

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDHOOD: THE CHILD JESUS,
HIS BIRTH, LIFE, AND CRUCIFIXION IN THE GOSPEL OF
MARK**

Janet Okang (Presbyterian)
PhD in Bible and Cultures
Drew University
jokang@drew.edu

INTRODUCTION

Nearly all cultures react positively to the significance of children. This is because, despite the pervasive notion that older individuals possess greater wisdom and understanding, there is still a great deal of knowledge that adults need to learn from and about children. Consequently, in recent decades, an interdisciplinary field increasing called childist studies has emerged in the humanities and social sciences. In biblical scholarship, a growing number of scholars are beginning to recognize the need to apply childist studies so to learn from children as well as addressing children's welfare by giving children the primarily attention in their interpretations of biblical

texts. Childist studies is, therefore, the hermeneutic of child-centeredness, an affirmative term to emphasize the agency and significance of children's influence in texts, social affairs, and societies. Within this field, Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker suggest that, besides focusing on the agency and action of children, childist interpretation also aims to “challenge traditional hegemonic assumptions” about characters in narratives.¹ This paper follows this development and understanding by building upon biblical studies of children in the Gospel of Mark. It challenges the traditional hegemonic assumptions about the Markan characters, especially that of Jesus, with attention to an African storytelling methodology. The paper takes its lead from Mark 9:36-37, in which the Markan Jesus identifies himself as “a little child” (παιδίον). The paper argues that the Gospel of Mark includes a birth and childhood narrative of Jesus that Markan scholars have failed to see. In order to arrive at this claim, the paper delinks decolonially from the rules and regulations of Eurocentric biblical scholarship and applies childist studies and

¹ Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, “Children in the Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Ghanaian storytelling hermeneutics approach to Mark's Gospel, so as to model biblical childist studies in a decolonial mode. First, while alluding to the significance of children in Mark, the paper narrates the birth of the beloved son, conceived in the womb of the water-body, Jordan, and, following his baptism-birth, declared a son of a heavenly father. In addition to the method of Ghanaian storytelling, the paper adduces the biological process of childbirth, which involves the water that gives way to the child's arrival out of the womb. Next, through reference to selective developmental stages of children, the paper chronologically narrates the ministry of the child Jesus, who is sent into the wilderness by his parent right after birth. The unthinkability of a lone child in the wilderness is addressed, and is related to the contemporary act of sending children into the USA through the desert (only for them to end up in politically constructed detention facilities, as the child Jesus also eventually will). The paper continues by exploring the childlike attributes of the sassy child Jesus, for whom the kingdom of God is a kingdom of children (10:13-16), which

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 422-4333; Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle* (Providence: Brown University, 2013), 16–18.

attitude eventually leads Jesus to his crucifixion—the execution of a minor(ity). Reconceiving of the Markan Jesus as a child allows readers to bring this gospel in dialogue with such contemporary social evils as child molestation, child slavery, and other forms of violence and abuse directed at children.

The Ghanaian storytelling hermeneutics is borrowed from the format of Kwaku Anansi stories in West Africa, Ghana. Kwaku Anansi is a folktale character, part man, part spider, and full of endless wisdom. Children love to hear Anansi stories told by the storytellers on the television or in person. The characters in an Anansi story, are relatable. Therefore, Anansi stories are a moral voice in Ghana for children and adults alike. There are often pauses for listeners to reflect on the moral lessons in the narrative, along with singing of native songs, drumming, and dancing. However, in this case, the story format is as if told and read by children with a lesser attention span; they interrupt and are curious to know (sometimes ahead of) the end of the child Jesus narrative—for they identify with the child Jesus. Parts of the creativity in this storytelling are also childlike. This method should encourage adults to read as a child

rather than through an adult lens. To achieve this, whether the child we become as we read is the remembered, or a constructed child, readers should take into account personal, sub-cultural, experiential, and psychological differences between children and adults. Perhaps, this approach is the path to understanding what is happening to narrative that have the idea of the child.²

However, I must admit that as adults, we often tend to move away from a child-centered interpretation of biblical texts, particularly the Gospel of Mark, where children roles are merely interpreted as objects of moral lessons and nothing more. Even as I write this paper, I find myself grappling with this adult-centric biases and perspectives. Moreover, subconsciously, the conventional readings of Mark continue to influence my thoughts and question this new child-focused approach to Mark's Gospel (e.g., The Gospel of Mark lacks a

² Peter Hunt's approach to literature in the field of literary theory comes to mind while I progress. According to Hunt, children's literature, as well as interpretations of texts that aims at addressing matters in "a child's world" or childhood, as a social construct, is constructed by grown-ups (including myself). Technically, this makes it more complex since adults' ideologies, assumptions, power, and politics are imposed on children through the written literature. For more read: Peter Hunt, *The Decline and Decline of the Children's Book? The Problem of Adults Reading Children's Books and What Can Be Done About Them,* ed. [Footnote continued on next page ...]

