus, notoriously adulterous, visits Alkmene disguised as her husband Amphitryon and conceives a child with her. Alkmene having learned about the real father of her son tries to get rid of the baby. She abandons her son in order to avoid the revenge of Hera, the legitimate wife of Zeus, being known as very jealous. Athena, however, saves the baby and brings it to Hera. The goddess not recognizing the identity of the child starts breast-feeding it. Heracles, however, begins to suck his divine wet-nurse so forcefully that it pains her. She throws the greedy suckling off her breast and her divine milk shooting out creates stars – the Milky Way! But through the milk he has received from Hera, Heracles already has all the divine power that will enable him to accomplish his heroic deeds which the myth is telling about.

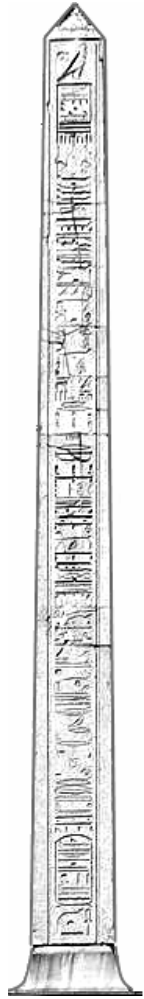


fig. 3



fig. 4

This pagan myth was part of the cultural heritage of Christian Europe as can be seen from an impressive painting achieved by Tintoretto for Emperor Rudolph II (fig. 4). One can ask if the Catholic emperor wanted to see himself as a second Hercules when he ordered this painting. We cannot know exactly, but we can be sure that the semantic link between Rudolph and Hercules definitely should not be seen in the powerless state of a baby who cannot help himself. The link must be seen in the powerful deeds which an Emperor accomplishes as well as the hero Heracles – at least on the ideological level.

### **“Re-ordering” Gender – How the source of divine milk got female again**

Latest in the 5th century CE, higher spiritual semantics was attributed to Mary’s milk. This happened despite the fact that the earliest Church fathers had linked Mary’s human milk to the human nature of Christ.

SCHREINER quotes Theodore of Ankyra († before 446 CE), who invited Christian believers to drink milk of salvation from Mary's breasts.

“Because with her is the source of life, hers are the breasts of spiritual and unadulterated milk. We came here now with enthusiasm to suck sweetness from these breasts.”

(SCHREINER 1994: 177. English translation JK)

This interpretation of Mary's milk is obviously nurtured by pagan ideas on divine milk and at the same time it is based on a New Testament text. Theodore quite obviously alludes to 1 Petr 2:2-3. But how can Mary become the source of divine milk on this basis? The answer can be given by recognizing the allegorical character of early Christian theology. It begins with Paul defining the Church as body of Christ. Later one concluded that Mary is the mother of the Church as she gave birth to the body of Christ which is not only the historical Jesus but on a metaphorical level the Church also. But the metaphorical conclusions go on. Mary can also be understood as the Church herself as she gave birth to the Logos and the Church is exactly doing that. Just as the incarnate Word of God was born by Virgin Mary, the Church is giving virginal birth again and again to the Word of God. In this allegorical logic characteristics of Mary can be transferred to the Church and also the other way round. That is why Mary – being the prototype of Church – can invite the believers to suck heavenly milk from their virgin-mother-breasts. And the birth of Christ from the virginal womb of mother Mary is the prototype of the permanent birth of believers (= body of Christ) out of the virginal womb of mother Church (cf. RAHNER 1935: 339-355).

This highly sophisticated theological game with metaphors which are rooted in the Bible appeared as purely Christian to its players, but it opened the door to the influence of older pre-Christian traditions. That is why patterns of Egyptian Isis-Hathor-religion can be found in Christian use of the IBF although the Christian theologians never intended to go back to these pagan traditions.

### **Isis lactans = Maria lactans?**

For some centuries we find only texts which show a Christian use of IBF, but there were no artefacts. The situation is different from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE on and the change can be seen first in the Coptic (Egyptian) Church. The eldest indigenous church in Africa created one of the



most remarkable topics in the history of Christian art, the *Maria lactans*. Mary, breast-feeding her son Jesus became the classical form of the IBF in later Christianity. Since long it is recognised that this type of images is very similar to that of the Egyptian mother-goddess Isis who gives breast to her son Horus (“*Isis lactans*”).

And indeed, as can be seen from fig. 5-8 the similarities are quite astonishing.



fig. 5



fig. 6

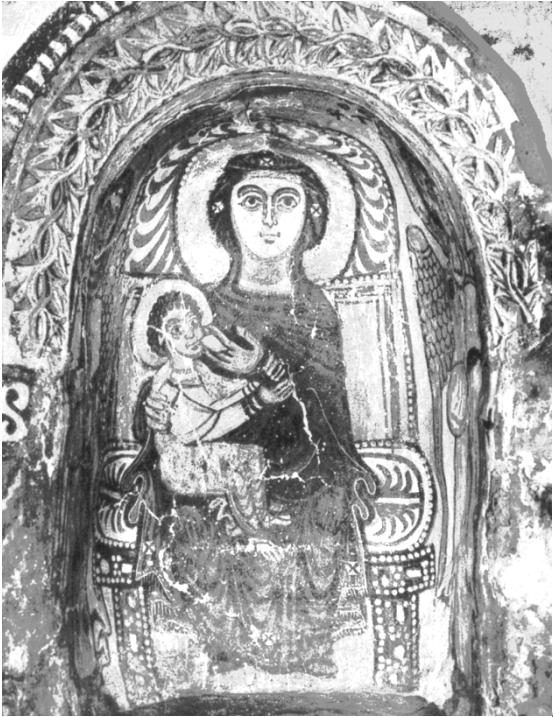


fig. 7



fig. 8

Of course one has to be careful and not take similarities which maybe superficial as the only basis of far going conclusions. Things that look alike must not necessarily be alike. This statement often made by conservative Christian scholars is generally true and one should not overlook differences between Mary and Isis, especially not the biggest one: As far as we know Mary never was venerated as a goddess on its own – at least not in early Christianity. On the other side Isis was a real goddess. Although she always was integrated in the Egyptian or Hellenistic-Egyptian pantheon she enjoyed cultic veneration as an independent deity with universal competence.

We must, however say, that its relevance is somewhat limited. On the basis of a structural view of religion, it is not that easy to make a clear difference between a Christian saint and an Egyptian deity like Isis. The main reason lies in the fact that Mary belongs to a religious system which is dominated by a monotheistic claim. Isis, however, belongs to a religious system which does not have this problem. That is why she can be called a goddess, while Mary cannot. But on the other side yet there are structural similarities between Jewish, Christian and Islamic angels or Christian saints and Egyptian deities: they are neither almighty nor omniscient nor omnipresent; they have a beginning and by that they are not fully eternal. That means the fact that Mary never was venerated as a deity on her own right, with her own temple, priesthood and offerings, does not rule out any comparison with an Egyptian deity.

### **Mary, Isis and God's Wisdom**

There is, however, another important aspect that should not be overseen. In Egyptian tradition Isis is not just mother, she is the royal mother. Already her name points in that direction as it means “throne”. Although Isis often was depicted with Hathor’s cow-horns with sun disk, her original insignia was a throne on her head (cf. fig. 5).

Each and every Egyptian king could see himself as an incarnation of god Horus and when he was sitting on his throne he was re-enacting the mythical icon of Isis and Horus. The king (representing Horus) was sitting on the knees of his mother Isis, represented by the royal-divine throne.

Isis is mother to the legitimate ruler. Isis is also linked to Ma’at, the Egyptian goddess of order and justice as the divine order is the basis of

any legitimate ruling. That is why the Isis-Horus-constellation fits perfectly to the mother of the messiah-king. Since Christians are convinced that Jesus is the true messiah-king, Mary easily turns into a royal mother and the royal constellation “Isis-Horus” converts into the messianic constellation “Mary-Jesus”. Recognizing this one must also say that the similarities are not simply superficial, but is touching deeper structures of religious belief. One must say that obviously early Christians expressed their faith into Jesus as Messiah-King by means of not only biblical but also pagan patterns of thinking and believing. Regarding the cultural world they were living in one may ask if any alternative was given.

Connected with Mary’s status as mother of the Messiah is the title “See of Wisdom” (= *Sedes Sapientiae*). This is not very surprising as the title has two strong sources. The first is the identification of Christ with the divine wisdom-logos. Especially the Gospel of John presents Jesus as the incarnation of God’s Logos (John 1:14) who is a male version of God’s wisdom. The second source for Mary’s connection with God’s wisdom is the link between Lady Wisdom and Isis. Especially the Book of Wisdom, written in Egypt during the 1st BCE, undertakes a thorough re-interpretation of the biblical wisdom tradition using patterns of the then powerful Isis-religion (cf. SCHROER 1998). In doing so the Book of Wisdom, however, mainly stressed Isis’ role as universal deity and not so much her maternal aspects. Just like Isis the divine wisdom is reigning universally over space and time. In order to show up this universal role of God’s wisdom the whole history of salvation is retold as a history of Lady Wisdom’s impact on Israel (Wis 10-19). Just like Isis God’s wisdom is depicted as a royal Lady enthroned in heaven. And she also has a royal counterpart on earth, the most-wise king Solomon, who is the (fictitious) author of the Book of Wisdom.

As soon as Mary was understood as mother of a king the link with the divine wisdom was not farfetched at all. And so the royal Lady Mary was a central topic of Christian art from Late Antiquity to early Middle Ages. Especially the Romanic epoch when Christian art focused on the royal dignity of Jesus mainly depicted his mother as *Sedes Sapientiae*.

## Mary as heavenly mother



fig. 9

The further development of Christian art and spirituality more and more left the myth-critical stance of the first centuries behind and approached closer to the semantic structures of mythical tradition. This can be explained by the fact that the pagan religions did no longer exist. Their myths no longer meant any religious competition to Christianity – sometimes they even were forgotten. That is why the deeper mythical structures underlying the early Christian theology, gained more and more influence. This led back to the idea of divine milk as medium of power, connected with the IBF since old.

This can be seen clearly when Bernard of Clairvaux (ca. 1090-1153) and some saints more are said to have been nursed by Mary in a mystic way.

At that time Mary already had become a superhuman, heavenly mother. Not only Jesus was her son, but all Christian believers are her children. And the milk she is spending now does not only stand for human nature. The human nature of men like Bernard is completely out of discussion! As an adult Bernard also will not need human breastfeeding anymore but of course since long is used to normal nutrition. That means the IBF now is a means to show Mary's milk as transferring heavenly goods like divine wisdom, understanding, the ability to preach the Gospel, and others. That is why on the drawing presented here (fig. 9) Mary's milk shot does not hit Bernard's mouth but his forehead – the head being the place where virtues are located.

And of course it is not about natural nutrition when Mary breastfeeds the suffering souls in purgatory as can be seen on a painting dating from 16<sup>th</sup> century CE (cf. fig. 10). Already the relations of size – the huge body of Mary and the small figure of the souls – indicate that Mary is depicted as a superhuman, heavenly person. Her maternal milk effects spiritual comfort and perhaps even salvation. One has to keep in mind that in late Middle Ages Mary was not only seen as mediatrix (mediator) of salvation but also as co-redemptrix (co-redeemer). This idea was especially vivid in theology and spirituality of Franciscans and Dominicans. The picture of Filotesio Nicola (fig. 10) anyway shows that up to the beginning 16<sup>th</sup> century CE Mary was seen more and more in the role of a divine wet-nurse for Christian believers. Mary is giving divine spiritual goods by her milk – just as Isis-Hathor or Hera did in earlier times. This led to a vivid interest in milk-relics which gained an enormous spiritual and commercial importance. The veneration of these milk-relics was faced by fierce critique – not only by Church reformers like Martin Luther but also by roman-catholic theologians. We find the Franciscan author Bernadine of Siena (1380-1444), called the Apostle of Italy, mocking about the inflationary multitude of milk-relics:

“There are people who show around relics as being milk from Virgin Mary. Oh, one hundred cows cannot have as much milk as they show from Mary all over the world, but yet she did not have neither more and nor less than what was necessary for her child Jesus.”

(cf. SCHREINER, 1994: 203. English translation JK)

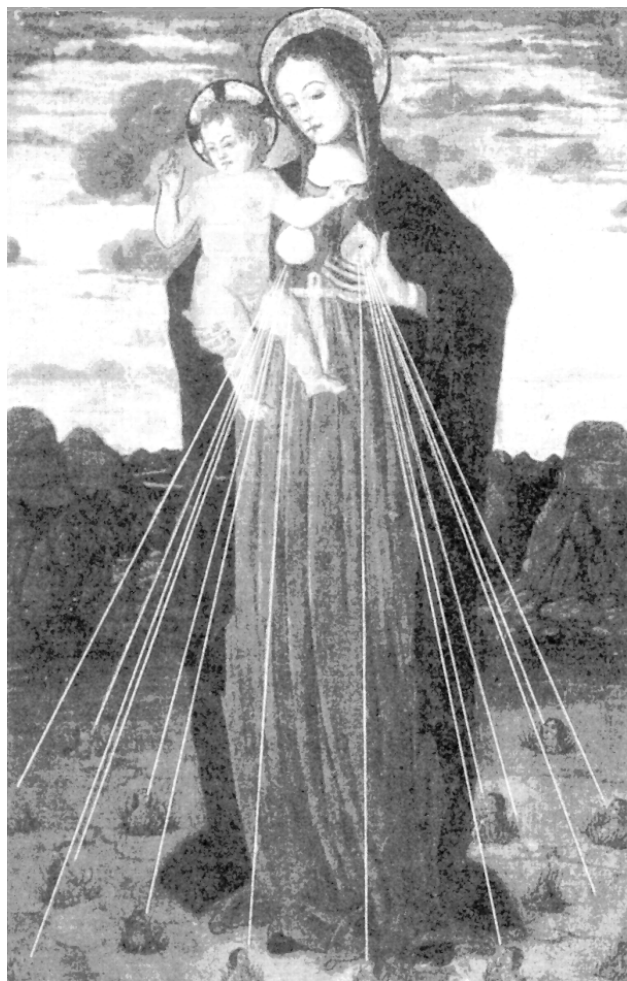


fig. 10

And indeed, even as a catholic author one must concede that some of the later developments in Mariology are charged with many problems if one looks at them from a biblical perspective. The main question is: Is later Mariology still preaching the Christian message with pre-Christian patterns – as the early Coptic Church did? Or is it the other way round and non-Christian mother-religion is reappearing in Christian disguise? Of course theology always has to pay respect to religious need of female and

maternal aspects in religion, which is so deep-rooted in human nature. From a biblical perspective the proper answer to this need would, however, be a stronger focus on the female aspects of God as they are shown by so many biblical text. This would be much more appropriate than an uncontrolled idolization of mother Mary.

Authors of New Testament texts as well as Church Fathers dared to integrate God-Father and the Son into the IBF to express the nourishing and empowering quality of salvation. Obviously they had no problem with talking about a breast-feeding Father or breast-feeding Son. If the first generations of Christians had no problem with a God who is beyond the categories of male and female, why should we have problems with it? It is time to decide whether our cultural gender-stereotypes are more important to us than oldest Christian tradition. If we opt for our tradition we must get ready to learn that God is transcending genders. God is a fatherly mother as well as a motherly father, and being that “he” is *all* we need. The moment we understand ourselves as “his” children, nourished by the milk of divine grace and love, we get the power to live in true freedom and dignity.

ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,  
 ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι,  
 τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,  
 οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων  
 οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς  
 οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς  
 ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.  
 (Joh 1:12-13)



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- 2 ***The King being suckled by several goddesses***, 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, time of Amenhotep III. Detail (slightly complemented) of a wall relief at Luxor-temple. Computer graphic JK (cf. Brunner 1986: Tafel 12).
- 3 ***Domitian's Obelisk in Rome*** (nowadays at the Piazza Navona on a basis dating from Baroque time). Computer graphic JK.
- 4 ***Heracles being suckled by goddess Hera***. Jacopo Comin „Tintoretto“ (1518-1594), „*The Origin of the Milky Way*“, painting, ca. 1575 ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo\\_Tintoretto\\_011.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_011.jpg))
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- 6 ***Isis lactans in Hellenistic-Egyptian style***. Fresco from a house in Kharanis, Oasis Fayum (4<sup>th</sup> century CE). Computer graphic JK (cf. Higgins 2012: 86 fig. 6). As can be seen Isis-religion was pertaining for long time even after the Christianisation of Egypt.
- 7 ***Maria lactans in Coptic style***. Painting in a monk's cell of Jeremiah-monastery at Saqqara (7. Jh. nC); Coptic Museum, Cairo. Computer graphic JK (cf. Higgins 2012: 88 fig. 9).
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## **Interaction of the Old Testament with the Shona Traditions on Children**

*Godfrey Museka & Francis Machingura*

### **Introduction**

One of the most enduring legacies of colonialism in Africa is the entrenchment of religio-cultural dualism. The intersection of various religious traditions dictates peoples' interactions along age, gender and several other socio-political boundaries. In traditional Shona society there is a pronounced mutual borrowing particularly between traditions and ideologies of the indigenous faith commonly referred to as African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity. Although various faiths exist within the traditional Shona society, ATR and Christianity by far remain the most populous religions in Zimbabwe. In this regard, some sources approximate that 50% of Zimbabweans are Christians-cum Traditionalists, 25% are Christians, 24% are Traditionalists and 1% are Muslims and others ([www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/religions.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/religions.html)). Whilst these percentages could have been exaggerated in some categories, they give a rough picture of the religious contours and dualism that exist particularly in traditional Shona society. The religious contours also determine how children are socialized and catalogued. The cataloguing is derived from the Biblical and Shona traditions.

The Christian faith, entangled as it is to the Jewish patriarchal traditions has coalesced with indigenous Shona traditions, which are equally patriarchal to promote prescriptive and proscriptive didactics creating incontestable destinies for children. It is our argument in this chapter that, these destinies to some extent can be so disadvantaging especially in the case of the girl child. Due to patriarchy and the privilege principle which are bequeathed to the Shona society by the Old Testament and ATR, children are socialised into accepting their destinies as divinely sanc-

tioned, as supposed to accept certain positions or roles which are therefore incontestable. The condition of being a child in the Old Testament and in traditional Shona society is therefore paradoxical in that whilst children are regarded as divine rewards; circumstances surrounding their birth and socialization deny others full humanity and participation in the family and society set up. The categorisation unfairly resources other children by denying other children access to the same resources. This marginalisation which is usually sanctified and naturalised through patriarchal myths need to be understood as a social construct and not divinely sanctioned, hence can be challenged, re-negotiated, re-defined and demolished, if children in traditional Shona society are to be given equal respect and access to resources. Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the Shona children's patriarchy-related privileges justified and reinforced by beliefs in the Jewish and African traditions. These traditions conferred children in traditional Shona society with two broad statuses that is, the haves and the have not, the liked and not liked, the celebrated and not celebrated, the servants (girl child) and masters (boy child). All the blame must be squarely put on traditions premised on patriarchy like the Jewish and African traditions that catalogue children.

### **Patriarchy and the privilege principle**

In general usage, patriarchy connotes a situation of unequal power relations in society or institutions resulting in men having an unfair advantage over women. Nakawombe in Kanyoro and Njoroge (1996) broadly defines patriarchy as a system of graded subjugation in which some have power over others, not only because of gender or sex but also due to social circumstances at birth, for instance, being the first or the last born, 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' child, patrician or plebeian. In this regard, the classification of the Shona children culminates in them having unequal access to family and/or societal resources and such statuses is reminiscent of the scenario set up in the Old Testament. The portrayal of children in the Shona traditional society shares similarity with what ones finds in the Old Testament texts, for example, on discipline and the expectations of children. Hierarchy and authoritarianism are also used to maintain social order and enforce certain behaviours. This social order makes individual children see what is expected of them and posi-

tively react in the expected ways. Alternative reactions or any negative dispositions are viewed as rebellious and deviant.