birth narrative and is more interested in the adult Jesus than the child Jesus. Although the childhood of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, it is not included in Mark's Gospel. In Mark, Jesus uses children as an illustration to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God). This makes it difficult to progress, and to come to terms with such a reading of Mark's gospel that this paper is proposing. Nevertheless, as Dong Sung Kim points out, "the growth of interests in children and childhood within biblical studies over the past decade enabled various hermeneutical and methodological explorations, expanding the scope of research in the field and deepening our critical reflection on the biblical texts."³ Therefore, I am reminded that, the objective of this paper is to expand the scope of research on the Gospel of Mark and deepen our critical reflection on the children in the narrative and beyond, both literally and figuratively. Consequently, the paper urges its readers and audience (including myself)—to approach this paper, especially the storytelling

Michael Stone (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 1991), 1-14; *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991), 19, 42-59.

³ Dong Sung Kim, "Children of Diaspora: The Cultural Politics of Identity and Diasporic Childhood in the Book of Esther," Pp. 109–130 in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the* [Footnote continued on next page ...]

parts of this “new” Gospel, with childlike minds—to read, imagine, or listen with openness and curiosity. Thus, as we proceed, read like a child, or the child you become, or remember to be.

KEYWORDS: Gospel of Mark, Childist, Child Jesus, Children, Childhood, Storytelling.

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST

Upon receiving the invitation to contribute to this publication, I realized that Chapters 9 or 10 of Mark's Gospel would be the most appropriate sections to examine. These chapters contain the most widely recognized and popular statements of Jesus that illustrate leadership and the kingdom of God concepts. However, as I chose to begin with selected verses in Mark 9, I reflect on how the conventional interpretations of these two chapters often result in a lesson about how Jesus' followers should behave to enter the kingdom of God, frequently using children's behaviors as an example. At the very least, the innocence of a child is often cited as the basis for understanding Jesus' words in Mark 9:33-37 and 10:13-16.

However, can this perspective of Mark's account of children extend beyond its current state? If children were to interpret these passages for the first time without adults' interference, what would their understanding be—a child-centered approach to these texts? As we proceed with these questions in mind, remember that children are actively involved in Jesus' group of followers, as evidenced in Mark 9:33-37.

Mark 9:33-37 begins with Jesus and the disciples embarking on a journey to Capernaum. Their journey was marked by an argument over who was the greatest or most significant among them (9:33-34). The narrator implies that, Jesus was not fully aware of the situation (9:33b). So, upon reaching a house in Capernaum and finding a place to sit, Jesus questioned his disciples about their discussion during their journey (9:35). The disciples, however, remained silent (9:34). Jesus then brought a little child into their midst and addressed his disciples with the words found in verses 36-37. Consider being that child, held by Jesus as he tells his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one such child... welcomes me, and whoever

welcomes me welcomes... the one who sent me,” (9:36-37). What can we glean from this scene? What is Jesus trying to convey?

Clearly, the narrative highlights a contentious situation that necessitates resolution. Nevertheless, in his attempt to facilitate effective collaboration among the disciples, Jesus introduces a little child into their midst. One might question the relevance of a child in addressing such disputes or finding solutions. However, when viewed from a child-centered perspective, this Markan scene portrays Jesus as child-friendly—leading us to imagine that “Jesus loves little children.” Consequently, the child can be included as part of the household’s members, indicating the child’s status as an insider rather than an outsider. Despite this inclusion, the child, possibly belonging to a follower of Jesus, a disciple, a servant, or even a child-slave, remains nameless and voiceless (this aspect will be addressed subsequently). Thus, although the child is included in the inner circle of Jesus in some capacity, the child remains mute, a subaltern without a name.⁴ At least the narrator ensured the absence of verbal

⁴ On *Subaltern* see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, [Footnote continued on next page ...])

expression from the child in the narrative. While the child might have spoken, giggled, or uttered “Jesus,” the narrator presents a child devoid of speech—an atypical characteristic for a child. Certainly, some children lack an identity and are voiceless because communities unintentionally or intentionally ignore them or label them as childish—a term that encompasses various derogatory labels such as insignificant, powerless, unpredictable, reckless, and immature.⁵ Across various cultures, such as those of the Greco-Roman and Judean worlds, children are often seen as lacking the attribute of *logos*.⁶ For centuries, in accordance with John Locke's theory on the nature of children, educationalists often depict children as having “empty minds,” or “blank slates” (*tabula rasa*), which must be filled before they can be educated.⁷ Furthermore, Stoic philosophers like

2010). For Spivak, the subaltern are the people who are voiceless and excluded from the mainstream narrative of history.