The disadvantaged children are always at the mercy of the privileged ones and mechanisms are put in place for them to be content with the status quo, e.g., the first born child, especially the boy child, automatically assumes an advantage over other children as in the case of the girl child. Any attempt to challenge the existing structures is viewed negatively and incurs a severe punishment. Thus, in a bid to maintain order, the traditional Shona society just like the Jewish, is hierarchically ordered with some children occupying the summit of the social pyramid whilst others anchor the same pyramid. Patriarchy is inextricably bound to the privilege principle, a concept which is also tied to images of class, status and wealth. According to McIntosh, cited by Brody et al (2000), privilege refers to unearned and frequently taken for granted advantages accrued purely through one's birth into a certain group. Privilege exists, openly or covertly within social systems to give certain individuals or groups choices, opportunities, dominance and permission to control less privileged members. Given that patriarchy and privilege emphasise hierarchy and authoritarianism, together they serve to make the power relations appear natural. In analysing the status of children in the traditional Shona society, it is vital to note that the patriarchal ideology together with its brain-child, the privilege principle, combine to create some kind of a caste system. The caste system serves some patriarchal interests in that the categories include and exclude some children and give certain social privileges that grant cultural, economic, religious, social, political, professional, and personal status to the few in ways that dominate and marginalise the majority.

### **Cultural Ambivalence in the Traditional Shona Society and in the Old Testament**

It is clear when one reads the Hebrew Scriptures that children were highly regarded. Their value is put at the spiritual level. Numerous Old Testament traditions, for example, Psalm 127:3-5, presents children as a heritage from God, the fruit of the womb, and a divine reward. Children are perceived as innocent, hence Hosea 11:1-4 says:

<sup>1</sup>When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.<sup>2</sup>The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sac-

rificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols.<sup>3</sup>Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.<sup>4</sup>I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one, who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

Israel's faithfulness during the early days after the ratification of the covenant bond was equated to the innocence of a child. Nations as in the case of Israel are likened to a child when they remained faithful to Yahweh (F Machingura, 2011, 26). Due to their innocence, children were symbolically taught to be unquestionable candidates for the heavenly Jerusalem, where the few elect have the experience of the motherly love of God (Is 66:10-13). Children are presented as innocent and trustworthy to the extent that God could even choose some of them as messengers of his revelation (1Sam 1-3; 1Sam 16:1-13). In the Jewish family set-up, children were valued such that no normal couple would be comfortable being childless. We almost find the same set-up in the Shona society where children are greatly valued. Children were so important that in Genesis (30:1), Rachel said to Jacob "Give me children, or I shall die." Children were regarded as gifts from God (Gen 4:1) and to be childless was considered a reproach or curse (Gen 16:4). Similarly, the traditional Shona society is very much pro-natal whereby the primary purpose of marriage is procreation because children immortalise the father's lineage. To this end, Shoko (2010) avers that in traditional Shona society, any sexual pleasure without the intention of procreating is viewed as a sin. Thus, sexual relations are a means to an end, and that end is procreation. Marriage is regarded as a life promoting ritual because kinship survival depends on it. It is not surprising that, as soon as the marriage vows are consummated; people expect to see results on the part of the female partner, i.e., the woman getting pregnant. Three months in marriage without any signs of pregnancy would call for meetings amongst family members to ascertain the source of the problem. The primacy of children is saliently captured in Magesa's (1998:133) sentiments that:

Young couples desire and pray for fertility and virility. A young woman will want to select a virile young man for a husband to 'give her children' and a young man will pray for a wife to bear him many children.

Polygyny, levirate and sororate forms of marriage that are rampant in the Old Testament and prevalent in traditional Shona society ought to be understood in the context of the primacy of children for the infinite survival of the kinship group. Children (sons) are regarded as divine gifts hence viewed as flowers. From birth to adulthood life cycle or initia-

tion rituals are performed to ensure fecundity. Infertility is equated to divine or ancestral curse and no right thinking Shona person would ever dream of a childless marital union. Once children are there, the lifespan of the marriage is rest assured. And the children are expected to be obedient in order to have peace and tranquillity in society.

Despite this immeasurable desire for children, some traditions in the Shona society which seem to be cemented by the Old Testament narratives require children to be subservient to parents and elders. Listening and obedience head the list of desirable qualities in a child (Gelfand, 1973). In most cases, these qualities rob children of their right to question and fully participate in societal activities, hence our contention that these qualities are seedbeds for patriarchal ideologies. In an attempt to perpetuate the patriarchal ideals the traditional Shona people often comparatively engage the Old Testament verses which emphasise the need to educate children to become responsible adults. The most commonly cited traditions being Proverbs 13:24; 22:6,15 which read as follows:

13<sup>24</sup>He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

22<sup>6</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

22<sup>15</sup> Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

In this case, responsibility means conformity as in the case of the Shona society. The Hebrew Scriptures are often used by the traditional Shona people in promoting unwritten laws which are not kid-friendly. Corporal punishment is the norm in most traditional Shona families and gets support from the Hebrew Scriptures in cases to do with behaviour such as Proverbs 23:13-14. Unfortunately, it is the same Hebrew texts that sound unpopular with most children and human rights activists. The argument being that, children's rights are infringed in the name of disciplining them to become responsible citizens. Similar legal provisions are spelt out in Exodus 21:15-17 and Deuteronomy 21:18-21 which say children who disobey their parents shall be stoned to death. Stories abound of Shona parents who kill their children in the process of disciplining them or are jailed for using excessive force in the process of disciplining their children. Some parents have killed their children for various petty cases like: soiling their blankets and in some cases, daughters being killed for boy chats (The Herald, 11 March 2011; Newsday, 01



November 2013; Newzimbabwe.com, Accessed online, 07 May 2013; Sunday News, 23 February 2013).

The Old Testament is usually cited in justifying kid-unfriendly practices such as child betrothal, early marriages, and appeasement rituals. The Hebrew Scriptures are also used in punishing children for the iniquities of their parents. A case in point is that of Achan's whole family, including children and grandchildren who were executed with him as punishment for his misdemeanour (Josh 6-7). With regard to the family inheritance, the Hebrew Scriptures are used to enforce the exclusion and stigmatisation of children born out of wedlock. Thus, children born outside marriage are regarded as illegitimate. They are not loved but tolerated hence stories abound of how the so-called illegitimate children are ill-treated in most families. They have no right to family inheritance hence their destinies being catalogued. This marginalisation is endorsed by the Old Testament texts such as Deut 23:2 which says:

Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the lord, even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the lord.

This mental torture, stigmatisation and discrimination is grossly unfair in that these children did not make any special request to be born out of wedlock. Solomon, despite being the ideal candidate to succeed David, almost lost the battle to Adonijah simply because he was regarded as an illegitimate child. Because patriarchy is rigid, authoritarian and exclusive, children regarded as illegitimate are victims of the traditional Shona fish boat ethics or ethics that serve patriarchy even in the context of various international conventions that seek to indiscriminately promote and safeguard the rights of children. However, the rights of children particularly in the traditional Shona society favour the boy child. The challenge is great with children living with disability and worse for disabled girls (F Machingura, 2013, 287-308). It is not surprising to read in the media about children who are disowned by their parents as a result of their disability status (Kwayedza, 03 May 2012, Kwayedza, 19 April 2013, The Herald, 2012, Kwayedza, 28 June 2013, The Herald, 07 October 2012, The Standard, 16 June 2013). Besides all the above mentioned challenges, the status of the girl child is still challenging especially with families that are still very traditionalistic. Reference is often made to Numbers 14:18 and Deuteronomy 23:2 which stipulate that "those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the lord." Even to the tenth generation where none of their descendants

shall be admitted to the assembly of the lord. Depending on the dialect, various Shona derogatory names such as *vana vepanze* (children out of wedlock), *zvinongwa* (those picked from the street), *gora* (wild cat), *tsuro dzisinambwa* and *vana vasina baba* (all implying that the children are from outside marriage and without a responsible father. It doesn't matter the mother knows the father of the child. As long as the father is not officially recognised; the label sticks to such innocent children) are used to refer to children born out of wedlock. Most of these children have experienced pain, abuse in their socialization and in most cases have commonly had problems in enjoying family resources as in the case of inheritance. It is sad that, even though it is not their fault to be born out of 'forbidden' unions; they are still denied inheritance privileges or participation in religious activities. In our view, these laws were propelled by patriarchy, a tradition which thrives by creating conditions that exclude others particularly where resources are meagre. The victims to such patriarchal hierarchy are mostly women and children as in the case of the girl child whose destiny in most traditional African societies is predetermined to serve men.

### **Mystification of uncontested destinies**

The statuses of children in traditional Shona social structure largely vary according to the circumstances at birth. The variation is cemented, sanctified, and mystified by traditional taboos similar to certain Old Testament traditions that lead to incontestable destinies in terms of fortunes, privileges and status. Given that patriarchy thrives by placing people into hierarchies, it is not surprising that the Old Testament endorses and mystifies the social grouping of children thereby appealing to the traditional Shona people. The most notable groups whose destiny are sealed through biblical parallelism and invocation include children of the royal and non-royal descendant, 'legitimate' versus 'illegitimate' children, male vis-a-vis female children, and the first born/last born children. An exegesis of each of these categories shows us how this dichotomisation benefits and victimises some children in the traditional and present Shona society. The helm of the traditional Shona political structure is occupied by the chief whose legendary power draws from territorial spirits that are regarded as the guardians of the chieftom (Gelfand, 1973, Shoko, 2012). The chief's major role is to mediate between the

people and the spirit guardians. Religious, political and economic powers are vested in him hence his better standards of living. Due to the modern political developments in Zimbabwe, the chieftainship office has become lucrative since they now serve as senior civil servants with salaries and an array of packages. The chieftainship office is unconditionally hereditary or dynastic, meaning children especially sons who are born in the royal house have their fate decided and sealed. Any attempt to challenge this 'divinely ordained' dynastic tradition is regarded as taboo and invites serious punishment such as ostracism. Reference is often made to tradition in defending this patriarchally motivated social organisation. There is visible parallelism with the Hebrew Scriptures in that children of the ruling class are destined to rule without any external rivalry or competition. To this end, we contend that dynasty entangled as it is to the patriarchal ideology and privilege principle, places some children in more fortunate positions than others. This social organisation ensures that certain political, civil and economic rights are enjoyed by the chosen few who are labelled as 'legitimate' heirs. In the Shona patriarchal system, an ideal family is constituted by a husband, wife/wives and children. Sex is regarded as a sacred union between husband and wife/wives and sex outside marriage is abhorred, especially for women. The descriptions of social roles are tipped on the patriarchy which manifests in different forms as in the case of how sons and daughters are socially defined.

### Sons and Daughters

In the traditional Shona society, female children are less desirable, not only to the parents but to the entire community than their male counterparts. Female children are eventually given in marriage to another man, yet male children would marry and add to the strength of the clan (Bourdillon, 1976, 1990). Male children ensure the posterity of the family and clan name. Similarly, throughout the history of Israel, the genealogical hierarchy is represented by male members. For men's interests, female children are expected to remain virgins until they marry (Gelfand, 1973) and *chimanda* tradition (a custom whereby a son-in-law gives his in-laws a beast as a token of appreciating the in-laws' efforts in keeping his wife sexually unsullied is sometimes provoked in order for girls to maintain their sexual purity until they are married. The same is not

expected of the male children. Given the primacy of the Bible in the lives of the Shona people, these cultural norms and customs are amplified by the patriarchal legal corpus found in the scriptures. Deut 22:13-21 stipulates that, a female child who lost her virginity was punished for dishonouring her father and future husband and death by stoning was the penalty. The punishment isn't for dishonouring herself but men in the mould of his father and the irony of all, the husband who is not yet there. We, therefore, posit that the two patriarchal traditions (Shona and Jewish) celebrate male privileges that have given birth to a hypocrisy regarding the sexual behaviour of boys and girls. While boys tend to increase their peer status by indulging and making public their sexual forays (Shoko, 2012), this is not the same scenario with girls with sexual knowledge and experience who are denigrated as polluted and unworthy for any attention.

Rape or sexual abuse of girls is in some instances moralised by the *chiramvu* tradition, that is, a traditional Shona custom that condones sex between a married man and his wife's unmarried sister(s). This can be likened to the Jewish tradition in Deut 22: 28-29 that says:

<sup>28</sup>If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, <sup>29</sup>and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her; he may not put her away all his days.

In this case, it is unfortunate that if a man has forced sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman he is supposed to make proper payment to her father and marry her. Forced marriage is used to justify and moralise heinous acts by men instead of protecting the victim who is a woman. The man is not blamed or sanctioned for his wayward behaviour that does not respect the rights of women. The judgment portrays the status of the girl child in the Jewish tradition where the feelings of the victim are not considered. In the traditional Shona society, such disrespect is also seen when the female children or women get raped, the blame is mostly put on them for sexually provoking men. The following blaming or labelling questions are usually asked: why did the rapists target you out of all these other girls or women? Were you properly dressed? The plight of the girl child is also sadly witnessed on the death of their parents where they have no right to inherit their parents' property like their brothers. If there are no brothers, family male members to the father can assume immediate ownership of the properties. They also

face further inheritance difficulties in marriage after the death of the husband. Old Testament traditions are often cited in the Shona public discourses to justify the exclusion of the female children. Such traditions include Numbers 27:1-11 and Numbers 36:1-9 which say only if a man has no sons then his daughters might inherit his estate on condition that the daughters would not marry outside the tribe of their father. Patriarchy undergirds these legislations in that gendered interests serving men are important for the protection of the family, clan, or tribal inheritance. Patriarchally tinted cultural practices such as *chiramu*, *bondwe* (a custom in which a nubile girl is given to the sister's or aunt's husband as a token), and child betrothal are supported by Old Testament traditions. It is not surprising that, child marriages that put the girl child at the mercy of the elderly men in some African Independent Churches (AICs) are rampant though sacrificing the lives of the young girls and women (F Machingura, 2011). The Old Testament is awash with narratives of girls who functioned as slaves or maid servants but later on treated as means to patriarchal ends. Hagar, a slave girl was compelled to fulfil Abraham's patriarchal dream of having children. Her opinions and interests as a child mattered the least. A virgin Abishag was thrown to the frail and ailing David in an attempt to generate warmth (*Kudziyisa mudhara*) for him or revive his waning sexual desires (1Kings 1:3-4). The narrative is silent on that but such speculations are not far from the truth.

The story of Lot and his daughters points to incestuous sexual abuse of girls. The story of Lot portrays him in good light that he wanted to protect the angelic visitors or strangers from the marauding homosexual men when Lot suggested giving them his daughters. We do not find Lot negotiating or seeking the consent of the daughters; something really sad to realise. Girls and women are portrayed as being there for the service of men from their time of birth till death. Sadly the dishonour of the girl child even manifests at the death of their parents where we rarely find girls in both the Shona and Jewish traditions getting death bed blessings from their parents. Therefore, among the traditional Shona, as was the case with the Old Testament Hebrews, being the first born male child is of ultra-significance as it is associated with family blessings. The first born son is the *nevanji*, an undisputed heir with the right to control family possessions (Museka and Kaguda, 2013). However, the death bed blessings do not favour the first, second or third born daughters in the case of a couple having girls only or a situation where a son is fifth or sixth born. Again when a father is about to die, the ten-

dency is to call the first born son and bless him. This cultural practice is typical of the Old Testament custom. The incident in which Jacob robbed Esau of his first born rights needs to be understood in the context of the importance of being the first born. Jacob's actions can be exegetically understood as having been a protest of some sort from certain circles against the privileges given to first-born sons. The concept of birth right and death bed blessings can only be rationally explained by the patriarchal theory and the privilege principle. Where resources are limited, patriarchy strives by way of finding moral grounds of marginalising and segregating others.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the traditional Shona society, children are carefully classified in order to include and exclude some where some have access to resources thereby pauperising others without access. When taboos, myths and biblical narratives are referred to, they are only there to mystify, naturalise and moralise this discrimination. Through biblical and traditional myths, the victims of patriarchy especially women, children (illegitimate ones), persons living with disability, aliens are persuaded to be content with the status quo. Consequently, some children are loved and well fed while others are denigrated, wallop in hunger thereby experiencing stigma and unwarranted discrimination.

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## **Bible Translations for Children**

### **A Philosophical and Ideological Interrogation**

*Musa W. Dube & Abel Tabalaka*

#### **Introduction: Aluta and the Bible**

One Saturday I took my, Musa's, then eight year old son, Aluta, to the Upper Room Christian Museum in Nashville, USA. It was a small museum full of biblical art, all of it white biblical characters. We walked around, silently admiring the art. Suddenly, we came upon one art piece, featuring a black man with an Afro. Underneath it was written, "Black Jesus blesses Children." We admired the art and then left the museum. While walking along the pavement, Aluta started jumping up and down, chanting, "Black Jesus blesses children! Black Jesus blesses children!" "Did you like the black Jesus?" I asked. "Yes!" he said.

Around that time, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* was published in Nashville. The pictorial biblical characters featured in the Bible were black. I was very excited as I found my way to the book store to buy my very own copy. I wanted to read it with Aluta and show him the pictures. And sure indeed, I brought a copy home and showed Aluta black Moses, holding the tables of the law, Noah building the ark, Abraham, Joseph, Solomon, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Elizabeth the Mother of John, baby Jesus in the manger, the Samaritan woman etc...they were all black people of African descent. But as soon as I started reading the text of the Bible, I knew that I should close it, and put it away, for I also struggled to understand it. It was a King James Version.

The next significant memory I had with Aluta and the Bible was through the images he had about angels. His bedtime was strictly 8:00pm since I needed time to study before sleeping. So after reading him one or two bedtime stories, we would pray. I always ended the prayer by saying, "May the angels come and surround Little Aluta and take care of him as

he sleeps.” With that, I would leave a contented guy to sleep while I return to my study desk, to push my dissertation. But soon this picture would be changed after a friend invited Aluta to come with her kids to see the Jesus Movie. Having been part of the Sunday school, Aluta must have seen illustration of angels appearing as if they are beautiful young women. In the movie, however, Aluta saw angel Gabriel, and realised that he was a man! So, that evening when we prayed Aluta told me, “*Wena Mama* (You Mum) please do not say the angels must come and surround me when I sleep.” I said, “Why?” He said “I saw an angel in the movie and it was a man.” I said, “So?” He said, “I do not want to be surrounded by men while I sleep!” All this time the little boy had imagined himself sleeping calmly under the full attention of beautiful ladies... until the Jesus Movie changed the picture.

The last story involved Aluta as a character in the Bible. I had published an article in *The Postcolonial Bible* about the Johannine construction of space. I began by describing how Aluta was traumatised by the image of Africa he encountered in the USA. Every time we were supposed to go out he made me promise that I would not reveal we are from Africa (Dube 1998:228-246). Soon after the publication of the article, those who had read the article asked about Aluta’s welfare. I had returned from one such conference and Aluta asked, “How was the conference? I said it was good. People were asking about you,” I said. “Me?” He asked. When I explained it he said, “Ooh I am just sooo glad I am in the Bible.”

Clearly Aluta’s childhood Bible was based on images, coming through paintings and movies. But he was not always neutral to the type of Bible he wanted; he had a racial and gender preferences for his favourite characters. Be that as it may, he recognised that the Bible is a book of power--when it came to his story featured in such a book as *The Postcolonial Bible*, he was very glad to be in the Bible.

### **Tabalaka and Son Bible Stories**

After reaching the age Of two and a half, my wife and I thought our son, Kago was now in the age to start learning stories from the Bible. Therefore, we bought him the 101 Bible stories for Toddlers by Carolyn Larsen (2007). This is a collection of 101 summarised Bible stories (51 stories from the Old Testament and 50 stories from the New Testament). Out of the 50 stories from the New Testament, 39 stories are derived from the

synoptic gospels while the remaining 11 are adopted from the book of Acts. The writer somehow managed to draw Kago's interest mainly due to the use of colourful pictures that take 95% of each page, with only a sentence or two written above the picture. For example, in the story of creation (particularly Genesis 1:24-25), which states,

24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so.

25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good (NIV).

24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good. (KJV)

The author simply says, "God made kittens and puppies. He made fish, too. God made all animals" (p. 13). That is all the author says about the above verses. The rest of the page consists of a picture of a seemingly amused puppy, a kitten, with a bird on its head and some little fishes. The selection of these animals is clearly purposeful given that puppies and cats are common cartoon characters, like Scooby Dooby doo, Tom in Tom and Jerry, Garfield, Pluto in Mickey Mouse Club House. Therefore, the author clearly wanted to mention these animals as children are more likely to be aware of them unlike the words livestock, used in NIV or cattle used in KJV above. Of course, this implies that this Bible was designed for TV or cartoon watching children and thus may exclude children in rural areas who may be more attached to livestock and cattle. Well, to Kago it somehow served as a Bible because even when we go to church, he would carry it. Unfortunately, it would hardly have the scriptures we were referring to in church, since it was highly summarized and rewritten for children.

Another predicament is that the Bible got finished too early. Since we read a story each night, we could only read Kago's Bible for three months. We are presently searching for a new Bible. In the meantime, we bought some Bible flash cards, which consist of pictures with Bible

characters on one side and a summary of the life of the character on the other. From the experience of reading the 101 Bible Stories with Kago, it is clear that children even at a tender age may need more than what we offer to them.

In her preface, the author of 101 Bible Stories states, “a toddler’s mind and heart cannot grasp deep theological truths of the Bible.” Although there is some truth in this statement, the truth is probably overstated, and holding such a position may somehow underestimate children’s capability. In my experience with Kago, I observed that young children could in fact grasp some deep concepts like forgiveness, jealousy and love. For example, we read a story of Joseph and his jealous brothers with Kago. Some days later, we were watching some Looney Tunes cartoons where there was a character called Deffy, who displayed some possessiveness and rage when dealing with other characters in the story. While we are still watching this, Kago out of nowhere says, “Ah Deffy is so jealous like Joseph’s brothers.” This and other examples should inform us of the great ability of children. Consequently, translators, whether intralingual translators (those who reword signs in the same language with signs of that same language (Edwin Gentzler 2001:01) or interlingual translators need to avoid undermining this capability.

### **Dube and Children’s Bible: The Case of *Read and Learn Bible***

I never went out to search for children’s Bible for Aluta. I also do not remember seeing it in a bookstore. Later, I encountered a youth Bible and gave it to him. By then a teenager, he was visibly disinterested and that Bible had no particular life. But now, I went out and bought a children’s Bible. Its title is *Read and Learn Bible*. It was originally published in 2005, New York. The version I bought was First South African edition, published by Bible Society of South Africa in 2008. Its foreword explains that “This is a unique Bible for young readers between the ages of five and eight years”. Within two weeks, and without sitting continuously, I managed to go through *Read and Learn Bible* from Genesis to the end. For the first time in my life; I can say I have read the Bible cover to cover! What made it so easy and so fast? The Bible is dominated by bright pictorial drawings, with the write up occupying one quarter or half of the page and using size fourteen for its font. Each book is severely summarised, or sampled to feature only a few stories. The se-

lected stories are severely and selectively summarised. Many stories are harmonised and most books are omitted altogether. The Hebrew Bible thus features only twelve books from its 39 books, that is, twenty seven books less. As for the New Testament, forget all the twenty one epistles and forget about Revelation. All that is featured are some selected and harmonised Gospel stories and some stories from Acts. Most selected Synoptic passages are presented together with their parallels, but occasionally passages from John are sprinkled in between, thus creating a new plot and narrative about the story of Jesus.

Lest we think all is 'cut and shorten', there are also some explanations and elaborations. Two that struck me involved resurrection from death. First, the story about Jairus' daughter, who dies while Jesus is on his way to heal her. Jesus arrives, goes to her room, takes her hand saying, "Little girl, get up." She gets up, starts walking around and Jesus instructs that she must be given something to eat. The story continues to say, "*She ate and they knew that she was not a ghost.*" (316) (Emphasis mine). Similarly, in the scene of Jesus reunification with his disciples after resurrection, Jesus says, "Why are you afraid? Why do you doubt? Look at my hands and feet and see who I am. Touch me. *Ghosts don't have flesh and bones as you see I HAVE*" (446). Why this anxiety to clarify that "they were not ghosts? Possibly because the author knew or feared that within the larger field of other children's stories, children would interpret those who rise from death as ghosts.

## **Ideology and Target Group in Children's Bible Translation**

What is the ideological framework that guides this children's Bible? Assuming that a children's Bible version should at least endeavour to include stories that feature children, we will look at, 1. Stories that were excluded and what it might tell us 2. Stories that were included and what they might tell us, using the book of Genesis. The latter features many children of the founding fathers and patriarchs. In seeking to understand the ideological framework of the *Read and Learn Bible*, we also need to understand its target audience and its purpose.

To establish its purpose and targeted audience, it is important to highlight some notes from the outer cover, foreword and Parents' Page section. The pictorial cover of *Read and Learn Bible*, features Jesus with outstretched hands and a white dove descending upon him (apparently

drawn from the story of Jesus baptism, where the God's voice declared Jesus a beloved son and the Holy Spirit came upon him). Seated and standing around him are black, white, brown children and adults. Biblically the picture underlines God as loving parent, who gives good gifts and Jesus as a beloved child, just as the parents who are standing around with their children. Designed in the USA where multi-racial identity is a national factor, this pictorial cover serves to underline racial inclusivity of the Bible. Internationally, such a cover then underlines Christianity as a worldwide religion. Notably the three featured animals, dog, sheep and donkey all carry the three colours of diversity: White faced white sheep, black donkey and brown sheep.

There are two more pictorial illustrations before we get to the foreword. The first one features Noah's Ark landing and the disembarkment of its members. This is found in the inner cover of the front page and in the inner page of the back cover. It is thus an illustration that frames the whole Bible. The illustration sports a big rainbow splashed across the land and sky, with various animals majestically jumping out in pairs and trailing off into a green undulating land and crossing a brook of fresh white water stream. It looks like a scene drawn from a Walt Disney movie---Let us just say, "The Lion King Movie", where the king summoned the whole kingdom to come before the Pride rock and see their newly born king Simba, where the praise singers kept singing "*Imnyama Ingwe ila bala*" while Elton John lead voice sang out, "In the Circle, the Circle of Life". Since the original *Read and Learn Bible* was published in 2005 in New York, in the post Lion King Cartoon movie, such inter-textual reading is not farfetched. The passage also serves to captivate children, especially North American kids who are used to cartoon like movies. Yet the illustration may serve to underline the beauty of creation and God the creator, I mean if we forget that God had just cruelly wiped the whole life on earth, save for the lucky passengers of Noah's ark. But for children who read this Bible, the illustration of course does not include the sinking towns, trees and people---just a beautiful scenery, may be a beautiful world. In the text they bring up the flood that destroyed everything, but the waters look like a clean blue sea. Indeed Noah's ark is featured again in the Parental pages, this time with animals jumping into the ark in pairs. The write-up here says, "The story of Noah and the flood is all about God's promise to us: God has promised us that He will love and be faithful to us all the time. Share with your children the power of knowing we have a loving God who will never leave us..."

Noah's ark is followed by a picture of Jesus sitting down holding a black child, while children of other races come running towards Jesus. The picture is drawn from Mark 10:13-16, where Jesus said, "Let the Children come to me! Don't try to stop them."

Turning to the foreword, it reads:

The *Read and Learn Bible* is a collection of favourite stories from the Old and New Testaments, based on the Contemporary English Version (CEV) and the King James Version, *written in simple language for young readers*. This is a unique Bible for young readers between the *ages of five and eight*: Not only is the text easy to read and to understand, but *highlighted information* throughout the text adds depth to the stories. In addition, there are supplemental *Parent Pages* at the back of the book designed to help parents in exploring certain biblical truths and Christian values. A team of excellent artists and designers have succeeded in *illustrating the Bible in a child friendly way*. We trust that this Bible will not only occupy an important place in your child's book case, but also in his or her heart.

(Emphasis added).

The foreword expresses the assumption that it is important to make the "text easy to read and to understand." The assumption tells that the target readers are a group whose understanding supposedly needs help and such help is achieved through making the text easy, adding highlights to some information, adding child-friendly illustrations of the Bible and expecting parental assistance in the reading process. Making the text easy to understand includes omitting many parts of the Bible and selecting some aspects of the included stories as described above. But certainly this is not just for the pleasures of reading and understanding biblical stories. Rather, it is a pedagogical instrument for parents, since the book is designed "to help parents in exploring certain biblical truth and Christian values with their children." One understands that the Bible carries truth and values which parents must explore with their children, possible to inculcate some of them. This is more explicitly stated in the statement that, "We trust that this Bible will not only occupy an important place in your child's bookcase, but also in his or her heart." This is further explicated in the introduction to the Parent Pages, which reads,

Recent studies point out that parents are still the most influential people in their children's lives. These Parent Pages are intended to help you, the best role models for your children, to be equipped and motivated to share your faith through reading the Bible and discussing its stories in a friendly and informal way. It will be an enjoyable experience for you and



for them! It will be fun! It will bring you closer together. It will help you to laugh, learn and love together.

Parents are being prompted to “share” their faith with their children. The promise is that the process will create a happier and closer family. The Parental Pages feature only twenty passages of the *Read and Learn Bible*. Only seven of the passages are drawn from the Hebrew Bible---the rest are from the New Testament. Given that the *Read and Learn Bible* features 17 books of the Hebrew Bible and six books of the New Testament, one would have expected otherwise. The truth and values they seek to promote most are thus Christian ones.

Yes it is notable that it is “certain biblical truths” not all of them are going to be explored. This suggests selection.

### **Excluded Stories: The Case of Genesis**

Abraham the founding patriarch and his wife Sarah are barren and Hagar bears their first child, Ishmael. In their old age God blessed Sarah and Abraham with a son, Isaac. Two things happen. Sarah requests that Ishmael and her Egyptian mother, Hagar should be disposed of, for she does not wish Isaac to share his inheritance with a son of a slave. Abraham is distressed by Sarah’s request, but encouraged by God, he obeys Sarah. He saddles Hagar and Ishmael on a donkey and sends them away, to nowhere in particular. They go to the desert and they run out of water and Ishmael is about to die of thirst. Hagar, her mother, puts him down under a tree and leaves him, for she does not wish to see the death of her child (Gen. 21).

Later on God tells Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him, to prove his love for God. Abraham goes out to the bush with Isaac and builds an altar, ties up Isaac and lifts his knife to sacrifice him---just then God intervenes and provides a sheep (Gen. 22). Both children, Ishmael and Isaac are saved, but these two stories are omitted in *Read and Learn Bible*. Obviously, these stories present both a God and parents that are sometimes detrimental to their children’s safety and may not be the most child-friendly biblical stories for parents to sell their faith to their children. They are best omitted for now. But also these stories bring in the question of class and race. It might be shocking to kids of some races to read that God was not entirely neutral towards race, especially the case of Hagar the Egyptian slave, who was asked to return back to

Sarah and obey her harsh mistress and then God, again, instructed that Abraham must send her off. Lastly such an inclusion would temper with the Romantic picture of Jesus sitting, holding a black child, while children of various other races come happily running to him.

Other notable exclusions are the two daughters of Lot, Rachel and the rape of Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob. This exclusion of daughters, makes the *Read and Learn Bible* quite patriarchal, especially that the opening of Genesis presents a male God, and features a harmonised approach to the stories of creation, with a man created alone in Genesis 1 and a woman created for him in Genesis 2.

### **Included Stories: The Case of Joseph**

Included stories include the story of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Jacob's twelve sons and Joseph, whose story gets a lion's share. Of course, the children who read these stories will hardly guess that Rebekah was possibly a small girl of twelve. The Jacob and Esau story is told to underline forgiveness, showing how Jacob came back to Esau, asking forgiveness and the elder brother was really glad to see his young brother. Thus the Bible features their picture, hugging happily. In the parental pages, the story is featured first, with the following notes,

“forgiveness is God’s gift to all people: In the Bible story Jacob was worried that Esau would not forgive him... but what a great feeling to find out that Esau had already forgiven him. And that is how forgiveness works with us; Jesus continues to forgive us, just the way we are.”

Joseph's story features a father, who loves one child above the rest, and a God who seems to love the same child above many. Why does this story enjoy such elaborate attention? Perhaps because at the end they are all united together in love, thus indicating forgiveness, family unity and that God is with them.

### **What is the Philosophy that Guides Children’s Bible Translation?**

A number of aspects are key to most translators of children's literature including translators of the Bible. The first aspect that translators consider is the fact that children's cognition level is not the same as that of adults. Consequently, there is often simplification of the text to cater for

easy reading by the child-reader. As Radegundis Stolze (2003:208) expresses this, in order to have a simplified text, the translator has to manipulate the source text.

Although simplification and freedom to alter the text is inevitable when translating for children, it comes with some challenges. Children may not grasp certain concepts unless such are simplified, however, there is often a challenge of oversimplification by translators as we have seen with the children's Bibles above. Given that it is upon the translator to decide what is complex, thus calling for simplification, it may happen that he/she leaves out what will in fact be meaningful and of greater interest to the child at the expense of what the child may perceive boring or meaningless. Stolze underscores this point when stating that,

The question is permitted whether we are not looking down on our children with our opinion that they cannot understand many things, forcing them into simple texts that have lost any feature of difficulty, foreignness, challenge and mystery. The prize for easy reading is not rarely boredom (2003: 208).

Experience has shown that what the translator assumes about his/her addressees may not be true. The same applies to children. In fact, studies on children as readers reveal the opposite of what we may have always assumed about children. In her case study of Children's Response to Bible Stories, Sharon Short (2011:307) observes that, "children are aggressive and inventive meaning makers." They can literally struggle with the text and make meaning of their own from it. A Bible verse like, "Man shall not live by bread alone", may be interpreted to mean that there is more that people eat to stay alive, such as rice, meat, vegetables, certainly not bread alone. Short also observes that children make meaning from the story by referring to resources available to them, such as cartoon characters they often see on TV. Furthermore, children like adults, are resisting readers. If a meaning is imposed on them, they may resist it because they know otherwise.

Translators often translate to inculcate certain worldviews, and this is particularly true for translators of children's Bibles. The Skopos theory views purpose as central in the process of translating (Wilt 2003). It assumes that we carry out translation for a particular purpose. In case of translating for children, the purpose for coming up with a translated text will be for example, instilling a particular worldview. This theory is a shift from the older theories, which focussed on the source text, perceiving it as "sacred", thus a translator needed to find equivalence to the

source text. With this theory, focus is not to reproduce the source text but the translator can exercise some freedom, driven by purpose, thus catering for the child reader legitimates cutting, omitting, rewriting and massive illustrations.

One challenge to this is that what is considered children's worldview in one period may not be the case in another culture and will differ from one society to the other (Stolze 2003:219). For example, how would a Setswana worldview of children affect the presentation of biblical stories? Setswana has several sayings about children such as: *Botlhale jwa Phala botswa Phalaneng*, (parents can learn much from the insight of their children) *Phala e senang Phalana lesilo* (literally, a duiker without a young one is a fool, meaning that ignoring the capability of our young ones results in our own peril), *Morogo wa ngwana ga o tlhopiwe ditlhokwa* (the effort and ability of a child should not be undermined); *ngwana yo oo saleng o swela motlhareng* (a child who does not cry to make herself or himself heard, can die on its mother's back, that is a child must make him/herself heard); *Susu a ailele suswana gore suswana a moilele* (adults must respect children so that children can respect adults). All these express the often time hidden yet astonishing ability of our children which can inform how we present Bible stories for children.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored different scriptural portions from Bible translations for children and the responses of children to the various translations. It has demonstrated that translating for children, like translation in general is riddled with a number of challenges, which translators should take cognisance of. It has expounded on the tension that exists between simplifying texts to enable comprehension by the child-reader on one hand and oversimplification of the source text and undermining of children's capability on the other.

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## **The Bible, Africa and family planning – Tension between text and context?**

*Johannes Wessels*

### **Introduction**

One day, as I was driving with an elder of the Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana through the vast Kgalagadi desert, he made a strange remark. “Moruti (the Setswana word for pastor)”, he said, “the return of Christ is still very distant”. In reply to my puzzled face he chuckled: “The Lord commanded us to fill the earth, and there are still lots of open spaces left to fill.” Elder Titus’ remark may be comical, but in a sense it resembles the world view and culture of the majority of the inhabitants of Africa.

There is the saying that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”, and I am fully aware that family planning is one of the ‘taboos’ in African culture, that one must approach with much sensitivity and respect. This chapter intends to shed some light on this “age-old” issue from some interesting Old and New Testament texts, and discuss especially this issue in the light of revelation history, and the phenomenon called progressive revelation (Kaiser & Silva 2007:195).

The paper will firstly touch on the burning issues in the debate on family planning, especially within traditional African communities. Subsequently the Biblical data on the issue, as well as some methodological considerations, will be taken into account whilst the last section will deal with a proposal on a possible way forward.



## The current debate

The issue of family planning in Africa is very complex. Not only are there differences between cultures and tribes, but Nürnberger (1988:55-58) pointed out that the development from traditional African Society to the urban industrial civilization surely contributed to the problems of overpopulation and malnutrition.

The direct link that is often made between overpopulation, poverty, crime and immorality in Africa is not to be taken for granted. The lack of development and growth in Africa must also be attributed to “geographical and health constraints, ill-concerned policies, the sheer number of separate nation states (a colonial legacy)”, and poor governance are also factors that surely contributed to the problems in Africa (Rotberg 2007:11).

Many African leaders, economists and development specialists question the assumption that Africa needs to “slow its rapid population growth in order to emerge from underdevelopment” (Obadina 2007:18). They deny that Africa has more people than its available resources can support. They would argue that there are scarcely populated areas in Africa that are also subjected to severe poverty. Secondly they argue that a densely populated country, like Japan, has a larger population than the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The size of Japan is only half of the DRC, but its people enjoy a standard of living that is vastly greater than their counterparts in the DRC (Obadina 2007:19).

Despite all the objections above, Obadina (2007:21) still concludes that it is “undeniable that rapid population growth complicates the quest to improve general prosperity.” In a study done by the CIA, it is shown clearly that Africa may not have the most densely populated areas in the world, but that the number of children per family is surely the largest in Central and Sub-Saharan Africa.

As was the case from the earliest human establishments, fertility is still a very important aspect in rural Africa. The number of children that you have is not only assuring your legacy and future existence (Mbiti 1969:133), but also contributes to your work force (Nürnberger 1988:55). In the case of female children, they include the possibility of earning *lobola* (dowry) at a later stage.

In discussing the Sotho group, also being the majority group in Botswana, Nürnberger (1988:55) states that the low life expectancy due to

attacks from wild animals, floods and hostile neighbours made procreation so much more important in earlier times. The traditional emphasis on multiplication and fertility did not mean that there were no restraints on procreation in the African culture. Not only did mothers often proceed with lactation for a period of up to three years (Mbiti 1969:143), but the number of males that could enter into polygamous marriages was limited due to the fact that they had to pay *lobola*, and that polygamy was arranged according to a definite social protocol (Nürnberg 1988:56).

Furthermore the youth was educated in traditional schools to practice safe sex, and having children outside matrimony was a punishable offence (Wessels 1994:5). Unfortunately many of these values have been watered down by globalization and industrialization. This had serious consequences for the morals of society as a whole, but also led to an uncontrolled population surge. This is confirmed by Dube (2003:541):

“Also, because globalization increases job insecurity and mobility, and separates families for long periods of time, the values of abstinence and faithfulness, though excellent, are often ineffective.”

These changes in traditional family structures had several results. Not only did it contribute to promiscuity and the HIV/Aids pandemic, but it also resulted in increased famine, destitution and even abuse of children. Even though these estranged communities are often blamed for this increase in population, Nürnberg (2003:56) argues that this situation was often created by the wealthy minority of the industrialized community.

It is noteworthy that the original meaning of the label “proletarii”, given to the working masses, actually referred to ‘breeders’ (Wilkinson 1978:443). Ironically it is often the haves, who can afford having more children, that have little or no children, and the have nots, that cannot afford to care for many children, that aspire to the primitive ideal to have as many offspring as possible.

Over and above the problem of these external circumstances, there was also the call towards multiplying from political leaders. The rationale was that voters, and even soldiers, should be bred for the purpose of strengthening a particular tribe or political grouping in the future. Even though the tendency of overpopulation is often the case of ridicule<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa the polemic regarding president Zuma’s ongoing promiscuity has resulted in several controversial cartoons, as well as several court cases surrounding a painting of him with his genitals exposed (Anon, 2012).

amongst more affluent persons from the urban-industrial civilization, such appeals are even made to their followers by certain Caucasian, right wing groups in the South-African Apartheid context (Nürnberger 2003:58).<sup>2</sup>

From a Biblical point of view, the instruction to be fertile and multiply, to be fruitful and replenish the earth in Genesis 1:28, has often been misused to strengthen a certain group through numbers. The question is whether there are other passages in the Bible that also look at family planning in a positive light.

## Family planning in the light of the Bible

### *Family planning in the Old Testament*

Starting at the very beginning, it is interesting to note that procreation is already mentioned as early as Genesis 3. Even though it may be reckoned that bearing children is part of the punishment of sin, it is important that the seed that will bring redemption, is mentioned as a blessing amidst the suffering that Adam and Eve had to endure.