⁵ Cf. Teresa Okure, “Children in Mark: A Lens for Reading Mark’s Gospel,” in *Mark: Texts & Contexts*, ed. Nicole Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel M. Patte, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 130.

⁶ Jan Grobbelaar, “Doing Theology with Children: A Childist Reading of the Childhood Metaphor in 1 Corinthians and the Synoptic Gospels,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(4), a5637 (2020): 3, accessed Nov 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.5637>.

⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser. 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1690; 1894); *Some* [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Marcus Aurelius and Seneca frequently employed the “figure of the child as a symbol for irrationality—especially for the irrationality of an unphilosophical adult.”⁸ According to these philosophers, children like the so-called unphilosophical adult, however, “cannot think out their moral obligations: the best they can do is learn moral maxims off by heart.”⁹ Therefore, “the child’s inability to communicate in the way adults do [makes the child] a symbol of non-participation in the rational world of the adult citizen.”¹⁰ Consequently, it can be inferred that the “nameless and voiceless child” in this Markan narrative has no significance in resolving disputes, let alone those of adults.

Mark 9:33-37 may reinforce stereotypes that marginalize children in adult society, however, this interpretation is valid only if participation is limited to verbal communication.¹¹ The narrative

Thoughts Concerning Education, (London: Printed for A. and J. Churchill at the Black Swan in Paternoster-row, 1693); Margaret J.M. Ezell, “John Locke’s Images of Childhood: Early Eighteenth-Century Responses to Some Thoughts Concerning Education,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17.2 (1983–84), 141.

⁸ Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 24.

⁹ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 24.

¹⁰ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 21–2.

¹¹ While it would not be prudent to limit our focus solely to the marginalization of the child(ren) at this juncture, as the disciples themselves have not yet spoken or been given names in this pericope, the discourse on the marginalization of children is indeed overdue. Furthermore, I must admit that, it remains ambiguous (at least to me at this point) as to whether Jesus or the narrator is responsible for the omission [Footnote continued on next page ...]

objectifies the child, denying the child agency or speech, yet it suggests the significance of recognizing children as participants in the adult world of reason. Notably, the story illustrates how a little child, despite having a non-verbal role, was embraced and included among the adults surrounding Jesus as a “teaching aide.” This compels us to recognize that verbal expression is not the sole means of engagement. Additionally, Jesus' actions thus revealed a reversal concept that challenges the conventional view of children. He exemplifies that, children are integral to community, and adults (disciples) can gain insights from and about the young ones in their midst. As in this Markan scenario, where the child becomes an active contributor to rational thought, children of every kind, contribute significantly to society, with their nonverbal communication often facilitating the resolution of household disputes. Therefore, societies and biblical scholars must recognize the value of including children—the voiceless minors—and emphasize the need to center children and their contributions to conflict resolution and scholarship.

of the child's name and voice. Yet, this narrative thus reflects a significant reality, of the marginalization of children in the adult's world—a problematic issues that requires individual and collective attention.

The Self-Identified Little Child

Another aspect that can be glean from this scene is the identity representation of the Markan Jesus. The narrator emphasizes the significance of welcoming the little child in Jesus's name, as it is equivalent to welcoming Jesus and the one who sent him. This raises the question of whether Jesus is advocating for his followers to be receptive to children and suggesting that humility, vulnerability, innocence, servanthood, and receptiveness to learning are essential traits for his followers. Furthermore, it prompts consideration of whether, by embracing a child, one is also embracing the very essence of childhood itself (cf. 9:33-35). Similarly, when focusing on the child and Jesus, the statement "whoever welcomes one such child...welcomes me," raises the question of whether verses 36 and 37 are potentially one of the few instances where Jesus, himself, embodies the essence of a child, and childhood thus becoming "a little child."

Defining the concept of a child presents a complex challenge, as the definitions of child and childhood can vary based on historical

and social contexts, as well as various linguistic and cultural nuances.¹² However, it is imperative to establish that this Markan child is not a slave-child. Despite being nameless and voiceless, and notwithstanding the prevalence of child slavery in antiquity, the language of Mark provides a means of distinguishing between the free and the slave. Whenever the noun παιδίον (*paidion*: child) and παιδίον (*paidion*: children) appear in Mark's gospel, they invariably denote an actual child (5:39, 40, 41, 7:28, 30, 9:24, 36, 37, 10:13, 14, 15). Παιδίον is never intended to be interpreted as a servant, a slave, or a slave-child. The Markan words for such terms are δοῦλος (12:2, 4, 13:34, 14:47), διάκονος (9:35, 10:43, cf. 1:13), and παιδισκῶν (14:66, 69). Thus, if welcoming this child meant embracing or becoming a servant, a slave, or a child-slave, the author of Mark would have employed any of these Greek words: δοῦλος, διάκονος, or παιδισκῶν. Given that Mark used παιδίον, the phrase “whoever welcomes one such child...welcomes me,” is suggesting embracing

¹² In some societies it is the social or life stage of a person that determines their classification as a child, rather than solely their chronological age. See Henriksen Garroway, “Methodology: Who is a Child and Where Do We Find Children in the Ancient Near East?” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 67-73; Ericka Dunbar and [Footnote continued on next page ...]

the very essence of an actual child. With this analysis in mind, the following questions arises:

- (1) Is “Me—Jesus” becoming “a little child” (Vice versa)?
- (2) Is “Me”—Jesus, becoming the “one who sent me” (Vice versa)?

The question posed is whether Jesus is conveying that the child is him and he-Jesus is a child-like, as well as whether he is the sender, which is presumably God, and God is Jesus.¹³ The latter hypothesis, in its literal form, is more acceptable, especially among theologians and churches who assert and believe that Jesus is God, having been born of the flesh yet retaining a divine nature lived among humans. However, the former hypothesis may be more difficult to accept, metaphorically or literally. Depicting an adult Jesus as a child, especially, in Mark's Gospel may be more unsettling than viewing him as a deity, as the Markan Jesus is traditionally portrayed as an adult without childhood experiences. Thus, conceptualizing a mature individual, Jesus, as a child can be challenging. However, while numerous scholars are endeavoring to deconstruct and reconstruct the

Kenneth Ngwa, “Children in Proverbs, Proverbial Children,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 131, 132, & 154.

persona of Jesus into various identities—Black, White, Asian, Trans, and others—Jesus in ch. 9:36-37 has also constructed a distinct identity of himself that resembles the little child among them.¹⁴ By positioning the child of Mark 9 in their midst and identifying with the child, Jesus effectively demonstrates a visual representation of himself, proposing he could also be perceived as a child. Moreover, this act of association—with the child, who serves as the focal point in the resolution of dispute—emphasizes the significance of children and childist perspective in revealing Jesus’ true identity to his disciples and the world. However, it is relevant to consider whether Jesus had already adopted the identity or essence of a child prior to chapter 9, and to examine whether the Gospel of Mark depicted the emergence of a child Jesus from the beginning.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND WATERBIRTH OF THE BELOVED CHILD

The beginning of all living organisms begins with birth. The human birth narrative alludes to some degree of human agency.

¹³ Likewise, is God child-like?

¹⁴ He is also the powerful messiah (1:1- 8:26), a suffering servant (8:27- 16:8), the son of man (9:31), and God-self (9: 33-37).

Similarly, a child's conception is traditionally associated exclusively with the female's womb—even when it emphasizes the supernatural elements. Furthermore, in most birth narrative, either before or after conception, there is an announcement of an impending child. In any biblical birth, the news of the birth that precedes or follows the child's arrival is proclaimed by a “transitional figure,” i.e., an angel or oracle. For instance, in Luke 1:26-38, the angel Gabriel heralds a miraculous (virgin) birth and the coming of the messiah to Mary and Joseph (Matt. 1:18-25, Lk. 1:26-38). Additionally, in Luke 2:8-15, the angel tells shepherds of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah–Christ.¹⁵ There are also announcements of the birth of Isaac to Abram and Sarai (Gen. 18), that of Samson to his parents (Judges 13-16), and the birth of John to Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-25), among others. In all of these encounters, the messengers of the good news of hope, deliverance, and restoration do not remain; they disappear or are never seen after delivering their message (cf. Luke 2:15). In the

¹⁵ This archetype of the miraculous birth is present in other non-biblical literature. Cf. Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors: Christianity Before Christ* (Book Tree, 1999), 29 -31; Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: [Footnote continued on next page ...]*

Markan (hi)story, there is no appearance and disappearance of an angel, but rather, John the Baptizer (1:1-8, 14; 6:14-29). Additionally, the conception of a child Jesus in Mark's gospel is associated with the womb of a female water deity, river Jordan, rather than the Virgin Mary. This is how it commenced at the river Jordan, through a childist perspective.

~ Expectant silence ~

The Beginning of the Beloved Son

Long, long ago, before there was any “king of the Jews,” a wilderness priest, dressed in indigenous attire fashioned from camel's hair, and eating locusts and wild honey, emerged.¹⁶ This wilderness priest is popularly known by his followers as John the Baptist. John announced and prepared the way for the arrival of the one he referred to as “the powerful one” (1:2-3,7). His reputation precedes him, as he preached and performed baptisms for repentance in the Jordan River (1:4), where the sound of the flowing water echoing the “Om” from

Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field (St. Louis, Mo.: Clayton Pub. House, 1982), 217.