At first glance, references to family planning are almost nonexistent in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Protagonists of the anti-contraception campaign often use the fact that Onan was slain by the Lord for spilling his semen on the ground instead of impregnating Tamar according to the protocol of the Levirate marriage (Gen. 38:3-10). This passage not only records the Levirate as a means to secure offspring from the family of the deceased, but also have importance for African families today. The interpretation of such passages touching on the levirate, as well as other passages ‘condoning’ polygamy in the Old Testament, calls for a “respect for culture and the need for a critical sense of what is the authentic Christian tradition (Hearne 1982:289). Adeyemo (2006:67) mentions here that this text is connected to widow inheritance in Africa, but was abandoned due to the growth of monogamy and the devastation caused by HIV/Aids. This text, and especially the death of Onan, may be interpreted to stress the

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<sup>2</sup> This call towards ‘expanding the nation’ is not only evident in Nazism, but is even present in the ancient world (Wilkinson, L.P. 1978:443).

<sup>3</sup> Very little research has been done on issues concerning bioethics and the Christian religion (De Lange, 2012:1-10).

importance of procreation and multiplication by the Israelites. There are, however other focal points in the text. According to Von Rad (1972:358) the principle that the first husband's name "should not be blotted out" (Deut. 25:6), and the retaining of property in the dead man's family, help us to a fuller understanding of this text. In addition Kidner (1967:188) points out that Onan was not against securing a large number of descendants, but that the specific issue is here that he wanted to secure his own name and offspring. Equally important for understanding Onan's death is the special place and role of widows in the Old Testament as part of the group called '*anawim*' (Wessels 2010:86).

Numerous passages that stress the importance of a decent offspring are found in the Old Testament, and three references will suffice. With the renewal of the covenant in Genesis 22:17, Abraham is promised that his descendants will be as many as the "stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore." In Psalms 127 Solomon praises the man who filled his own quiver with many arrows (Solomon's indiscriminate pursuit of this ideal probably led to his downfall). In Jeremiah 29:5-6<sup>4</sup> we find an interesting reference to the Israelites in exile. Not only are the Israelites encouraged to marry and have children, and for their children to do likewise, but in verse 7 their envisaged multiplication is even linked to prosperity.<sup>5</sup> It is notable that there are two quite different interpretations of this passage. Initially the command to multiply was viewed as a ploy for survival, but Galvin (2013:1) is of the view that verses 5-7 definitely refer to a positive contribution to the foreign country that is in question here.<sup>6</sup> He also concurs that this refers to the 1.5 generation, the generation referred to as "those who emigrated as adolescents or slightly older children of immigrants".

Even being quite scarce, we also find clear indication of the temporal instruction to refrain from having children at certain times. One such an example is in Ecclesiastes 3, where verse 5 mentions that there is "a time

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 29:5-6: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease."

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 29:7: "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

<sup>6</sup> The distinction between multiplication for the sole purpose of survival and multiplication is of great importance for the theme of this paper, and will be discussed in the latter half of the paper.

to embrace and a time to refrain.” This is said at the background of verse 8, mentioning that there is a “time to love and a time to hate”, “a time for war and a time for peace.” In interpreting the intricate set of opposites in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Brisson (2001:294) is of the opinion that the value of these verses is not a detailed exposition of the meaning of each phrase, but the wisdom of knowing ‘what to do when’. In terms of family planning, it seems very important that this wisdom is applied carefully in each situation in current-day Africa.

Even though the Lord is recognized as the giver of the first child mentioned in the Bible (Gen 4:1), and the one who formed Isaiah in the womb (Isa 49:1-5), we also find even believers lamenting the day that they were born, as in the case of Job (3:3, 5:7, 14:1), and even Jeremiah (20:14-18). The passage in Jeremiah is of specific importance in this regard:

- 14 Cursed be the day I was born!  
 May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!
- 15 Cursed be the man who brought my father the news,  
 who made him very glad, saying,  
 “A child is born to you—a son!”
- 16 May that man be like the towns  
 the LORD overthrew without pity.  
 May he hear wailing in the morning,  
 a battle cry at noon.
- 17 For he did not kill me in the womb,  
 with my mother as my grave,  
 her womb enlarged forever.
- 18 Why did I ever come out of the womb  
 to see trouble and sorrow  
 and to end my days in shame?

Jeremiah 20:14-18

In this passage it is evident that the prophet is creating a paradox between the normal blessing brought at the birth of a child and point out the misery of a child born in times of war and animosity. The phenomenon of cursing one’s day of birth was not totally foreign to ancient times, as a parallel for Jeremiah’s lament is also found in the myth of Erra and Ishum (Walton et al., 2000:656).

## Family planning in the New Testament

This lament of being born or having children in troublesome times is in a sense echoed more than once in the New Testament. In this respect, the radical saying of Jesus on his way to Calvary must have gone right against the grain of a society where fertility and procreation were held in high esteem:

Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" <sup>30</sup> Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" <sup>31</sup> For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Luke 23:28-31

This is a striking passage in the sense that barrenness and childlessness, which were previously seen as curses amongst the Jews (Geldenhuis 1950:604), are now seen as blessings in the light of the horrible Roman-Jewish war (70 AD) that followed in the second half of the first century. Already in Chapter 21:23<sup>7</sup> and Mark 13:17<sup>8</sup>, Jesus predicted the suffering that women with children will endure. Even though the childless ones would have to endure great tribulation, they would not have to endure the pain of seeing the suffering of their own children.

From the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40, we find not only a reference to the acceptance of those being emasculated (Deut. 23:1)<sup>9</sup>, but the passage that the eunuch was reading (Is. 53:7-8) is clearly brought into connection with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, who died without any 'physical' descendants.

Last, but not least, is the Apostle Paul's treatise on celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. Traditionally the instruction of Paul to act as if one were not married (in verse 29) is interpreted in terms of eschatological concerns that Paul might have had (Orr & Walther 1976:221). In terms of these views Paul encouraged the Corinthians to refrain from having children due to the "form of this world ... passing away". More acceptable, per-

<sup>7</sup> Luke 21:23: "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people."

<sup>8</sup> Mark 13:17: "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!"

<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 23:1: "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD."

haps, is the argument of Van Drunen (1996:1) that Paul does not discourage marriages, or having children in any way, but warns the Corinthians not to be “engrossed” by these things at all. It is notable that Van Drunen links the text in Jeremiah 29 with the text in 1 Corinthians 7, as both having relevance on marriage and procreation.

One of the less known explanations of the above Pauline passage is provided by the acclaimed scholar, Bruce Winter (1989:86-106). To my view Winter convincingly argues that inscriptions testifying to the appointment of a *curator annonae* for three consecutive years, indicated a serious famine during Paul’s stay in Corinth and his correspondence to the congregation.’ Noteworthy for our theme is that Winter (1989:93) directly links Paul’s instruction to those who are unmarried to stay as they are to the ‘present crisis’, being the famine in Corinth. Although married couples were advised not to abstain from intercourse due to the famine (Winter 1998:94), these couples were warned that they will face “many troubles in life”, of which survival with their children during the famine would have surely been included. Although Winter’s argument seems somewhat complicated, it is to my view more viable than the other explanations provided for Paul’s stance.

In the light of the Biblical evidence in this regard, it is clear that there is an understanding of the troubles of parenthood, especially in times of trouble. In some instances, as in Jeremiah 29, procreation is encouraged, whilst in later instances (1 Cor. 7) it is clearly discouraged, *albeit* just as a temporary measure in times of famine and war. It is noteworthy that multiplication is often interpreted as a method of survival, whilst in other cases the refraining from multiplication is also viewed as a method of survival, especially in times of food shortage and poverty.

### **Progressive revelation: a possible way forward?**

In approaching the difficulties in handling the Bible on the topic of family planning, the distinction between the “analogy of faith” and the “analogy of Scripture” (Kaiser 2007:71-73; 193-198) has to be kept in mind. The “analogy of Scripture” refers to the additional socio-historical and informational data becoming available from earlier information in the Bible, assisting us in determining the historical context of the text. The “analogy of faith” refers to spiritual Biblical truths deduced from the whole Bible as a canonical corpus, which are used to determine the

theological contexts of a text. After having attended to the analogy of Scripture, it is important to revisit the analogy of faith, and the way in which Biblical texts have been incorporated into religious traditions.

From the information available to us concerning the current debate and the Biblical evidence available to us, it is clear that there are no clear-cut solutions to the problem at hand. From both the background to the problem, as well as the Biblical evidence, it is clear that family planning cannot be blindly applied in any given situation, nor can it be ignored, especially in situations of dire poverty.

The dilemma of family planning in the African context is often approached by pastors and prophets alike by falling back to the basic instruction, being to multiply in Genesis 1:27. I propose, however, in line with the important movement from experiential teaching philosophy, i.e. moving from the “known to the unknown” (Ndlovu, 2012), that spiritual leaders be guided towards proclaiming the importance of family planning, especially in certain circumstances.

This chapter has shown that there are definite Biblical markers for implementing family planning in certain contexts. The motivation of parents and the implementation of such practices from the side of the church are to fall within the scope of another study. I believe that this paper’s investigation of Old and New Testament sources in this regard can provide us with a sound foundation for such a study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has adequately pointed out several traditional beliefs that may be stumbling blocks in the provision of a sustainable and a secure environment for our children. It has also been pointed out that there is more than one side to the coin of family planning, and that thorough research, which includes collaboration with several role-players will be of the utmost importance in deciding upon the viability and wisdom of family planning as a partial solution to poverty.

In the context of our quest, it is therefore of the utmost importance to critically establish the progressive revelation concerning the importance of procreation, and revisit our current context in this light. In terms of the revelation-history and the teachings of Jesus and Paul in this regard, it is also clear that the inculturation of the gospel, especially in the light



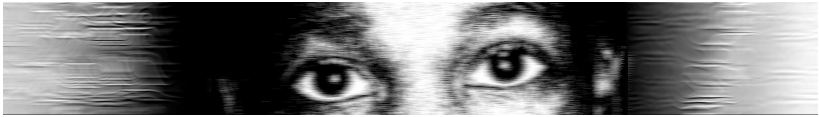
of the global plight of the children, aspects such as polygamy and its original roots, traditional values in terms of sexual education, and the position of children as property or social capital be revisited. Procreation as a basic element of marriage, as well as the sacrifices that responsible parenthood would require are also not to be overlooked, especially by the those finding themselves in the wealthy urban-industrial civilization.

Above all, the conclusions of Nürnberger (1988:58-61) should not be overlooked. The dire situations that children are experiencing globally, are also to be blamed on the lack of understanding family systems and economical necessities by governments and employers. New attention to the family in the working environment, taking care to preserve family units within a secure work environment is of utmost importance.

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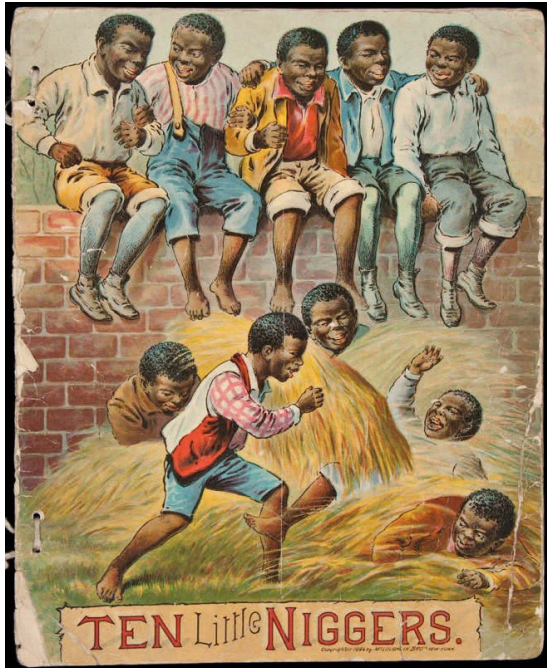
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## The term “child” in colonial and post-colonial perspectives<sup>1</sup>

Stephanie Feder



### Introduction

Half a year ago I visited the *Rautenstrauch -Joest Museum* in Cologne, a renowned museum for ethnology. They have a permanent exhibition called “*The distorted view – prejudices*” which looks at aspects of biases especially towards Africans. I spent some time watching the video “Ten little nigger boys”<sup>2</sup>. It is a children’s song in which ten black children are reduced by one in each stanza until none is left.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Duke Grounds, Andrea Qualbrink and Eva Mundanjoel for proofreading!

<sup>2</sup> Since the usage of “nigger boys” is really problematic and I do not want to re-impose that racist language in my article, I will use the abbreviation “n.b.” for it.

In the exhibition, each stanza of the children's song is presented by an afro-German, commenting on the prejudices the song imposes. Although this song is very racist, it can tell much about the problematic use of child imagery of African and black people in general.

This paper will try to give a short overview of the usage of child imagery for Africans and black people. It will show how the image was used during colonialism by the colonizers and how it is still present. The first section will be an interpretation and historical presentation of the song "Ten little n.b." Furthermore, with the help of an article by Bill Ashcroft, I will explore the image of the child and its impact on Africans and the colonized in general. The last step will be a marginalized reading of Mark 10:13–16 in its context. I decided to use this passage from the New Testament because it is one of the most well-known references to children in the Bible. My intention is to read this passage from the perspective of the children involved in the passage and to figure out what is Jesus' and the disciples' attitude towards them.

### **"Ten little n.b."**

I learned the song "Ten little n.b." when I was a child in the eighties in Eastern Germany. Today it is still a well known song in Germany. Since people are aware of its political incorrectness, there are different versions available which do not use the "n-word" but retain the melody and the same principle of reducing a group of ten people to zero.<sup>3</sup>

The song was originally written by Septimus Winner in 1868 (Schmidt-Wulffen 2010:63). It had the title "Ten little indians". Later on it was used in the United States during the time of slavery. The title shifted to "Ten little niggers". The stanzas referred to issues which regarded different aspects of slavery (Schmidt-Wulffen 2010:81). During that time, the infant image was not yet so important.

As the picture shows, there was a shift towards the representation of black people as children. The picture illustrates black men playing childishly but having faces which belong to adult men. Since then, the title changed from "Ten little niggers" to "Ten little nigger boys". Although

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXS7w1Ydd9Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXS7w1Ydd9Q) ("Zehn kleine Jägermeister" by Die Toten Hosen). At [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zehn\\_kleine\\_Negerlein](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zehn_kleine_Negerlein) other versions of the song are mentioned.

the “little” already refers to someone small and immature, the “boys” made it even clearer that the mentioned group is not grown up yet.

In Germany, the first children’s book including the song was published in 1885. It had the title “Aus Kamerun” which hints at the fact that Germany got colonies in Africa around that time. Since 1885, 90 prints with different versions of the song were published in Germany. There are too many stanzas to recite in full. I will stick to the version as it is presented in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum (Böhmerl/ Friedrich/ Hebig 2007). The German rhyme cannot be maintained in the English translation.

*Ten little n.b. went sleeping in a barn.  
One got lost in the hay and then there were nine.*

The afro-German commenting this stanza refers to the barn as a house for animals but not for people. He assumes that there is the idea that people in Africa do not live in real houses but have primitive housing as the barn illustrates. Regarding the child imagery, the barn with the hay was, and maybe still is, a children’s place for playing.

*Nine little n.b. went hunting.  
One shot himself and then they were eight.*

The interpretation of the woman from the video links this stanza to the time when Germany had colonies. According to the woman, this stanza shows that Africans do not know how to use weapons. In general it illustrates the stupidity of the Africans. This example also illustrates the immaturity of Africans: they behave like children when using something like a weapon which is a sign for war, maleness, and power.

*Eight little n.b. went to the bowling alley.  
One bowled himself to death and then they were seven.*

Once again the n.b. are seen as stupid children. Bowling is a game and games are childish.

*Seven little n.b. went to see a witch.  
She ate one of them and then they were six.*

The young man from the video can see no link between Africa and the witch but he mentions the naïve, clumsy depiction of Africans who fall from one catastrophe into another. He is concerned about the many deaths of people in a children’s song.

According to my view, the witch represents the animistic worldview in Africa. It shows that Africans still believe in silly and childish things like witchcraft, which have no relevance in the West anymore. The witch could also hint to (German) fairy tales where witches play an important role. Then it is also a connection between fairy tales, which are usually read for children, and the childish perspective on the black boys.

*Six little n.b. went into a swamp.  
One got stuck and then they were five.*

Regarding the idea that Africans are childlike, this stanza again depicts children who could not even cope with something normal like a swamp.

*Five little n.b. loved drinking beer.  
One drank himself to death and then they were four.*

This stanza shows the excess of Africans. They do not know their limits, which is why they can even drink themselves to death. It could also hint at the German colonial practice of trading in alcohol, a practice that brought a lot of trouble and conflict to African communities. Furthermore, excessive behavior is something that is also linked to children, since they need to learn their limits in different regards.

*Four little n.b. cooked some porridge.  
One ate himself to death and then they were three.*

Eating excessively is almost the same as drinking too much beer in the last stanza.

*Three little n.b. went to Turkey.  
One got run through with a spear and then they were two.*

*Two little n.b. went to cross the Rhine.  
One fell overboard so then he was alone.*

These last two stanzas are interesting since they mention Turkey and Germany. It is clear that this version of the song does not play in Africa (as is evident in the last stanza as well). I could not find any helpful interpretation explaining why they go to Turkey, but the action that happens there illustrates once again the stupidity of the boys. It is not said that the boy was killed by another's initiative but by his own mistake. That one of the two fell into the Rhine also shows a self-produced accident. Nothing is said about a storm; it seems that he was just too silly to stay in the boat.

*One little n.b. was dreadfully clever.  
He went back to Africa and took a wife.*

This version of the last stanza is common since 1874. Before 1874 it was more likely that all n.b. would die. This version hints at the aspect of reproduction. It implies that the dying and the disappearance of the other nine are not problematic since new ones can be easily re-produced. As the n.boy is old and mature enough to have a wife, this stanza shows that there is an ambiguity regarding the age of the boys who are probably no boys but adults.

With this example I want to illustrate how black people were depicted in the West, especially in Germany during the time when Germany was engaged in colonialism. Africans are seen as children: immature, stupid, excessive, and fated to never grow up.

A lot of stereotypes are reproduced in the stanzas of the song, and there are even more which could not be presented here. Interestingly, this song belongs to what we call “negative pedagogy”: German children and children from the West in general should learn from the rhymes and illustration how to behave correctly and to control their drives. They also learned racism because they laughed at the silly mistakes of the blacks and felt that – if they behaved correctly – they were better people than the “Ten little n.b.”

We will continue by looking at the infant image more theoretically with the help of Bill Ashcroft and his article *Primitive and wingless*.

### **Bill Ashcroft’s analysis of the child as colonial subject**

In 2001, Bill Ashcroft published a book called *On Post-Colonial Futures*. Chapter 3 ‘*Primitive and wingless*’ deals with *The colonial subject as child*. He asks why the child was such an attractive image for the colonizers. In order to shed more light on this issue, he first determines the emergence of the term child. It came up at the same time as the term “race” was established. Therefore, there is cross-fertilization between the concept of the child and that of race (Ashcroft 2001:37). Both concepts make it possible to legitimize the domination of another group of people.

Furthermore, according to Ashcroft, the invention of the printing press made it necessary to distinguish between two groups according to their



literacy: whether someone could read or not would determine if they were a child or an adult. This gap could only be overcome by education.

Another aspect Ashcroft mentions is that of development (Ashcroft 2001:38). The concept of development was mainly influenced by Karl Marx. The state of immaturity and infantility was to change through development into maturity and adulthood. This idea of development is still there. Especially, the issue of “developing countries” illustrates the need that something or someone requires development and that there is the possibility of an unlimited growth.

Ashcroft also analyses the concept of the child by two important philosophers: John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>4</sup> Their view towards the child was different but both concepts fitted the imperial undertaking very well. Locke’s idea was that at the stadium of birth, the mind of the child was a *tabula rasa*. Parents and teachers should responsibly write on this *tabula rasa* (Ashcroft 2001:39). Since Ashcroft sees a link between the child and the primitive, the primitive was also a *tabula rasa* on which nothing was written and that the missionary could fill. Furthermore, the image of the *tabula rasa* was also used for colonizing achievements, as the term *Terra Nullius* implies. The colonized foreign land was seen as *tabula rasa* on which the white man was the first to write and to settle.