the life of the river accompanies his proclamation: “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals (1:7).” This declaration pertained to the arrival of Israel’s long-anticipated Messiah, about which John was succinct yet emphatic. Subsequently, John’s messages led to his incarceration. Following the fulfillment of John’s proclamation, he disappears (is arrested) for a while, after his last recorded appearance in location 1.14 and entirely in 6.14-29, where he is decapitated and his head is displayed at a sub-king’s birthday celebration. This was the request of the king’s daughter upon seeking counsel from her mother, subsequent to her excellent dance performance accompanied by the sounds of trumpet, strings, timbrel, flute, and drums: *konkokonko, konkokonko*. Then the king, Herod, proudly declared to the princess adorned in a shining dress, golden ornaments, and long hair, saying, “Request of me whatever you desire, and I shall grant it.” Consequently, she requested John’s head, as per the queen’s instruction. Sadly, a “great tree” has fallen. A

¹⁶ One could also imagine that the priest’s cloth is more rugged and less civil. Or he is “dressed in the attire of a dharma bum, or one of those hippies, [Footnote continued on next page ...]

righteous man is executed (6:19-20). Thus, this is how John transition from one realm to another. However, the story does not end here. The collective memory of the Roman persecution from 65-70 C.E. and the ancestral prophecies foretold in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 preclude the termination of the narrative with John's demise or in a state of despair.¹⁷ It is imperative to recall that this Markan narrative constitute the declaration of the εὐαγγελίου (euaggelion - good news) of Jesus. Moreover, this εὐαγγελίου evokes and recalls the opening words of Genesis 1:1 “in the beginning.”

“Obi nnim obrempon ahyese,” which means “nobody knows the beginning of a great man.”¹⁸ However, the feminine Greek noun, ἀρχὴ (1:1), identifies the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ with the notion of the first creation and birth by water. In Musa Dube’s view, “in the beginning” is an outer, unlimited space of power

wearing upcycled clothing, rather than store-bought.

¹⁷ These passages strongly associate Jesus with the Messianic figure of the oral tradition. There are about three voices echoed in Mk. 1: 2-3. The voice of a messenger “who goes ahead” of the people; suggesting the angel God sent to lead the people of Israel from the Egyptian exile (Exo. 23:20). The next is the “one sent to prepare a way”; also suggesting the promised figure in Malachi 3:1. The last voice is the one, which is “crying in the wilderness” whom Isaiah describes as the one to give comfort to the people of God, this is common in the Jewish tradition.

where things came into being.¹⁹ In the first Genesis creation account (1:2), there is, “in the beginning,” the waters of *tehom* (Heb. תְּהוֹם). In the narrative that follows (Gen. 1-3), all of creation emerges out of those primordial waters at the immediate command “let there be.” Similarly, in the first gospel account, Mark says there is “in the beginning” the waters of the river Jordan, a space of power, where immediately out ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος (from the water) a beloved child emerges (1:10-11).

~How can this be? ~

¹⁸ “Obi nnim obrempon ahyese,” is one of the many proverbs in Ghana, mostly used among the Akan tribes.

¹⁹ From a post-colonial view (of John’s gospel), Musa Dube claims that “In the beginning” is a spatial construction-setting-with nothing above or below it. “In the beginning” is an outer, unlimited space of power where the spoken Word (inseparable from and equal to God; pre-existing time and place) “virtually created all things that were created (124-8).” It constructs an outer space (heaven) above this world (earth) and “also serves to legitimate a systematic subordination of all other individuals or groups that occupy the spaces of this world (except, of course, Jesus’ followers).” Musa Dube, “Savior of the World but not of this World: A Postcolonial Reading of Spatial Construction in John,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, pp. 118-35, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 124-8.



Figure 1: By Dreamcatcher
Birth, September 1, 2013,
[https://dreamcatcherbirth.co
m/2013/09/01/water-birth-2/](https://dreamcatcherbirth.com/2013/09/01/water-birth-2/)

The Labor and Delivery of a Beloved Child

A birth narrative would necessarily encompass a labor and delivery period. This stage primarily comprises three steps leading to the arrival of the child. During natural delivery, the cervix is expected to dilate, allowing the baby to move into the birth canal during labor. Subsequently, the mother pushes until the baby's head becomes visible at the vaginal opening, facilitating delivery. The final phase involves the delivery of the amniotic fluid and placenta that surrounds the “infant” in the womb. Alternatively, in cesarean delivery, the baby is surgically extracted from the uterus or abdomen, while the umbilical cord connecting the child and mother is cut and tied. None of the canonical gospels make any direct claim or provide details of

any of this traditional birth stages. However, as every natural birth involves the aforementioned phases, it is reasonable to infer that all biblical children underwent this process. In the case of a newly born child Jesus in Mark's gospel, there is no womb of a Virgin Mary (though Jesus is later referred to as "son of Mary," 6:3) undergoing these phases. Instead, there is an allusion to the "womb of the water" that produces a beloved child by undergoing these phases; what this study terms the birth by water, or the baptismal birth (i.e., birth from the womb of water or a watery womb).²⁰

~ Mumbling ~
~Oh, my mother water broke during pregnancy ~
~and my little brother was born~

Alright, where are we? The birth by water! The concept of birth by water is significant in African culture, where water bodies are linked to female deities. These water deities primarily symbolize fertility, the womb, rebirth, life, and even death. Similarly, in ancient cultures and Greek mythology, the water Goddess represents both the positive and negative aspects of water. For instance, the Nile Goddess Anuket was

²⁰ In Ghana, one of the popular water deities is called Mami Wata, with complex attributes.

worshiped because her floodwaters fertilize the crops that nourished the people.²¹ The Sumerian deity, Nammu is a water goddess who gave birth to gods and humanity.²² The Greek Goddess Styx, the underworld river's personification that separates the living from the dead, i.e., representing the river of death.²³ Water, therefore, is conceptualized as an ovary capable of procreation, bestowing or withdrawing life and corporeal forms. Moreover, water is frequently associated conceptually with physical and moral purity (cf. the Jewish concept of handwashing in Mark 7:4; 14:12-16). Even in instances of polluted water bodies, there persists a perception that waters possess healing properties and can restore vitality, as exemplified by the sacred water of the Ganges in India.²⁴ In the Christian and African traditions, water serves as the element utilized for purification of an individual for their subsequent life stage, constituting a significant rite

²¹ Anuket, goddess of Egypt, accessed November, 2023, <https://www.landofpyramids.org/anuket.htm>

²² Nicole Brisch, 'Namma (goddess),' *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy, (2019), accessed November, 2023, <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/namma/>

²³ "STYX - Greek River-Goddess & Underworld River of Hatred," accessed November, 2023, <https://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/PotamosStyx.html>

²⁴ See [Images of the Ganges Water](#)

of passage into the community.²⁵ Water is also used in the preparation of a body for death, for one's eternal resting place in the African tradition. This rite of passage, which is also integral to the formation of a moral person, is known in Judaism and Christianity as baptism. To be baptized (βαπτίζω, βάπτισμα) signifies being either wholly or partially "dip[ped] frequently or intensively, plunge[d], or immerse[d] in water."²⁶ The River Jordan in this context (until recent pollution) holds significant religious importance. Its water serves as a source of purity, that possesses the purifying power which is integral to the creation of a moral individual devoid of sins (1:5).²⁷ So, baptism in the River Jordan symbolizes the (re)birth to a newness of life and its water can be referred to metaphorically as the water of "life."

~Mumbling among children~

²⁵ Ernest Van Eck, *The Baptism of Jesus in Mark: A Status of Transformation Ritual* (New Testament Society of South Africa:1996),187 - 215.

²⁶ Wikipedia, "Baptism," last modified October 27, 2024 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism>

²⁷ On the Jordan River see "*River Out of Eden: Water, Ecology, and the Jordan River in The Christian Tradition*," accessed on Nov. 1, 2023. https://abrahamicprograms.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1468/2020/09/14036833860_%5E%5E_Sourcebook_Christianity_FINAL-1.pdf

Behold the blessed River Jordan! And blessed is its womb—water of life! Do you remember the wilderness priest, John the Baptist? Prior to John's disappearance, nineteen magnificent Greek words initiated the account of birth by water narrative of the powerful figure John had foretold: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρετ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου, (1:9). Analogous to the biological process of childbirth mentioned previously, the birth by water is conceptualized as an act that requiring three movements for Jesus' symbolic birth at the Jordan to be completed. Firstly, Jesus must move into the space of baptism, comparable to entering the birth canal during labor. Secondly, the head needs to be pushed and pulled into and out of the water. This is necessary to for the completion of his *baptismal-birth* delivery. Lastly, Jesus' separation from his surroundings, and subsequent thrust into the wilderness, is likened to the separation of the newborn from the umbilical cord, amniotic fluid, and placenta—that surrounds the baby in the womb. From this point, the child Jesus can move independently, yet still requires the parent's guidance and sustenance. In this Markan tale, this guidance and

sustenance are represented by the spirit that immediately adopted Jesus and the angels that fed and served him in the wilderness (1:12-13).