The other concept Ashcroft introduces is taken from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Ashcroft 2001:40). During childhood there is a strong connection with nature. Children are like a wild plant that symbolizes an ideal state of innocence but, on the other hand, asks for cultivation, or in our context “civilization.” Regarding both concepts, Ashcroft states: “It becomes the perfect surface for the inscription of imperial adventure and maturity” (Ashcroft 2001:40).

In sum, Ashcroft elucidates why the child was such a suitable image for colonization:

The child, then, is the image, which normalizes this threatening identification with the other because its ambivalence and ‘naturally’ subordinate status, while serving as the pretext for imperial conquest and domination, is also that which continually mediates the tension between identity and difference: the child is both pre-formed self and repudiated other (Ashcroft 2001:44).

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<sup>4</sup> In this way Ashcroft is anachronistic, since he states that childhood was invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially through printing press but then refers to two philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and their concepts towards childhood.

Furthermore, Ashcroft appropriates Julia Kristeva’s concept of the “abject” for his concept of the child (Ashcroft 2001:44f). The abject is the state between subject and object and its fear of losing the distinction between these two modes. Since the child is a part of the mother and the father, the abjection is most precarious here. Regarding this aspect of imperialism, Ashcroft writes:

The myth of the child therefore promises the development of the primitive unformed subject into the ‘self’ while at the same time maintaining that subject as the abject other, the object of imperial rule (Ashcroft 2001:47).

Ashcroft also analyses what happens to the child image after colonized countries became independent and nationalism emerged. In many countries the image of the child was not rejected but replaced by the image of the father, especially by “founding fathers” like Nehru, Jomo Kenyatta and Nelson Mandela. According to Ashcroft, the missing father in the ex-colonies was replaced by these founding fathers. Insofar, the image had not been abolished yet but it survived in terms of the parent.

Ashcroft’s analysis will help to illuminate Mark 10:13-16. After introducing you to the usage of the term “child” in colonial and post-colonial times, I would like to analyze Mark 10:13–16 in this regard. How is the child image used in this text? What kind of relationship is established between Jesus, the disciples, and the children? Is there an analogical use of children as presented by Ashcroft in regard to colonialism? To what extent is the narrator supporting the differences between the groups?

### **Reading Mark 10:13-16 from the margins**

My analysis of Mark 10:13–16 will be a reading against the grain. I will mainly make use of results presented by the German New Testament scholar Martin Ebner in his article “*Kinderevangelium*” oder *markinische Sozialkritik?*” (Ebner 2002). The difference is that I will read from the perspectives of the marginalized within the text. But before figuring out who is the marginalized in the text, I will examine the structure and the context of Mark 10:13–16.

## Structure and topic of Mark 10:13–16

Since there is another passage on children in Mark and the topic is almost the same, we should include Mark 9:35–36 as well. Ebner points out that Mark 9:30–10:31 has one topic: who will be first and who will be the last. Therefore, the passage has to be regarded as coherent. The structure of the passage is according to Ebner (2002:321) as follows:

- 9:30–32 Summary of the passion
- 9:33–35 First and last
- 9:36–37 Children
- 9:38–40 Disputation about the foreign exorcist
- 9:41–50 Sayings of the  
treatment of the little
- 10:1–12 Disputation about divorce
- 10:13–16 Children
- 10:17–31 First and last

Ebner speaks of a concentric structure. At its center stands the treatment of the little. Although there are different words used (*μικρός* and *παιδίον*), little is an allusion on the children. Skipping the summary of the passion, the passage starts with Jesus asking the disciples about what they had spoken about on the way to Capernaum. Although the disciples were silent about their quarrel concerning who was most important, Jesus addresses this issue and illustrates it with a child. He urges the disciples to relinquish their wish to be the first. Mark 10:17–31 refers to that topic more specifically in economic terms (Ebner 2002:323) whereas the disputation about divorce (Mark 10:1–12) addresses the theme in terms of the patriarchal household (Ebner 2002:324). There is also another topic: boundaries. It becomes apparent that the disciples were trying to establish an exclusive right over the ability to cast out demons when they told Jesus about the foreign exorcist. But Jesus is unconcerned about the foreign exorcist as long as he does it in his name. The establishment of boundaries demanded by the disciples is not confirmed by Jesus. Similarly, in Mark 10:13–16 the disciples reject the children and the people who bring them to Jesus. Again, Jesus does not establish boundaries but offers integration to all who want to join his community.

## Figures at the center and on the margin

Jesus and his disciples are introduced to the reader as the protagonists. In Mark 9:30–10:31, Jesus and the disciples are fixed figures while others come and go. In the text, the importance of a particular character is demonstrated through constancy, therefore Jesus and his disciples are more important than the changing characters.

The difference between Jesus and the disciples is that Jesus is a single character who is opposed to a whole group. The group, in our passage, is a mass of unknown people. From time to time one single person in the group becomes active and is therefore identifiable, for instance, John in Mark 9:38. Regarding the priority of characters, Jesus is in the center, together with his disciples. All other characters are marginalized by the narrator. In Mark 10:13–16 the marginalized are the people who bring the children and the children themselves. Since I wanted to read with the marginalized, I will continue to read with the people who bring the children, the children; and since the disciples are subordinated to Jesus, I will also read from their perspective.

### *The children*

It is important to recognize the usage of the Greek word *παιδίον* instead of *τέκνον*. Ebner shows that there is a difference between these two words. Whereas *τέκνον* is mainly used in the child's family context and in the genealogical sense, *παιδίον* refers to the social and legal status of the child. *παιδίον* can also be translated as "slave." This reveals the low status of the child in society: a child is comparable to a slave and sometimes actually is one.

In Mark 9:36 Jesus takes a child and places it in the midst of the disciples. The narrator does not tell where the child comes from. It is probably in the same house as the disciples – but we have no idea which house it is – and it is just there when Jesus wants to illustrate something. The child has no name, no age, and no gender. It is even without its parents and siblings: a child on his own, used as a means of illustration. This aspect could hint at the fact that this child should not be seen in family terms but as a slave. When Jesus places the child in their midst, he wants – according to the word *παιδίον* – to highlight issues relating to the social aspect of the child. As Ebner points out, Jesus turns the social order around (Ebner 2002:320).

However, even if the child is a slave, I wonder how this child must have felt being used as a means of demonstration. In this regard, it becomes a mere object of illustration.<sup>5</sup> Though Jesus succeeds in using an impressive image in order to illustrate what he wants to say, he fails by treating the child as an object.

In Mark 10:13–16, we have a different scene involving children. In this scene people bring the children to Jesus. This time it is not Jesus taking the initiative (Ebner 2002:318) but some people who want Jesus to touch the children. It gets more ambiguous since there are more children, again without names, ages, or gender; and even the people who bring the children are unknown. It could be the parents but also some other people. I wonder why they want Jesus to touch the children: Are these children sick? Are they in need of healing, since “touching” is a word (Ebner 2002:331) that appears in Mark’s healing stories quite often? Or do they just wish the children to be blessed by a famous person? Why are these children called *παιδίον* although they probably come with their parents? The narrator is silent about this.

It is only Jesus who speaks. By the disciples’ rejection, the children and those who brought them, the children become objects again. This time they are objects of negotiation of power between the disciples and Jesus. The disciples would like to decide who is allowed to speak to Jesus and who is not. Jesus frustrates the disciples’ power demonstration. Later on we will look closer at the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Here, we continue to look at the children, who are then allowed to approach Jesus. Nothing is said about the age of the children, and Joel Marcus suggests in his commentary on Mark imagining infants in order to justify the passivity of the *παιδίον* (Marcus 2009:714). But we do not know. The narrator tells us that Jesus took the children in his arm, blessed them and even put his hands upon them. Jesus is very bodily here.<sup>6</sup> The first scene in Mark 9:36 left an aftertaste: The child was treated as an object. This time Jesus’ attention for the children cannot be

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<sup>5</sup> Musa Dube reminded me of my contextual lens regarding that reading. In the African context, the child is not only seen as the child of a family but of the whole village. This could also be true for Jesus’ time and would lead to a different perspective of Jesus’ usage of the child. Unfortunately, I could not find any hint regarding that issue in commentaries or other literature. That is why I just leave it with the comment of Musa Dube but I do see a need in doing more research on that topic.

<sup>6</sup> The intense use of his body may point to the fact that the children were quite small, so that even they could understand the gesture of Jesus.

just a matter of illustrating something. By using three verbs it seems as if the encounter between Jesus and the children is highly appreciated by Jesus. But what about the children? Again, the narrator says nothing. The focus is fixed on Jesus, his words, his reaction, and his behavior. The children's bringers are even written out of the text. They are only mentioned in the beginning just to make clear how the children could manage to come to Jesus and are referred to indirectly in verse 14 "do not prohibit them," although it is not clear if this refers to the children's bringers or the children themselves (Marcus 2009:714).

### *The disciples*

The disciples are the ones who are responsible for the disputation with Jesus. If they had said nothing and just let the children through, we would probably not have heard this story. There are at least two ways the behavior of the disciples can be understood. First, the disciples want to protect Jesus from the crowd, they do not want him to be disturbed. When rejecting the children they are well intentioned. Since they belong to a chosen group – and especially the incident with the foreign exorcists hints at this – it could be that they do not want to open up for others. Second, the disciples are the group who should learn something from this incident. As Daniel Patte has shown, the story leaves the response of the disciples –and that of the reader– open (Patte 1983:11). Regarding the first aspect, it seems as if the disciples are the children of the text. They are portrayed as pupils who have to learn and to understand something. From today's perspective, children are those who learn. Therefore it sounds as if Jesus is speaking to children. In Mark 10:24 they are even called "children" by Jesus. What strikes me is Jesus' strong reaction to them. Jesus is not reacting to the good intention they probably had. He could also have said something positive. But it is said that Jesus became angry (Patte 1983:9) and this anger is directed towards the disciples so that they become the actual subject of the whole passage. It is not the children and the children's bringers but the disciples who are in the focus of this story. Looking from this angle, then, the children become once again objects of illustration. It is not through Jesus' initiative that the children are brought to him, but as Jesus realizes how much the disciples think in boundaries, he makes use of the children. Although the objectification cannot be denied, I would argue that this time it is much more balanced since the children and children's bringers are

gaining something from the encounter with Jesus. They gain even more than they asked for (Marcus 2009:716).

If we return to the aspect of the disciples who have to learn something, then I observe that there is a big gap between the teacher (Jesus) and the pupils (the disciples). Jesus is very impatient with his students. It is only his speech which is reported directly and his emotions (angry) which are described by the narrator. Certainly, Jesus is right when reminding the disciples not to become exclusive by establishing boundaries. And Jesus is gifted in illustrating the principles he wants the disciples to learn. But Jesus' reaction may not have helped the disciples to learn since they were probably afraid of Jesus' reaction if they failed to understand. As reported in Mark 9:33-34, the disciples are sometimes afraid to tell Jesus what they talked about.

The relationship between the disciples and Jesus is that of students to their teacher. In this regard we find some paternalistic elements in Jesus' treatment of the disciples, e.g. his impatience and anger. Nevertheless, Jesus does not really tell the disciples what to do but asks them to position themselves. This is not paternalistic anymore, since the disciples are treated as adults who can decide on their own.

## Conclusion

Finally, I want to combine my results of the reading of Mark 10:13–16 with Ashcroft's observations concerning the child as the colonial subject. Regarding methodology, I need to say that combining Ashcroft and the biblical text is somewhat anachronistic, since – as Ashcroft has shown himself – the idea of the child arose together with the idea of race in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Our text in Mark is much older and unconnected to colonial history in its modern sense. Nevertheless, if we use the concept of the child we encountered in Ashcroft to read Mark 9:36–37 and Mark 10:13–16, our attention is brought to the fact that the narrator depicts a Jesus who is using children as objects of illustration. But there is no abjection to be observed, such as Ashcroft found in (post-) colonial literature.

In addition, it is not identifiable whether the child is seen according to Locke's or Rousseau's view since the main subject of both passages is the group of the disciples. There is too little information about the child

and the children in Mark 9:36–37 and 10:13–16 to figure out which of the concepts is appropriated in Mark 9 and 10.

Furthermore, the crucial issue of Mark 9:36–37 and Mark 10:13–16 is not so much Jesus’ relationship with the children but his relationship with his disciples which resembles that of a teacher to his students. Although there are paternalistic aspects, Jesus does not tell the disciples what to do but leaves the issue of drawing up boundaries to them. This does not mean that Jesus’ behavior is without judgment or evaluation, but he is not the father telling his disciples what to do and what not to do.

Mainly, I talked about children but only regarding their “fathers” as the word “paternalism” implies. More research should be done on the topic of women in this regard. What becomes apparent is the fact that although the narrator tells us about all the children, the representation of females, e.g. mothers, is absent although in the cultural context of the New Testament caring for children was mainly a women’s matter.

This well-known passage from the Gospel of Mark is according to my interpretation not the best to refer to Jesus’ caring relationship towards children. It tells us more about Jesus, the disciples, and their intense but also ambiguous relationship.

This study also shows that the derogative usage of children I presented in the beginning cannot be found in the Bible. The aspects found in the stanzas of “Ten little n.b.” have no equivalence in the Bible. The racist idea which projected childishness and immaturity on Africans goes along with colonial thought and actions and was a means of justifying the subordination of Africans and legitimizing slavery and exploitation. In the New Testament, children may be objects – but objects to illustrate the injustice in society and God’s coming kingdom.



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## **Fathers of the Fathered**

The effects of migration on families and children in Namibia:  
a Biblical responsibility

*Johannes Hunter*

### **Introduction**

In a previous lecture of 2010 I spelled out the Namibian situation regarding orphans and referred to them as probably the most vulnerable group in Namibia. The lecture related the extreme need of children in Namibia with the general situation in the world and also in that regard the poverty stricken Namibian situation seems to be one of the most strenuous to children growing up in extreme need (Hunter 2012). The lecture further referred to particular factors, such as HIV and AIDS, which play leading roles to the detriment of children in Namibia. The situation explained then did not change and, particularly, not for the better.

### **Increasingly a world problem**

On October 2011, the world's seven-billionth child was born. This time no big fanfare was made of a particular child on that day, mainly because a big fuss was made when the six billionth child was born on October 12, 2009, and a celebration followed with Kofi Annan present, and promises were made that the vision of a world with human rights and freedom for all would soon become a reality. This did not materialize: instead, the Mevic family, into which little Adnan was born on that October day now lives in poverty. Now, in the place of big celebrations and promising visions, the world fears the coming of the next billions who will have to be fed, live in peace, and have human rights and freedoms. As Ban Ki-moon said to students in New York at the birth of the 2011 seven-bil-

lionth child: The new people will want “...everything you want for yourself – seven billion times over.” (Cf. *The Namibian*, November 2011, 16–17.)

Ban Ki-moon’s suggestion is brought to reality with the reports of world hunger that is reaching unthinkable dimensions when Claude Fauquet of the US-based Donald Danforth Plant Science Centre is quoted as saying that there are about one billion people in the world suffering from malnutrition (Ibid. 14). This means one seventh of the people on earth suffer from malnutrition while we await another 3 billion arriving on earth in the next 30 odd years. While many organisations including, of course, the World Bank, create funds for food security, these are not necessarily successful because pledged monies are a far cry away from real money, let alone real food, as has been found out by the World Bank’s Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), where almost half of the pledged US\$1 billion has not come in from donor pledges (ibid.) for this agricultural development fund. With global crises hitting hard at the cash flows of even the biggest donor countries, some of the “best” helping programmes, such as the aid programme that the United States started with Kenyan farmers to help them with irrigation systems for their farms and investments in drought resisting crops, are struck by funding decreases and withdrawals (Ibid.).

As we see more poverty in the world, children increasingly appear to form the main body of suffering. UNICEF reports in 2012 that one third of all children in the world are growing up in slums, often undernourished, in the poorest hygienic circumstances without access to medical treatment or schools (Cf. *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 Feb. 2012, 12). In many big cities of developing and poor countries, 30 to 50 per cent of new born children are not even registered, meaning that they officially do not even exist! In some countries, more than 50 per cent of children growing up in slums are both physically and mentally underdeveloped. The UNICEF report states that these children are the most difficult to trace when they get involved in child trafficking, labour and other activities, many illicit. As many as 215 million boys and girls around the world between the ages of 5 and 17 are forced to work to survive and 115 million are involved in what is deemed “hazardous” work. Of these the worst are forced work, illicit activities, armed combat and domestic labour (see pp. 31-32).

### **And a Namibian one too ...**

In a recent report about reaching the MDG's of Namibia, it is noted that the number of under-five children that were malnourished and stunted increased from 28.2% in 1993/4 to 29% in 2006/7 (T. Gurirab, *The Namibian*, Tuesday 29 May, 2012, p. 7). The Prime Minister of Namibia acknowledged that 50 per cent of under-five deaths are related to malnourishment (*New Era*, Monday, 7 November, 2011, p.7). At the same occasion where the Namibian Prime Minister reportedly spoke, the World Health Organisation's Country Representative for Namibia, Dr Andre Michael, said: "As we speak, more than a billion people go to bed without food; the majority of these are women and children..." (Ibid.). Reducing child mortality rates is one of the MDG's of UNICEF and the Namibian Prime Minister has, in fact, made known that Namibia is not likely to reach the MDG targets for maternal and infant mortality (Gurirab, p. 7). After many infant and maternal deaths in Namibian, State hospitals made headlines, recently the Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr. R. Kamwi, denied any crisis in Namibian hospitals or Namibian health services, saying more good things than bad have been done in his ministry (Cf. *The Republikein*, Thursday, 31 May, p.1).

On Tuesday, 5 June, the *Namibian* reports that Namibia "is the sixth most miserable country in the world because of its high unemployment and inflation rates, according to an index published worldwide" (p.11) on 4 June 2012. "The Misery Index is compiled by adding a country's unemployment rate to its inflation for a given period. The higher the total, the worse a country's economy. Namibia's score in the 2012 Misery Index is 56,5 per cent – the sum of its unemployment rate of 51,2 per cent and an inflation rate of 5,3 per cent..." (Ibid.). It is no wonder that the Namibian suicide rate is amongst the highest in world and this is mainly ascribed to "unemployment and its accompanying misery" (Cf. *The Namibian*, Thursday, March 15, 2012).

The unemployment rate in Namibia increased with 17% in the ten years previous to 2008 and indications are that it became worse over the past four years with Namibia feeling the effects of the global economic crisis (IPPR 2011, p. 1). The full statistics of unemployment are staggering and too technical to explain in detail, but suffice it to say that it presents no fine picture in Namibia. The fishing and agricultural sectors in Namibia used to provide a large segment of the Namibian employable people with jobs but these sectors lost enormous numbers of jobs since the em-

ployment surveys started in 1997, with the fishing sector shedding 90% of available jobs. Full statistics are available in the 2011 Democracy Report of the Institute for Public Policy Research in Windhoek.

Poverty strikes the hardest at children. Youth (between 15 and 24 years of age) unemployment in Namibia rose to 75% in 2008 and the rising trend does not stop, especially in the face of the fact that the overall number of jobs offered in the formal job market in the country has reduced by 20%, despite the fact that new mines opened. Of these young Namibians, 44% have secondary education (Cf, LaRRI 2012, pp. 4ff. for full figures).

Along with unemployment and its resultant poverty comes a surging urbanization to the point that Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, is bursting its city borders. “Squatter compounds that have, from the 1980s, mushroomed on Windhoek’s periphery ... may contain up to 200,000 people and are soon expected to double.” (Mufune 2011, p. 8) The “soon expected to double” means that one fifth of Namibia’s population will live in squatter camps around Windhoek city. In these squatter areas poverty is extremely high, unemployment rife and “environmental conditions increasingly desperate” (Ibid.).

The question is how this very superficial mentioning of the poverty situation in the world and in Namibia links to a paper about the fathers who fathered with the aim of speaking about migration and children in Namibia. A brief turn at the role of the father in the Bible will also be made since, to my understanding, our deliberations eventually have to result in a serious stand towards the terrible plight of children in the world based on a thorough understanding of the Bible.