~So, a child is born~

Moreover, following the birth of a child, Ghanaians conduct a ceremony commonly referred to as *the outdoring or naming ceremony* for the newborn. This traditional event involves bringing the newborn child “outdoors” for the first time and given the child a day-name at a designated time. The author of Mark was kind enough to inform readers that as Jesus came out of the water, his naming ceremony commenced. In contrast to the Ghanaian naming ceremony, Jesus’ naming seems to have been a brief event, albeit graced by divine presence. We are told in 1:9-11 that *immediately* while coming up out of the water, he saw the skies σχιζομένους (splitting open, cf. 15:19), and the Spirit, like a dove descending into him (cf. Ezek 1:1); and a voice came out of the skies, saying; σὸν εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased). Thus, Jesus is designated on the day of his birth by water as the “beloved son” by a heavenly voice, which assumes the paternal role

(1:11). Subsequently, Jesus becomes the “newly” born beloved child—who attained divine sonship, an adoptionist Christology—of a celestial being.²⁸

~ Magnificent~
~Is he cute? How long or short is the hair? ~
~What color is he? What happened next? ~
~Well, yes, he is a cute beloved son~
~However, he is still the “beloved child.” ~

THE CHILD’S SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

As indicated in the above section, Jesus’ baptism marks the birth of the beloved child (1:11). As a beloved son separated from the parent(s), he is sent into a wilderness to be with wild animals and wild elements to be tempted by the devil. The details of the temptations are unknown, (1:12-13). However, the concept of a child in the wilderness appears unthinkable—*similarly, the act of sending children into the United States of America through the desert only for them to end up in politically constructed detention facilities in hopes of fulfilling unethical ends is unthinkable*—yet made possible.

²⁸ This Christology is the kind Mark Stauss will tag as “enigmatic and paradoxical.” However, Hal Taussig and Maia Kotrosits, rightly note that, Mark’s gospel is a “companion” in rawness and creativity. And this is an example of its rawness. See Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*. ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Children as young as five are sent across the Rio Grande, by raft, unaccompanied, with nothing but the clothes on their back and a phone number, occasionally scrawled across their abdomens or arms. Majority of these children are, eventually, traumatized and dehumanized.²⁹ However, the child-Jesus (among the few children provided with helpers) survived the wilderness experience, and subsequently, Jesus was doing the will of his heavenly father, preaching a message in accordance with the one the wilderness priest presciently preached at River, i.e., one essentially of repentance (1:12-16). Nevertheless, the child Jesus will, ultimately, himself end up in a politically constructed detention facility.

His Childhood Narrative

Upon release from the wilderness, the beloved child Jesus proceeds to Galilee, where he recruits other children to follow him.

734; Hal Taussig and Maia Kotrosits, *Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

²⁹ This analysis does not intend to diminish the fact that most children undertake the wilderness journey to the West, fleeing conflict zones or hardships in their countries where remaining could result in premature death. However, the psychological trauma induced by their wilderness experience is (somewhat) comparable to that of war or hardships. At least seven children have either died in custody or after being detained by federal immigration agencies at and within the border, and the mothers weep for their losses.

[Footnote continued on next page ...]

He addresses Simon and his brother Andrew, stating, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,*” to which they immediately abandon their nets and follow him without hesitation. Next are James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, who, too, immediately left their father at the shore to follow Jesus. These sons demonstrated the childlike attribute of complete, unquestioning, innocent trust especially when invited to participate in a familiar endeavor (1:16-20). This evokes an image comparable to the photographs below.³⁰ During a recent visit to the Northern Region of Ghana, an agrarian community, I observed a child who owned a farm. This farm owner (the shortest child in the first image) had recruited other children as laborers to assist in the crop cultivation. Through my interaction with these children, it was evident that they have joined the farm owner to fulfill the family's plan for restoration and the well-being of family members; ensuring that they, like their parents, contribute by serving as farm laborers who produces sufficient harvest during the farming season to endure the dry season when food scarcity is severe. This shows that children

are integral component of the family's plan for restoration and healing members of the family; in the case of the beloved child Jesus, it pertains to the healing of the corrupt world and the children of the kingdom of his father. Thus, for a perceived beneficial purpose, these children left their homes, heeding to the call of the young farm owner, to become servants of the fields, giving their agricultural skills and strength to produce and provide sustenance for their family. Therefore, the farm owner expressed dissatisfaction regarding the duration of my interaction with the workers, as it was distracting them from accomplishing their tasks as agricultural laborers. As a result, I too become one of the workers, obligated to assist in their endeavor (see the second image).



³⁰ The pictures of the farm boys were taken on August, 2023. These images cannot be used for advertising or promotional purposes.