## **The role of the father in the Bible**

The role of the father in the Bible needs little explaining. The man and husband even listed the woman as part of his possessions and this is supported by no less a document than the Decalogue (Ex. 20:17; cf. De Vaux 1978:26ff.). The husband becomes the master of the house and is to be respected as such. He chooses a wife and she does not have much to say about her choices. Her marriage is discussed with her family and he also has the right to divorce the wife if there are reasons for that, sometimes even, in our current understanding, very bad or flimsy rea-

sons, such as cooking a meal badly (De Vaux 34f.). This does not, however, mean that she is not cared for, as noted below.

In general, the father figure is extremely important in the Bible. David, the first real king of Israel became such an ideal figure, so much so that his line was also followed through to the New Testament with the birth of Jesus, as is stated in Matthew 1: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Apart from this, psalms are dedicated to him and the success of other kings is often measured against that of David. In 2 Chronicles 35:3-4 this glorification of David is striking: "He said to the Levites, who instructed all Israel and who had been consecrated to the Lord: 'Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. Prepare yourselves by families in your divisions, according to the directions written by David king of Israel and by his son Solomon.'" In the same way Proverbs are attributed to Solomon: "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel." In this way more authority is brought to the father who speaks and instructs in the various proverbs.

Of particular importance in the context of this article, is the role of the migrating father. As one example, Abram can be mentioned who was called by God to go to the land of Canaan. "He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan..." (Gen. 12:5). "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land' (Gen. 12:7). A typical example of the importance of the wife and family is found in the Bible here, with the husband taking his wife with and the Lord promising the land to his offspring. Also in the next part of Genesis the importance of the wife is described with the household of Pharaoh "inflicted (with) serious diseases ... because of Abram's wife Sarai" (Gen. 12:17). Even though, indirectly, Abram was the cause of the dilemma, Pharaoh found himself in because Abram has lied for his own gain, Pharaoh and his family was struck with disaster. The whole family is included in the gain or the loss. Abram now migrates again (though forced to) and again his wife and household move with him: "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had ..." (Gen. 13:1).

The story of Abram tells in a powerful way how the wife and family shared the joys and tribulations of the man, and even this might not be

the main gist of the story, it certainly conveys the message of the migrating husband not abandoning the family but keeping the family intact by taking them with him on his travels for better pasture.

Another interesting example from the Bible (Old Testament) is the case of Boaz and Ruth. Boaz acquires the role of redeemer of the land Naomi and Ruth want to sell. When buying the land, Boaz announces the following: “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records...” (Ruth 4:9,10).

In this instance, the family and family name are of utmost importance to the person who acquires the land, so much so that trouble is taken to maintain the family name of the property, even though the owner of the land has died. The family name is maintained through the widow, Ruth, whom Boaz marries. The family is thus not disowned or moved from the land. Instead, through a special legal agreement with witnesses from the town, the family is honoured and kept on the land through the widow of the deceased.

The importance of the father figure is also carried in Christian theology with the doctrine of the trinity. Eph. 3:15 expresses this ultimate role of the father: “For this reason I kneel before the father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” In the understanding of the trinity, the father did not lose his role as the one father responsible for all other Christian expressions. Paul points to this in Eph. 4:4-6 when he says: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Rosmini (2011:99) puts it as follows: “This is the absolutely first act, principle and cause of all acts; it is the fatherhood ‘from whom’, as St. Paul said, ‘every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name’. For human beings, fatherhood expresses the principle and the fullest, total cause...”.

The figure of the father in the Bible is therefore most important as present one: a provider, leader and teacher, and in Christian theology the absolute one, the one from whom and through whom everything living and knowledgeable has its cause (cf. Rosmini 2011:97ff.).

## **The migrating father in Namibia**

Migration in Namibia has a long history starting as early as the 1840's and 1850's with the discovery of offshore guano deposits and copper mining respectively. The colonial administrations of both the Germans and South Africans saw the increase of migrant labour with even the later introduction of an institutionalized system of labour migration under the South African period of rule. The history of migration, particularly labour migration, is extensively discussed by Winterfeldt (2002), who also discusses various historical documents referring to labour migration. He makes the following remark at the end of his overview of these documents: "As a concomitant social effect of labour migration, one central feature emerges from all these documents. Workers were not allowed to migrate with their families, whom they had to leave behind in the reserves/homelands. That this inevitably contributed to social disruption on a large scale, can easily be imagined. The customary family and kinship systems came under pressure, as well as the customary sexual morals." (2002:57)

The effect on, for example, men of "Ovambo" origin, the largest ethnic group in Namibia, Winterfeldt (2002:58f.) describes as follows: Migration became an almost inevitable stage in the lives of most Ovambo men, mainly in the age period between 25 and 44 years, wage labour becoming a prerequisite for marriage and acquisition of usufruct rights to land and of cattle. At the beginning of the 1970s, the majority, i.e. 60% of male manpower of employable age was compelled to work outside the home region, 80% of whom were married and had to leave their families behind."

Below is printed the "highly expressive image Muafangejo juxtaposed urban and rural life and men and women engaged in their specific roles in different environments. The artist in this way stressed a very common social situation in Africa, where families are torn apart and lead dissimilar lives for economic reasons." (Lilienthal 2010:42). The "common social situation ... where families are torn apart" is striking in this interpretation of this linocut by Muafangejo, a Namibian artist who was born in 1943, and sadly died before Namibian Independence in 1987.





Muafangejo was known for his social, political and religious commentary on Namibian life. This picture is no exception, especially because, with the figure on the right of the top picture, who is seen with “his hands stretched out in despair”, Muafangejo captures “the general tenor of the sad lot of the workers” who have to migrate to the cities and mines for work. The rest of the picture shows how the women must take over the domestic chores, including the hard work, such as chopping down trees, normally expected to be done by men. (Cf. Lilienthal 2010:42)

Even though not much has been written about migration in (current independent) Namibia (cf. Mufune 2011:150), some major characteristics of migrating people were identified by those who did write on the issue. One migrator characteristic is unemployment: 54,5 per cent of persons migrating do so because of unemployment; because of the belief that cities will offer relief to problems in traditionally subsistence farming areas, especially in the North of Namibia. Of course, other factors, such as education and health facilities concentrated in the cities, play a major role as well. (Cf. Mufune 2011: 150ff.).

Men mostly migrate to cities because of drought and the resultant lack of food supplies in the rural areas where they come from. In these cases, women are then left home to care for the household as is vivid from the prints of Muafangejo from pre-independent Namibia, and they have to do so with very little material support. In general, migrants do visit their area of origin, but these visits are, of course, limited because of the vast distances in Namibia but also because of the type of employment people would tend to obtain. Employment would normally be obtained in the major economically viable sectors of Namibia, which are mainly the mines and fishing sectors, but also other sectors such as farm work and domestic work. It has been established that 89 per cent of migrant workers visit their places of origin at least once a year but many who fail in obtaining work in the places of economic viability would stop these visits because of shame, which again, is the result of the traditional patriarchal view of the man as supplier of support for the home or homestead. (Cf. Mufune 2011: 153ff.; Tvedten 2004). Such men who fail would then see themselves as failure *as men*. (Tvedten 2004:415). Visits of once a year do not enhance the father’s role as father. In fact, this means that children and wives are visited by some “stranger” once a year, who plays no role in the education or general well-being of the children, other than sending money or other means for survival back home.

A problem associated with the fact that men are away on migratory labour, is the fact that women (and children) who are looking after the homestead also suffer in other ways because of tradition. Women and children have very little right or reprieve when something would happen to the husband whilst away. Normally property would be inherited by the oldest surviving male in the kinship group and the extended family can grab property when the husband dies. “Children often mainly inherit small, personal and non-wealth producing property” (Jauch, Edwards & Cupido 2009:20). The situation is, of course, even worse when the women would go so far as to divorce the husband for whatever reason, including being abandoned by the men, as stated above, when men would not go back to the traditional homestead for some reason.



In the picture of Muafangejo printed above, this destitute of a divorced woman is expressed and telling about the picture is that the caption reads: "She divorced her husband together with her children". She is moving away from the homestead because she has no further right to stay there and no further part to play in the homestead. She is taking the children with her because they essentially stay part of her and therefore her fate becomes their fate too.

### **The Namibian father, the Bible and the family**

Even though a selective picture has been sketched from the Bible and from the Namibian situation about the role of the father, some essential differences come to the fore, which certainly can be addressed in the Namibian situation from the Bible.

There is no doubt that poverty, resulting from all kinds of driving factors, has played a major role in the Namibian situation depicted above. Namibia is not alone in the experience of abject poverty as this is increasingly a world phenomenon and one that particularly affects women and children. There are, however, certain factors which makes the Namibian situation unique, particularly as the country is defined by vast distances which affect the acquisition of work as a solution to extreme poverty. This acquisition of work somewhere else often leaves women and children alone at the traditional home, and even though many migrants may have their hearts at home, their presence is lacking as attendant fathers at their home. More often than not, the fathers who migrate to cities, find themselves in informal settlements on the fringes of town also in poverty, and not being able to supply money or means to people "back home". (This particular situation is very well spelled out in a research project by Winterfeldt and Namupala 2011). This makes the absent father even more missed.

In the Bible the father plays an extremely important role, and even though, in some cases such as those cited above, we read this on the sidelines of the text, the message is clear that the father will care for the family when migrating and even when taking over the homestead of a dead member. The caring for the family stays of utmost importance.

In the Namibian case migrating takes place mostly because of extreme poverty, but seldom with the family. As is vividly illustrated by the pic-

tures of John Muafangejo, the family is left home to care for the homestead and in most cases they become even more slummed into poverty.

It seems like an absolute priority for Namibia to tackle the problem of urbanization and migration. Together with this, projects for the betterment of those who stay behind should be started and laws, which are currently under reform for the strengthening of the woman and children in the traditional areas should be seriously applied. Customary laws should be reformed to safeguard the protection of those who stay behind, even when the woman divorces the husband. Many such reforms are undertaken but the application of the laws is a thorny business. (See Ruppel 2008).

Churches are in a position all over Namibia to not only express concern but to practically work towards social and legal reform. The Bible's outlook on the role of the father can lend huge support to the work of churches towards the protection of women and children in the dire situation of migration and the resultant urbanization in Namibia.

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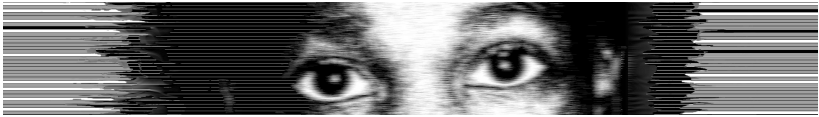
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## Tip of the Ice-berg?

### Theological Reflections on Christian Perspectives on Responsible Parenting in Zimbabwe

*Fortune Sibanda & Richard Maposa*

#### Introduction

The world over, Christian parents consider parenthood as a gift from God. This gift must be expressed through responsible stewardship. There is no doubt that for most people, parenthood is one of the most fulfilling experiences complemented through procreation. Generally, African Christians regard parenthood as a life-long responsibility and a process that stretches from 'womb to tomb' (Peresuh 1999). This suggests that as long as parents live, they remain useful to their children even in their adulthood. Today's parents are also children to the yesteryear parents, dead or alive. Put differently, parenthood and childhood are two sides of the same coin of life. Yet it is important to note that there are environmental, cultural, political, social, economic and religious factors that influence the life of a child in the family, school, church and society at large.

As the study will show, the essence of Christian parenting is based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. For instance, Jesus Christ illustrated how children are supposed to be placed at the centre of human operations in the family, church and society (Luke 18:16). The example of Christ's attitude towards children cannot be orchestrated by mere techniques and procedures but through the divine dynamic of His activity. Therefore, Christian parenting is primarily a life expression of "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4; cf. Jn. 14:6). It is His life and example that Christian parents wish might invest in children so that they grow mentally, physically and spiritually.



The root of the problem of this study emanates from a sermon entitled ‘*Good Parenting*’. This sermon was delivered in May 2011 by Rev E.T.C. Ngadziore, the then Pastor-in-Charge at Masvingo Urban Church under the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ). Rev. Ngadziore is now the sitting President of UCCZ. This is in tandem with his vast experience as one of the Ordained Senior Ministers and Marriage Officer-cum-Marriage Counsellor. As members of this Church, the researchers were present when the sermon was delivered. Rev. Ngadziore explained that that particular Sunday he would give a teaching on ‘*Good Parenting*’, informed by life interests as opposed to the interpretive interests of the Bible that he would employ. This resonates with a relevant approach to biblical studies in Africa that tackles the existential realities of the people (Chitando 2012: 285, 286).

The teaching followed an incident of the mysterious death of a minor child that had transpired in Masvingo Urban during the course of that week. It was said that the child belonged to a certain Christian family of a Pastor of a church in Masvingo urban. The child was mysteriously ‘stolen’, ritually murdered and dumped in Mucheke River. It was alleged that one of the causes towards the loss of this child was negligence from the parents who were prey to an alert ‘child snatcher’ who kept a close watch on their movements until the minor child was left unattended just for a few moments. It has to be asked: Can one rule out foul play in this whole maze in a day and age when the world and its inhabitants are becoming more Satanic? On this basis, following the teaching, the researchers sought to undertake a study that would reflect on the status of children and the Bible as nurtured in Christian families of UCCZ in Masvingo urban. The paper posits that the perspectives of UCCZ members on childhood are inspired by the changing paradigms that recognise some calls on the church or the family, for instance, to mitigate on challenges like poverty, human rights, violence and HIV and AIDS. In order to explore these paradigms, the study is organised as follows: methodological issues; an overview of the Bible and children; principles of good parenting; a historical overview of UCCZ; Christian perspectives on good parenting in Masvingo urban; theological reflections and concluding remarks.

## Methodological Considerations

The study employed in-depth interviews and the observation technique to gather data among the members of the UCCZ in Masvingo urban. The researchers utilised observation as a technique that complemented in-depth interviews. As such the activities and behaviour of parents towards their children and vice-versa were taken as vital to gauge the patterns of parenting among the participants. In addition, the use of the phenomenological method allowed the researchers to respect the believers' perspectives through *epoche*, engage descriptive accuracy and to arrive at *eidetic* intuition (Cox 1996) on good parenting. The phenomenological approach together with the data collection methods were further corroborated by theological reflections hinged on Child theology as a hermeneutical approach. This step enhances an understanding of good parenting from a biblical perspective and within the context of the experiences of UCCZ parents and children in Masvingo urban. We now turn to the biblical perspectives on children.

## The Bible and Children: An Overview

By far, the Bible is the most common and widely published book in contemporary times. In the words of Meeks (1993: xvii), “[t]he Bible is the most familiar book in the English-speaking world; certainly it is the one most often published and most widely owned”. Yet in a way, the breadth and width of its distribution has also been non-homogenous. In fact, there has been a use and abuse of the Bible the world over and in different times and contexts. For Hans de Wit (2009:28) cited by Chitando (2012:286), the Bible was a ‘double-edged sword’ given that “many readings of the old book have led to death, exclusion, colonialism, discrimination and slavery. But others have led to freedom, salvation, conversion and new life.” This suggests that the Bible has the potential to oppress and to liberate. As such, there is need to uphold the liberating readings or ‘redemptive readings’ of the Bible for the sake of protecting children.

In addition, the reading of scripture must be informed by the African lived existential realities (Chitando 2012). Notably, the Bible is an ‘all-weather’ text that can address issues that span across the gender, age, race, class and ethnic divide. Therefore, the dimension of children is covered. Jannie Hunter (2012) writes, thus: “The Bible describes chil-

dren as part of the religious community or covenant community and they have to be respected and taught within this community, not only by the parents in their early lives but also later by the priests and others responsible". Along the same lines, Togarasei (2008:73) cited in Gunda and Kügler (2012:11), says the Bible "is the book. It is read in times of joy and in times of sorrow". In other words, the Bible is an 'all seasons' manual that tackles matters of optimism and pessimism.

Children occupy a significant place in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Hunter 2012:65). In this holy book, there are both 'positive' and 'negative' texts pertaining to children. Hunter (2012) refers to some sections of the Bible such as the book of Deuteronomy, Wisdom literature and the stories of Jesus Christ as having an inclination on children. Such an observation is relevant for the concerns of this study. Hence, some of the insights raised by Hunter (2012) have been adopted in this section of the study. Hunter (2012:63) notes that children were regarded as part and parcel of the holy gatherings. As such, both boys and girls were expected to be taught from an early age by both parents and at any time when opportunity arose. The parents were expected to teach and explain the texts of the commandments. However, at this early stage it is said that parents should be considerate and treat the children as innocent as they do not as yet know what is good from what is evil (Deut. 1:39). Parents are tasked to teach children the right ways. In this manner, this will ensure that "you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life" (Deut. 6:2). Thus, keeping and observing the laws of God is demanded by the Creator.

The children were also the future of a tradition and nation. Psalms 8:2 is a powerful reference point to the effect that the teaching of children and infants in praising the Lord was a tool for the survival of the Israelite nation. In addition, parents were expected to promote righteousness, the right way of living linked to justice as well as protect the rights of their children and the under-privileged (cf. Prov. 31:9; 29:14). Essentially, the Christian law "protects the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the women and children, the fatherless and widows against those who would neglect and exploit them" (Hunter 2012:63, 64). More often than not, parents are sure to usher good care and appreciation of the vitality of children and employ the biblical ethical principles to guide themselves. Hunter (2012) notes that the Christian ethics is anchored in

love which is stressed in 1 Corinthians 13 where love tops the list of other related virtues like faith and hope. This love must also be expressed towards children as one of the most important pillars of society. The other pillars are the parents who are expected to employ principles of good parenting.

## The Principles of Good Parenting

Generally, good parenting can be understood in ambivalent light in the Zimbabwean context. In the light of the African indigenous principles which inform most Zimbabweans, Christians and non-Christians alike, uphold that it takes the whole village to educate a child. In fact, a child is 'everyone's child' and is nurtured through the philosophy of *ubuntu/unhu* (humanness). In other words, parenting along Christian lines is a communitarian effort that taps from the African wisdom and existential situatedness through contextualisation. In this way, a parent is not strictly speaking a biological figure-head only. It is someone whose status may be, *inter alia*, determined by age (adulthood) or marital status. Nevertheless, for some people, parenting is such a daunting task such that children are regarded as an inconvenience and unwarranted burden. Yet, for others parenting is a welcome privilege. The contrasting positions on parenting have been aptly noted by Randy Alcorn on the website [www.surfinthespirit.com](http://www.surfinthespirit.com) thus:

- The first position says that "Children are a burden; the fruit of the womb is a curse to this overpopulated world. Like a crippling blow or burning coals under your feet, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the one who avoids having any." This position represents both secular and Christian perspectives on procreation. This is a position that is likely to witness parents who regard children as a mistake not as a precious gift. Parenthood here is not seen as a privilege to be supported by responsibility, service and love.
- The second view holds that "Children are an inconvenience; the fruit of the womb is highly overrated. Like a pebble in a shoe or a nagging cough, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the one who has few of them and gets them out of the house as soon as possible." This is a rather modern stance that upholds the sanctity of small families in light of material needs that sustain humanity. This position is not likely to promote a typical extended family that is en-

demic to traditional African households. It has an individualistic and western slant that contrasts with the communitarian approach.

- The third position says that “Children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a marksman, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the one whose quiver is full of them” (Psalms 127: 3-5). This is a conservative view with a strong biblical basis subtended by the divine command that “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it ...” (Genesis 1:28). By and large, this position is flexible on the number of children one could have. Yet, at another level, one of the most important determinants of the size of the family is the ability to provide adequate care and love for the children in any particular family set up. The Shona proverb expresses this succinctly when it says “*Kumedza mbura hugonda mukuro/huro*” (One who swallows mbura fruit has confidence with his/her throat-size).

In line with the above observations, apart from the ‘African way’ of parenting, the Bible also provides an authentic formula that has influenced many Christian parents in Zimbabwe. Apparently, today the Bible is regarded as an ‘African book’ rather than a ‘white man’s book’ or ‘foreign oracle’ (Chitando 2012:274). As such by citing Gathaka, Gunda and Kügler (2012:14) posit that the Bible “has been accepted as part and parcel of instruction for the African way of life though it is alien in origin, geography, language and history”. Therefore, it is uncontested that the Bible forms the kernel of African Christianity. The point being advanced here is that some principles of parenting are biblically based.

In addition, the patterns of parenting are varied in both secular and Christian contexts. The systems of parenting in both contexts are difficult to separate. However, there is also a realisation that marriage is closely related to parenting. As such, there is an extent to which one finds it impossible to distinguish the two entities. What is certain is that parenting, under normal circumstances, is a subset of marriage. Marriage is expected to be fruitful such that barrenness is treated with scorn in both the African traditional context and the Bible. However, notwithstanding the centrality of the Bible in parenting, there are also good and bad insights from African tradition that have endured the test of time and have filtered into the fabric of Christians including those of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.

## **United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe: A Historical Overview**

The United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ) is one of the mainline congregational churches that were established during the colonial era by the western Christian missionaries. The founders of this church came from America. Therefore, UCCZ first operated in this country as American Board Mission mainly among the Ndau people of Chipinge district. History has it that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which was an extension of the United Church of Christ Board for World Ministry, sent missionaries who established mission stations at Mt Selinda and Chikore in 1893 and 1895, respectively (Abbot, Lowe & Mundeta 1993:12, 20; Zvobgo 1996:6). Yet, it was not until 1957 that the Church began to use the label 'United Church of Christ' (Gunnemann 1989). The missionaries had the green light to establish their base in the Eastern region of Zimbabwe among the Ndau people from C.J. Rhodes through land grants. Hence, from the onset there was a partnership between the Christian missionaries and the settler colonial administration.

From South Africa, particularly in Durban-Natal, the pioneering team of the ABCFM missionaries gathered the support of Zulu evangelists under 'Zulu Mission' to go to the lands across the Limpopo to establish mission stations in Zimbabwe (Abbot et al 1993:12,13). The same source recorded that the ABCFM team comprised some Americans, namely, Rev and Mrs Wilder and their two children, Dr and Mrs Thompson, Mr and Mrs Fred Bunker and Mr Bates. They were accompanied by four Zulu evangelists and their families, namely, Mr and Mrs T. Zonzo Cele, Mr and Mrs Laduma Njapa, Mr and Mrs Elijah Hlanti and Mr and Mrs Henry Mbesa (Abbot et al 1993). These missionaries focused on evangelism, education, agriculture and medical work. The ABCFM funded the missionaries who continued to trickle in so as to serve UCCZ as evangelists, doctors, teachers and officers in other related areas. However, from 1973, UCCZ began to be locally administered. Effectively, the Synod became the supreme board in charge of running the affairs of UCCZ.

Today, the Church has managed to move out of the cocoons of the Eastern region to different parts of Zimbabwe in both rural and urban set ups. One of the areas to which the Church has found root is in Masvingo urban since 1973. Masvingo Church, located adjacent to Yeukai Business Centre in Mucheke was able to open and dedicate a church building to Synod in September 2004. On a wider scale the UCCZ denomina-

tion operates through three Conferences, namely, Northern, Eastern and Western Conferences. Masvingo Church is under the Western Conference. The denomination also operates using three units in the form of Churches, Conferences and Councils which are governed by the Synod. These concepts may require a brief explanation. The UCCZ Constitution (2001:6) states that “A Church consists of 40 or more Voting Members who have agreed to worship regularly together as a congregation and generally do God’s work in the community.” Next in the chain is a Conference, which is an assembly of churches that meet to implement evangelism and developmental work in the UCCZ. Finally, the UCCZ Councils are instruments through which the Church implements its programmes. There are ten Councils and platforms which are namely, Medical Council, Education Council, Agricultural Council, Station Councils, Ruwadzano Council, Volunteers Council, Christian Youth Fellowship Council, Sunday School Council, Men’s Fellowship Council (currently vibrant in the Western region) and Conferences. It is under the operation of these Councils that Masvingo Church has been selected in the study to explore the experiences of its congregants on good parenting to which we now turn.

### **Christian Perspectives on Good Parenting in Masvingo Urban**

The study established that in general, parental care manifests differently in the family, church and society among members of UCCZ. The roles of a parent to children were identified by one church elder as encapsulated in the word PARENT itself, thus: P – personal friend; A – available; R – responsible; E – encourages; N – nurtures; T – teaches. This acronym aptly represents concrete existential elements that characterise parenthood in some UCCZ families in Masvingo urban. Notably, in Masvingo urban, some children were operating from families with two parents, single parent mothers and single parent fathers. Yet other children were found to be total orphans under the custody of guardians or child parents. The diversity of parenting was noted through interviews and observation on the basis of the following indicators which guided the ensuing paragraphs: Dress code; social relations; leisure time - the use of television, Internet, Face book; health issues - HIV and AIDS; and family time.

On the issue of dress code, most participants felt that it was important for Christians to dress decently. In UCCZ, each spiritual Council has a uniform that is worn on Big Sunday services, usually once a month or when there is a special occasion. This part is not what is problematic as compared to other Sundays when people do not put on uniform or in their day to day dress code. Whereas, occasions for coming to church must not be turned into ‘beauty fashions’, there is an extent to which the dressing patterns among UCCZ adherents is moving with times. This is an element of elitism that Togarasei (2010:19) describes fervently as a fashionable trend in Pentecostal churches today variously labelled as “*chechi dzemucheno* (churches for the smartly dressed) or *chechi dzevap-fumi* (churches for the rich)”. Yet, research has shown that a conservative element on the dress code persists in UCCZ and it is biblically based. Generally, UCCZ members abhor women who put on trousers or dress in pants or men who also dress in women clothing. Parents of the older generation often have ‘wars’ with youths, particularly urban youths on this aspect. Advising congregants as a Guest Preacher at three separate occasions, namely, twice, during Men’s Fellowship Council Regional Annual General Meetings held at Masvingo Church in 2011 and in Kwekwe in 2012, and then at a National Volunteers Council Annual General meeting held at Vumba in Mutare in 2013, one lay elder of UCCZ, Mr Naison Tenene, stressed this point vehemently. He based his point on Deuteronomy 22:5 which says: “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God.” The cladding of trousers or mini-skirts among girls and young mothers has cost UCCZ some of its congregants to other churches that are deemed as ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ in this regard. All in all, most UCCZ parents insist that their children must not meddle in ‘cross-dressing’ but must dress modestly (cf. 1Tim. 2:9) and thereby sticking to the church tradition without any compromise.

In line with the above, good parenting can also be conceived on the basis of social relations. The same preacher, Mr Tenene, referred to the problem of homosexuality which is biblically an abomination (cf. Lev. 18:22, 20:13). Whereas, the problem of ‘cross-dressing’ mentioned above relates mainly to girls, the issue of homosexuality is largely a male domain. Some boys drop their trousers below their waist-line, thereby revealing their underwear in a fashion known as ‘*kulezesa*’. In addition, some also wear ear-rings, either on both ears or on one. This has impli-



cations on how people would perceive such a person with some concluding that these are characteristics of homosexuals. This is an incipient problem among youths who emulate fashion trends in the western nations and other African countries such as South Africa. In these foreign countries, homosexual marriages are legalised, common and regarded as human rights. However, Zimbabwe in general and UCCZ in particular, has an uncompromising stance on homosexuality with President Mugabe describing the practice as alien, un-African and the homosexual behaviour as ‘worse than dogs and pigs’ (Divani 2011; Gunda 2010). This is true for the Christian indigenes of Zimbabwe in UCCZ unlike some whites from America, the place of origin of the denomination. A case in point was one white male Reverend who once worked at Mt Selinda in the late 1980s and sodomised some poor students at the High school. The victims fell prey to the abuse because of poverty. This was revealed when his contract had expired and had returned. For most Zimbabweans, this white American could not walk the talk of Christianity. Therefore, through such a sermon from Mr Tenene, UCCZ parents were warned to be wary of who their children play with, their social welfare and social relations.

The study further established the link among UCCZ Masvingo youths between their dress code and social relations with their exposure to and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). One elder spoke of ICT as a ‘double-edged sword’ which is impacting heavily on the behaviour and conduct of the youths. He pointed out that ICT is definitely God-inspired in essence but picked up the advice raised in Ecclesiastes 7:12 which says: “Wisdom is for protection, the same as money is for protection”. In a way, the use of the television, Internet, Face book, Twitter, WhatsApp and the manner in which the youths utilise their leisure time were implicated here. In another study carried out among junior secondary school learners in Masvingo urban, to which some UCCZ youths formed part of the sampled population, Sibanda and Maposa (2010:17) established that the cyberspace and multimedia technology could cause negative effects through the cell phone, satellite dish and the Internet. Some of the findings in that study resonate with the current research. For instance, it was noted that through the Internet, youths could visit pornographic sites whilst on the satellite dish they often watch ‘all-adult’ shows characterised by late-hour viewing, nudity, sex, obscene language and violence. In that study, 1.47% of the sampled junior secondary school learners admitted that they have

accessed pornographic sites which is a tip of an ice-berg on the cyber-space problem (Sibanda and Maposa 2010:17). Thus, it reminds one that 'kids will always be kids' and require parents to shrewdly monitor what they view. This echoes the biblical admonition that "[A good mother] is watching over the goings-on of her household" (Prov. 13:16; 31:27a). An element of vigilance and 'with-it-ness' should prevail in parents towards their children so that they have moral integrity.

The health of individuals in a family set up was another issue that was raised by participants in the context of responsible parenting. This has an interesting dimension because illness and disease have spiritual and medical dimensions. So in the light of UCCZ congregants, the two dimensions are an existential reality. On the medical side, Rev. Ngadziore and other members of the UCCZ leadership reminded members of the Church that the first Christian missionaries introduced western medical practice through the 'Medical mission', thereby establishing Mt Selinda Mission and Chikore Mission Hospitals. These are used as examples of how the hospital complements the church in serving the sick. Parents were supposed to use both avenues liberally with a full conscience that was aptly expressed by one elder that 'the hospital treats but Jesus heals'. This is important even in HIV and AIDS contexts. Therefore, in principle the Church expects its sick congregants to seek spiritual guidance and prayers from the Church elders (cf. Jam. 5:13-18) and or to pursue the medical option. However, the study also found that when faced with pressing spiritual problems, some members of the Church consulted African traditional healers (*n'angas*) with the same zest as they would consult their pastors and the hospital for medical attention. Such an approach reflecting 'plural belonging' (Maimela 1985) among some UCCZ Christians was described by Rev. Ngadziore as '*irresponsible parenting*' because it is condemned in the Bible and will confuse children on what to follow.

Another relevant part of our findings were drawn from the concluding segment of Rev Ngadziore's teaching on good parenting. He referred to some principle elements that responsible Christian parents could employ as barometers of their conduct. The researchers identified eight characteristics that Rev Ngadziore associated with responsible parenting. These were closely followed and captured in this study.

First, he pointed out that responsible Christian parents are *models* in many ways, among which their affective domain must fill them with

passion and compassion. Such parents are emotionally strong and able to teach others about feelings and how to control tempers. They follow the example of Jesus Christ who was a model to his followers. This resonates with the Apostle Paul who admonished the Corinthian church to imitate him as he had also imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). In the same manner, children are expected to emulate the good elements from their parents through role and status socialisation in the family and society at large. Indeed, the family is the first and most important socialisation setting where the parents are among the primary agents of the socialisation process for children (Ezewu 1983:37).

Second, he highlighted that responsible Christian parents are very conscious about their *priorities*. Putting their families under God's guidance is one of the indicators that they put their priorities in order. Rev. Ngadziore, just as other participants, was convinced that priority number one is God, and then come other things like the family and their needs. Yet on this element, some interviewees referred to the problem of misplaced priorities. For instance, one irresponsible father was an alcoholic, despite claiming to be a Christian. This father had the audacity to leave wife and children suffering without adequate food, clothes and school fees but yet he had the pleasure of being a 'Daily Drinking Officer' (DDO) with a good reputation of 'making Castle Great'. To make matters worse he had times when he would beat up the children and his wife. As such, his children lived in shame, fear and abject poverty. Rev Ngadziore took a swipe at such irresponsible behaviour from fathers who abused innocent children physically and emotionally. This particular father is a father who never had 'family time'. The father was conspicuous of his absence and feared by his children.

Third, and related to the previous point, responsible Christian parents are *there*. In fact, they are always there when needed and can be depended upon. Their children know and appreciate their availability (cf. Gen. 2:24; Mk 10:7-9; Matt. 19:5). This is an ideal factor for parents to have time for their children through 'family time'.

Fourth, Rev. Ngadziore pointed out that responsible Christian parents aim to go beyond building a house to the extent of building a *home*. This suggests that whereas a house provides shelter, the operations of a good parent culminates in the building of a 'home'. And this 'home' is an environment where tears may come out but dry at their own pace. Therefore, effective parents are concerned about the welfare of their

families. The home should be complete and feels like a home. Yet in some cases, these homes had to be built single handedly, on one hand, by mothers who operate as both mother and father, on the other hand, by orphaned children some of whose parents died of the AIDS epidemic.

Fifth, responsible Christian parents know how to *encourage*. They are cheer-leaders for their children. In the same manner, some of these parents go out of their way to also encourage their children's friends to do well in their endeavours.

Sixth, it was pointed that responsible Christian parents are *risk-takers*. They are willing to go an extra mile to secure things that matter for the well being of their families.

Seventh, he stressed that responsible Christian parents were always striving for *spiritual* growth. Therefore, in terms of priorities, their spiritual life is guided by the quest for a meaningful relationship with God. The ways of God are essentially based in doing his will and following his commandments. The importance of prayer, fasting and giving were also identified as pillars of spiritual growth. On a separate occasion, Pastor Zodwa Gono, currently a student at United Theological College implored members of the Volunteers Council to submit themselves to God through prayer and fasting. In her words she had this to say: “*MaVolotiya haasi kubuda muma‘Inns’ munosanganisira Slice Inn, Bakers Inn, Chicken Inn, Trotbeck Inn neHolliday Inn. Asi nhasi ndinoti pindawo mu-Prayer Inn – utsanye, ukomborerwe.*” (Volunteer Council members are regular patrons of food outlets known as ‘Inns’ including Slice Inn, Bakers Inn, Chicken Inn, Trot beck Inn and Holliday Inn. However, today, I want to encourage you to get into the Prayer Inn which allows you to fast and be blessed). However, spiritual growth is a result of discipline – spiritual discipline. The final point refers to discipline of another kind.

Eighth, responsible Christian parents exercise *discipline* on their children. This is in line with the following related biblical views, thus: “Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them” (Proverbs 13:24). In addition, it is stated that “Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with a rod, you will save their lives from Sheol” (Proverbs 23:13-14). However, meting out discipline to children need to be done in moderation. The researchers noted that some parents took this advice literally arguing that they became who

they are today because of the whip at home and school. This is not surprising among families in Masvingo given that the majority of the members are of Ndau origin and tend to have a conservative stance.

### Tip of the Ice-berg? : Theological Reflections

The study has noted that responsible parenting is a communal endeavour in the Zimbabwean context. Good parenting must be informed by the visions of Child theology. Child theology is characterised by responsibility, accountability, service and love towards the welfare of children. White (2006:2) posits that Child theology is “a process of theological reflection starting with the question: ‘What does it mean for us today to respond to the teaching and example of Jesus when he placed a little child in the midst of his disciples so that they could be encouraged to become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven?’” The lesson that could be drawn from the analogy of Jesus’ action to the child as portrayed in Luke 18 is informative towards Christian perspectives on responsible parenting.

In our view, another way of reflecting theologically pertaining to good parenting is succinctly captured in the poem entitled: ‘The ABCs of Parenthood’ ([www.surfinthespirit.com/parenting/abc2.html](http://www.surfinthespirit.com/parenting/abc2.html)). The abridged version of the poem is quoted in full to illustrate the point as follows:

“Always [en]trust your children to God's care; **B**ring them to *worship* and Bible School; **C**hallenge them to *high goals* in life; **D**elight in their *achievements*; **E**xalt the Lord in their presence at every opportunity; **F**rown on *evil*; **G**ive them *love*; **H**ear their problems; **I**gnore not their childish *fear*; **J**oyfully accept their apologies; **K**eep their *confidences*; **L**ive a *good example* before them at all times; **M**ake them your *best friends*; **N**ever ignore their endless questions; **O**pen your home to their friends; **P**ray for them by name daily; **Q**uicken your interest in their *spirituality*; **R**emember their *needs*; **S**how them the way of *Salvation*; **T**each them to *work and be responsible*; **U**nderstand, they still need you, even when they are older; **V**erify your statements; **W**ean them from *bad company*; **X**pect [expect] them to *obey*; **Y**earn for *God's best for them*; and **Z**ealously guide them in *Biblical truths*”

[square brackets added and poetic structure transformed to prose punctuated by semi-colons].

Thus, more than being a religion, Christianity is a relationship. In addition, the above ‘ABCs of Parenthood’ is the ideal attitude that must be

nurtured by parents towards children. It is noted that children need the love, care, guidance and exemplary behaviour from parents. Parenthood is like a life-long venture where one remains as a perpetual learner – each day is a learning curve of how to treat challenges and questions that one encounters. Put differently, the demands of parenthood are comparable to a school set up. This is a school where one would never graduate; a school without a break or a free period; a school where dropping out is not tolerated; a school in which one attends every day of one's life; a school where there is no holiday or sick leave; and finally a school founded by God. If one were to continue with the analogy of the 'parenthood school' among Christian families, it would be plausible to the parents as students (learners) not the Principal since Christ is the head. For all this to function well, parents need to express love to each other, to their children, friends and neighbours (Col. 3: 18 – 4:2; 1 Cor. 13). The experiences of UCCZ Masvingo church on parenting offers a 'tip of the ice-berg' about the existential realities of Christian practice in contemporary Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

The study has tried to show that parenthood and childhood are two sides of the same coin. They are life-long processes which take place from 'womb to tomb'. In other words, parents are also children to their parents and other elders from an African theological viewpoint. The study established that responsible parenting is governed by several factors that some members of UCCZ Masvingo church noted. Although generally, Christian parents are engrossed in moulding their children using some Biblical paradigms to inculcate family values such as unity, efficacious love, human compassion, moral discipline, humble citizenship, hard work and spiritual gratification, in practice some are failing to 'walk the talk'. In the light of these findings, it can be concluded that many Christians 'talk' Christianity by yard but very few can 'walk' it by an inch in the context of responsible parenthood. This provides the 'tip of an ice-berg' on the level of parenting among some Christians in UCCZ in particular and the Zimbabwean context in general.

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## **African children and the Bible in experiential learning**

*Lovemore Ndlovu*

### **Introduction and statement of the problem**

One of the problems that confronted policy makers and key role players in Bible teaching in Zimbabwe, soon after independence, was the fact that Bible teaching did not allow learners to personally engage in an encounter with biblical phenomenon. At the same time, the methods of Bible teaching did now allow learners to validate the material that was being studied. Hence, the Bible as it was taught, was separated from the learners' life situations or contexts. Effective Bible teaching in Zimbabwe began during the third wave of Christian missionary penetration and influence in sub-Saharan Africa (1920-1959). The Africans were taught to read so that they would be able to read and understand the Bible. However, when formal Bible teaching commenced in the 1940s, the Christian missionaries were allowed to craft the Bible curriculum.

Upon attaining independence, Zimbabwe inherited a Bible curriculum that was crafted by Christian missionaries during the colonial period. The objective of the missionaries was to evangelise the Africans and convert them from heathenism to Christianity (Oliver and Atmore 1994:146). According to Ndlovu (2009:114), the main rationale of the Christian missionaries in introducing Religious Instruction was theological rather than educational, and this meant that the missionary crusade in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, was largely driven by theological and not educational reasons.

Advocates of post-colonial Biblical criticism such as Gandhi (1998:142), Punt (2002:69) and Boer (2001:1) argue that the Bible was used during the colonial era as a tool of repression or marginalisation of Africans. As Punt (2002:69) notes, "texts-documents, books and literature of various

kinds – played an important role in the colonial endeavour”. It is thus pertinent in this study to examine how the missionaries manipulated Bible teaching in order to meet their own interests. As the missionaries taught Biblical concepts, they did not apply them to the African context largely because they saw African learners as people without religion or “authentic” beliefs and value systems.

In post-independence Zimbabwe, teaching learners the Bible has always been a daunting task because of the legacy of the past and the fact that the religious education curriculum does not allow teachers to apply Biblical insights, concepts and material to the African context. Hence, the Bible becomes abstract and removed from the day-to-day experiences of the African learners. It is disturbing to note that the legacy of the Christian missionaries is still evident in the teaching of the Bible in present-day Zimbabwe, more than 30 years after the country gained independence from colonial rule.

The main thesis advanced in this study resonates around the stance taken by the Christian missionaries particularly in rejecting the traditional or rural past of the learners and the implications of this tragedy for future Bible teaching in Zimbabwe. As noted above, when missionaries taught African learners the Bible, learners did not relate biblical concepts to similar concepts in African society. Consequently, denying learners opportunities to explore various manifestations of religiosity in the African context. The rationale of the missionaries was that there were no authentic manifestations of religiosity in Africa. Terms such as “pagan” or “heathen” were used to describe religious practices in Africa in order to create a negative attitude about religion in Africa. It is argued in this study that failure to relate the Bible to the African context and specifically to the African children was a disadvantage to learners as they failed to grasp the key concepts in the Bible.

When this researcher was evaluating the use of the experiential learning model in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe, he was keen to analyse whether students studying biblical prophetic books were able to appropriate prophecy or prophets in their local context. However, he found that students were not aware that there were similar concepts or functionaries in their local context. Religious functionaries identified were found in Harare such as Makandiwa, Ezekiel Guti, and others. Some students selected examples from Nigeria as the local functionaries were ignored in favour of popular functionaries. Learners could not identify similarities be-

tween biblical functionaries, such as prophets with local religious functionaries such as traditional healers, diviners and prophets in African initiated churches. This was evidence that the Christian missionary crafted curriculum was still being used and learners were denied the opportunity to confront manifestations of religiosity in their context.

It is important at this point to explain experiential learning briefly in order to provide a rationale for applying the Bible to the African context. The experiential learning model follows on traditional teaching principles, to start teaching from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the concrete to the abstract, from the known to the unknown, etc. Christian missionary methods of teaching ignored these important traditional pedagogic principles. However, the experiential learning model enables learners to confront their life situations first before they engage in a detailed analysis of biblical material.

Since the traditional or rural past of the learners was described in bad and unacceptable terms, the Christian missionary approach was meant to eliminate the traditional or rural past of the learners and introduce a new religion. This strategy was evidence that the Christian missionary approach was evangelistic and not educational. The approach in Bible teaching in Zimbabwe schools is still confessional and aims to indoctrinate the learners; and is not aimed at assisting learners to analyse the Bible from a critical perspective (Religious Studies Syllabus Document 2010:2-5). In other words, the Bible is a tool for indoctrination rather than a tool for understanding the biblical concepts and content. This situation continues unabated in Zimbabwean schools. As a result, learners are not equipped to study the Bible in a critical and objective manner.

Furthermore, the Christian missionary approach emphasised “rote learning” or simple recall and ignored higher order skills such as analysis, evaluation and application. It is also argued in this study that failure to apply experiential learning, as is evident in the Christian missionary approach, had harmful effects on the part of the learners as they could not engage critically with biblical content. This partly explains the high failure rate in Bible studies at ordinary level in Zimbabwe public examinations (Religious Studies Ordinary Level Report 2010:1).

## **Aim and strategy**

The purpose of this study is, firstly, to analyse the problem of the Christian missionary Bible teaching approach. Secondly, to analyse how experiential teaching could be used to teach biblical concepts such as prophecy. The article examines how concepts such as prophecy could be appropriated in African society to include various manifestations of prophecy found in African society. The aim is to explore how religious functionaries in African society could be studied to further advance the knowledge of biblical concepts.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theory in this study is derived from two main areas of interest to the researcher. Firstly, the study uses hermeneutics, particularly postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Secondly, the study draws its theory from pedagogy; and the concept experiential learning is analysed as a pedagogical tool. The paper proceeds and clarifies the concepts hermeneutics, postcolonial biblical criticism and experiential learning in order to shed light on the relevance of the latter to the study.

## **Clarification of key concepts**

### *Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics is an important concept in this study and underpins other concepts such as postcolonial biblical criticism. Clines (1982:65) explains the concept 'hermeneutics' as follows:

'Hermeneutics' is a term for the arts and sciences of interpretation. It means no more, etymologically speaking, than 'interpretation', but the term has gained currency because it covers the methods of 'interpretation' and not the result. Thus the term 'interpretation' in reference to a passage would be likely to refer to the end product of a hermeneutical process. Interpretations are arrived at by hermeneutical 'interpretation' process.

The field of hermeneutics is viewed both as an art as well as a science. Hence, the concept 'hermeneutics' refers to the art or science of interpretation. However, because hermeneutics is viewed as an art as well as a science, there is no such thing as objective, neutral interpretation

(Clines 1982:66). Every interpretation, therefore, bears the stamp or imprint of the interpreter. As we read documents on a daily basis we often engage ourselves in a hermeneutical process as we attempt to explain what someone is saying.

Biblical hermeneutics is gaining currency and the quest for objective exegesis of biblical texts is always an ongoing concern. Scholars are interested in the role of the interpreter in the process of interpretation. Clines (1982:66) poses the following contentious questions raised in biblical hermeneutics:

The question is increasingly taking the form, not ‘what does this text mean?’, but ‘In what way is it meaningful?’ and ‘To whom is it meaningful?’ This move signifies a shift of attention from ‘What does this text mean?’ to ‘How does this text mean?’, i.e. a shift of focus to hermeneutics, the art and science of interpretation.

As the study seeks to examine how the Bible was interpreted by the Christian missionaries and presented to the Africans, it is important to see the missionaries as “interpreters” of the Bible. The prior beliefs of the missionaries, their interests or motives in Bible teaching are critical in understanding how the Bible was conceptualised and presented. Hermeneutics, particularly, biblical hermeneutics thus plays a pivotal role in this study.

## **Postcolonial biblical criticism**

Postcolonial Biblical criticism underpins the analysis of Bible teaching during the colonial era, particularly, issues of representation and interpretation of the Bible during the time of the early Christian missionaries. Punt (2002:59) views postcolonial biblical criticism as:

a variety of hermeneutical approaches characterised by their political nature and ideological agenda, and whose textual politics ultimately concerns both a hermeneutic of suspicion and hermeneutic of retrieval or restoration. It interacts with colonial history and its aftermath(s), which concerns both a history of repression and repudiation, but it also deals with expose and with restoration and transformation.

Sugirtharajah (1998:15) explains that postcolonialism “is not a homogenous project, but a hermeneutical salmagundi, consisting of extremely varied methods, materials, historical entanglements, geographical locations, political affiliations, cultural identities and economic predicaments”. Horsley (2000:10) advocates that pioneers of postcolonial

criticism are from the outset seeking “to make alliances with those subjected to and seeking liberation from sexual, racial, colonial and class domination”. Consequently, postcolonial studies concern themselves with social formation and analysis as well as cultural production and it is, therefore, viewed as an attempt to write history. However, Gandhi (1998:178) notes that postcolonialism posits a reflective modality that is embedded in critical thinking, historical imbalances, cultural inequalities which were established during the era of colonialism. In corroborating Gandhi’s (1998:178) views, Punt (2002:63), sees post-colonial biblical interpretation as a form of ideology criticism which considers the socio-political context and one’s stand within it of primary importance.

Postcolonial biblical criticism is characterised by the following: It reintroduces issues of representation, not in the mimetic sense, but rather in recognising and assigning the once colonised their place in the chronicles of history, affirming their agency in the present; it highlights the acquisition and propagation of a new identity, it deploys a different reading posture aimed at exposing the relationship between ideas and power, language and power and knowledge and power and how these prop up western texts, theories and learning (Punt 2002:66; Sugirtharajah 1998:16-17).

In Southern Africa, postcolonial biblical criticism is still an emerging field and scholars such as Dube (1996) and Punt (2003) pioneered its use. The return of Musa Dube to Botswana in the mid-1990s, having spent a number of years in the United States marked the beginning of serious academic engagement in the field of postcolonial biblical studies. Dube’s (2000) hermeneutics largely falls within the ambit of liberation hermeneutics. The second development in the last ten years has been the substantial contribution of Punt (2003). Punt (2003) brought to the fore major contributions in the area of postcolonial biblical studies such as R.S Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Richard Horsley, Musa Dube, etc. Despite the above scholarly endeavours in Southern Africa, commentators in this region have remained cautious and reluctant to embrace postcolonial biblical criticism.

## **Experiential learning**

Other names have been used to refer to experiential learning in Zimbabwe such as “life approach” or “life-experience approach”. Experiential

learning is often viewed as “learning by doing” and “action” is seen as an important and a vital component of experiential learning. Beaudin and Quick (2002:2) explain experiential learning as follows:

Rather than merely thinking about abstract concepts, learning-by-doing involves a direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied. It utilises actual experience with the phenomenon to validate a theory or concept.

The basic philosophy underlying experiential learning is that ideas cannot be separated from experience; and for learning to occur, it must be connected to the learners’ lives (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993). According to Lewis and Williams (1994:5), the twentieth century has seen a move from formal, abstract education to one that is more experienced-based. One of the most important advocates of this concept is John Dewey (1938) and he states that there must be a relationship between education and experience. Following on Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984:6) argues that there should be a link between the classroom and the future work for which classroom is supposedly preparing the learner. In other words, there is need to translate abstract ideas of academia into the concrete practical realities of the lives of learners (Kolb 1984:6). Learners ought to test ideas discussed in the classroom on real life situations. Corroborating Kolb’s (1984:6) idea, Tisdell (1993:98) asserts that learners must “relate theoretical concepts to real-life experience”.

Experiential learning is supported by theorists within the constructivist school of thought such as Piaget, Dewey and Bruner. The constructivist view of knowledge is that experience allows the learners to construct their own meaning of the world around them. The concept ‘experiential learning’ underpins the main arguments of this study. The proposal in support of experiential-based biblical learning is meant to replace the Christian missionary Bible teaching approach where the Bible was taught as an abstract concept.

### **Aims of the missionaries in teaching African children the Bible**

During the early Christian missionary penetration into Africa (1415-1787), their first stage was to form Christian villages. The Christian villages were instrumental in Bible teaching (Sundkler and Steed 2000:90). In the Christian villages, the Christian missionary programme (catechumenate) comprised of:



an introduction of the Bible. On the road to the Bible the catechumen (convert – L.N.) was supposed to learn the alphabet and to read, the fundamental idea being that the individual, at least those of the younger generation would be placed in a position to see for him – or herself what the word of God said. The teaching included certain select pieces from the stories in Genesis and Exodus together with a synopsis of the Gospels. Certain more established churches could refer to a catechism – Martin Luther’s or the Westminster catechism – while other Protestant missions regarded a catechism with distrust, the idea of a such a book smacking of Rome (Sundkler & Steed 2000:90).

Historians such as Mungazi (1977:99) and Zvobgo (1996:149) point out that the Christian missionaries were fully aware of the fact that the introduction of the Christian faith was entirely dependent on the introduction of effective Bible teaching, as these two were closely related and one could not be achieved without the other. Consequently, in order for the missionaries to carry out their mission successfully, they needed to educate the Africans to read and understand the Bible, Christian religious literature and interpret its meaning according to Christian precepts (Mungazi 1991:100; Zvobgo 1996:149).

Introduction of Bible teaching in Africa was theological rather than educational as the Christian missionaries sought to convert as many Africans to Christianity. Hence, the Bible was seen as a tool for mass conversions from “paganism” to Christianity. Scholars such as Sanneh (1983:127) view Bible teaching during the early Christian missionary period as a “method of social control to instil in the African a proper attitude of subservience towards the white man”. Oliver and Atmore (1994:146) and Siyakwazi (1983:43) note that schools were established as centres for conversion where Bible teaching played an important role.

It is interesting to note that most of the Christian missionaries, besides having little training in theology, had no other expertise. However, the missionaries bore the entire brunt of African Education across all subjects. Bible teaching became the main focus of their curriculum in preparing Africans to be receptive of the gospel. The Bible curriculum usually comprised a detailed exposition of Old Testament and New Testament books and was intended for spiritual use only and did not allow learners to apply biblical concepts such as prophecy, healing, miracles, etc. to their own African context. When biblical concepts were rarely applied to the African context they were meant to denigrate African religion, particularly the moral and belief systems.

## **Role of the missionaries in shaping Bible study in schools**

It is important to bear in mind that missionaries wielded a lot of authority, power and influence in African society (Oliver and Atmore 1994:146; Hastings 1967:119). Hastings (1967:119) comments on the authority and superiority of the Christian missionaries as follows:

Another factor making for conversion has been the authority and sense of superiority of the missionary as a white man and even the sheer use of force. Often he seemed to be in league with the new colonial government, and at times acted as if he shared in some general authority for the running of African society.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the missionaries penetrated the whole of the African continent and began to concern themselves seriously with the Africans and their society (Hastings 1967:81; Iliffe 1995:154-155; Oliver & Atmore 1994:145). Their strategy changed from “Christian villages” to “village schools”. Hastings (1967:81) notes that “the missionary was turning his interest outward from the Christian village to a network of catechists schools, established roughly but vigorously over wide areas”.

In Zimbabwe, besides the Southern Rhodesia Christian Conference, the Christian missionaries also used the African Advisory Board to influence decisions regarding African education (Siyakwazi 1995:323). The African Advisory Board comprised of church and state representatives, and was influential in formulating education policies on literacy, religion and practical training. Siyakwazi (1995:325) comments as follows about the influence of the Christian missionaries on the African Advisory Board:

The creation of the Advisory Board legitimised the co-option of the churches into the status quo and they were accorded a place of influence. It might be a fair statement to say that churches in Zimbabwe throughout the years have had some influence on educational policy.

The Christian missionaries maintained close links with the colonial government as the two became partners in the repression and marginalisation of Africans with respect to Bible teaching. Because of the close relationship between the missionaries and the colonial government, the then colonial government designed and promulgated policies and laws that allowed the missionaries to have free reign in Bible teaching. One such law was the right of entry of the clergy. Under this law, the missionaries enjoyed special privileges such as exercising their legal right of entry in the classrooms for at least one period a week to preach their

denominational dogma. This was in addition to formal Bible teaching lessons that they conducted (Education Department 1940:1).

Cecil John Rhodes<sup>1</sup>, promulgated the above-stated right of entry of the clergy, in a Religious Instruction policy statement, contained in a memorandum to the British South Africa Company, and it summarised the official position of the first colonial administration in Southern Rhodesia:

As to your Government School – I believe you will have one in Salisbury – I must say I hold the old views that there should be Religious Instruction in the following manner, namely, that from say half past eight to nine every morning, a separate classroom should be allotted to the clergy of the different denominations who desire to instruct children, with the consent of parents, in their religion and that during that time to those (sic) children whose parents do not wish them to receive Religious Instruction, some other subject should be taught ... (Rhodes 1890:3).

The Christian missionaries in partnership with the colonial government were allowed to design and shape Bible teaching as they saw it fit. The colonial government provided the framework in which Christian missionaries were free to operate and establish schools and churches in order to further their interests.

## **African children and the Bible**

During the colonial era, in Zimbabwe, African children learnt to read the Bible when they first went to school and were taught literacy skills. It was common to find the Bible being used as the chief vehicle to teach literacy skills because the missionaries taught the African child to learn the Bible so that he/she will become a functional convert – able to read and interpret the Bible and preach to others. It was clear to the missionaries that without teaching the African child literacy skills, Christianity would not easily penetrate African society because they needed children who were able to read the Bible and teach others biblical principles and precepts. Schools were thus created by the missionaries to serve a dual

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil John Rhodes was the founder of the British South Africa Company. Rhodes successfully persuaded the British government to grant a Royal Charter to his company. This charter entitled his company to govern and administer Southern Rhodesia (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa 1977:5).

role – to teach literacy skills and to indoctrinate the African child with Christian norms and values.

The study postulates that African children are unique and they live and learn in a context that exhibits special features – unique cultural and religious landscape. As African children read the Bible in their quest to find meaning and value from the text, they also strive to understand the Bible within the context of their experience and African heritage. The context of the African child was often condemned by the missionaries as irrelevant and demonic so as to usher a new ideology and thinking to the child, hence creating ruptures between what the child experienced and what the child was taught by the missionaries. However, African belief and value systems played a pivotal role in both concept and thought formulation of the child. The child at a tender age made an attempt to deconstruct the Bible or biblical concepts using his/her African lens and based on his/her life experiences and African heritage. It is significant to note that as the child went to school to learn to read and write, certain concepts about religion or God had already been formed. However, schools did not take into cognizance prior knowledge in as far as religion was concerned.

The role of the school with regard to the African child is to assist the child to find meaningful connections to God through features that speak directly to his/her life experiences and cultural heritage. The approach in teaching the Bible to the African learners must not be prescriptive but should be open to divergent views and experiences. A prescriptive approach inevitably leads to rupture and discontinuity. As the African child analyses the concept of God, he/she may compare with similar concepts found in his/her local environment. By adopting the experiential model, those tasked with educating the African child should foster within the child an understanding of concepts as expressed in both the Bible and in the African context. The underlying assumption regarding the teaching of the Bible to African children is that the child comes to school with some notions or concepts about God and the Bible. The child's prior knowledge should then be complemented by a more detailed exploration of God in the Bible. The concept of God or religion is further amplified and exemplified in various biblical text passages.

## **Appropriating biblical concepts in the African context using experiential learning**

Having situated post-colonial biblical criticism within the context of Bible teaching in Zimbabwe and explained the nature and context of the African child, it is pertinent to present the way forward and proposals for Bible teaching in Zimbabwe. The study identifies the problem of Bible teaching during the colonial era and proposes experiential learning as a pedagogical tool, to mitigate the problems of the past. In light of these remarks, the study argues that experiential learning should underpin Bible teaching so as to enable learners to confront or interact with religious phenomenon in their life context.

One of the concepts that are explored using experiential learning is the concept of prophecy. It is evident that the African context is endowed with various functionaries such as traditional healers, diviners, etc. First, the traditional healer, besides being a major resource person in African society, may share similarities with prophets of the Old Testament, for example, he/she could be able to interpret events within the African world view or spiritual realm. Furthermore, the traditional healer can foretell future events including but not limited to calamities that are likely to affect the consulting individual.

The study advocates that learners studying prophets of the Old Testament should first interrogate similar functionaries within their society. African functionaries with similar roles include traditional healers, prophetic figures in African initiated churches and Pentecostal churches. It is important to note that Bible teaching should take into cognisance religious functionaries within the African context. In addition, experiential learning must underpin any future Bible teaching in Zimbabwe so as to enable learners to understand and deconstruct the Bible.

## **Role of the teacher in Bible teaching using experiential learning as a pedagogical tool**

The role of the teacher in Bible teaching, using experiential learning as pedagogical tool, as envisaged in this study is to:

- provide a stimulus, for example, present the sacred texts to the learners and then allow the learners to dissect, interpret and apply

- the texts as they see fit. As they are reflecting, they are constructing their own life and world view.
- foster religious literacy in learners and to assist them to mature in their ability to reflect and respond to religious issues in their daily encounters.
  - translate the “raw material” of religion (whether from the learner’s experience or from institutional religion) into a format that learners could comprehend. If religions are studied as a juxtaposition of the content of the religious life-worlds of the adherents with the content of the learners’ life-worlds, learners might become informed about religious beliefs and values and be able to use them as instruments for the critical evaluation of their own beliefs and values.
  - apply philosophical and theological thinking skills in weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of their own and other views about the ultimate truth and meaning of the universe. Hence, learners would come to accept that the universe, society and their own humanity put forward fundamental and ultimate questions, the answer to which fundamentally affect the way they live their lives (Erricker and Erricker 2000:200; Thompson 2004:134; Wright 1993:72-73, 102-103).

## **Conclusion**

In this study, the problem of Bible teaching during the colonial period is outlined and explained. It is noted that Christian missionaries used the Bible as a tool for conversion. The Bible, as it was taught by the Christian missionaries, was abstract and a foreign text. The study advocates that any effective Bible teaching programme should be underpinned by the experiential learning model so as to mitigate the problems of the past. One of the tools that are used to interrogate Bible teaching during the colonial era is postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Using postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, the study analyses the role of the missionaries in Bible teaching. The Christian missionaries were not interested in applying the Bible to the African context. The traditional or rural past of the learners was seen as evil and various terms such as “heathen”, “pagan”, etc. were used to describe the manifestations of religion in Africa. The study therefore supports experiential learning in Bible teaching so as to enable learners to confront similar concepts in the African context.

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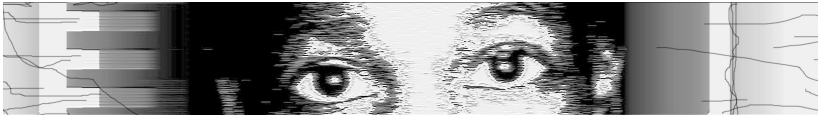
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This volume of BiAS 17 is collecting the papers presented at the 2012 BiAS meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, with some additional contributions.

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