A more comparable image is the photograph here, which depicts children working independently and endlessly as “child fishermen” or



“fisherboys.”³¹ The presence of child fisherman is not unconventional for families residing in the coastal regions of Ghana. Driven by poverty, countless children are fishing in

Ghana—*either as part of a family business or because they have been sold into modern-day slavery: compelled to catch fish in the Lake Volta*—for approximately twelve hours in a day. Akin to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, as subjects of Rome whose labor power was extracted for the metropole, the great empire, these children are

³¹ One child in the foreground is mending and taking fish from the net. For more description on the young boys fishing in the village on the Lake Volta see Shutterstock Image, *Ghana Modern Slavery* [Footnote continued on next page ...]

also skilled in diving for fish and catching other sons to join them in their endeavor. In Mark, this is evident in chapter 3, where the *team of sons* led by the beloved child Jesus is now a pack of twelve, whom he designates as apostles, commissioned to go from village to village preaching repentance with authority over impure spirits, (3:14 -19; 6:7-13). Similar to the fisherboys, none of these apostles initiated their discipleship as fishers (of men). However, intensely focused on proclaiming the good news and fulfilling the heavenly father's will, the beloved child and his pack remain away from home, like delinquent children (1:35,38; 6:7-13). Out there, in the playground of Mr. Sickness and Sir Tyranny, Jesus is recognized as the healer of various diseases and conditions, including a man's withered hand, a paralytic individual, a dead little girl, and an unnamed woman with a bleeding disorder whom Musa Dube refers to as Mama Africa. This woman struggled and tarried in the hospital of Dr. Independence and

(Mar 2007). Accessed Nov.10, 2013. <https://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/young-boys-ghana-remove-fish-nets-yeji-7780145a>

Dr. Neo-Colonialism, the physician (2:1-5, 3: 1-6, 5: 2-43).³² Yet, through her act of faith and perseverance, she, like many others, got healed by physical contact (6:56). Surprisingly to viewers, child Jesus would engage in unconventional healing practices, such as dirtying himself by spitting on and touching others, resulting in their immediate recovery (7:31-37, 8:22-26). However, some grown-ups who disliked his healing methods said, this child is possessed by the “Lord of demons—Beelzebul,” and as the prince of evils and filth, he casts out demons (3:22-30). In response, Jesus fearlessly invokes the father of Mr. Sickness and Sir Tyranny, Satan in their midst, saying, “How can Satan drive out Satan?” Asserting authority over both demons and Satan himself, Jesus gradually becomes a sassy male child—bold and cheeky—known throughout the region of Galilee.³³ The concept of a sassy male child may sound contradictory as in contemporary US culture, only queer men tend to (occasionally) be

³² Musa Dube, “Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Feminist Reading of Mark 5:24-43,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol 51, no.1 (1999):11-17, accessed Nov. 20, 2023, doi: 10.1111/j.1758-6623.1999.tb00374.x.

³³ On sassy behavior see Smith, Mitzi J. “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass’: Reading Mark 7:24- 30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and [Footnote continued on next page ...]

labeled as “sassy.” However, in the African context, children of all genders are considered mischievous when exhibiting behavior that Mitzi J. Smith describes as sassy or insubordinate toward authority figures. Adults surrounding a sassy child, disregarding the significance and potentials of such a child, would frequently conclude that the child’s sassy behavior is unacceptable until proven otherwise by other beings in the society (cf. 6:4). In Mark, demons, unlike the humans, recognized the authority of the sassy child Jesus and cried out in fear saying “you are the son of God,” the village champion (1:21-42, 3:11-12). However, other grown-ups identified him as a mentally ill child, for they said, look “he has gone out of his mind” (3:21): so wild, irrational, senseless, and insane. Who permitted him to play in the fields of Mr. Sickness and Sir Tyranny? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? Why is he doing what is unlawful and where on earth is his family? Is he not the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters in the community (6:2-3)? Subsequently, his family heard it and went out to the field to

Inter(con)textuality,” in her *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cascade Books, 2018), 28-45.

restrain him. When they find him, however, he refuses to go home with them, gesturing instead to the fellow children of God whom he identifies as his true family: brothers, sisters, and mother, (3:21, 31-35). Consequently, Jesus, the beloved child, for whom no earthly father is identified throughout Mark's entire account, is portrayed as running around, seemingly outside of the State's control like *undisciplined* child (in the Foucauldian sense). Whether he goes, like a child he feels a need to be surrounded by those he identifies as family—which extends beyond the pack of twelve—doing the will of his heavenly father. Accordingly, the pack of sons, were never confined to a specific location, as they roam into forbidden territories where they attracted additional kin who admired Jesus' charisma and wisdoms (5:34; 7:29, 9:30-37; 10:13-16). During their travels, as any child will do, Jesus and his followers breaks the rules, such as those pertaining to the Sabbath (2:23-24, 27; 3:4-6) and the ritual washing of hands before meals (7:1-15; 10:42-45; 5:9). Indeed, what child has ever had patience with washing of the hands?

~Mumbling among children~
~My stomach hurts when I eat with unwashed hands~

*~But Jesus is trying to help and he has power over all germs~
Shush!!*

Unable to fast, not something children have any patience for either, child Jesus and his followers dined with sinners, untouchables, marginalized individuals, and impoverished children and adults, even when such actions were prohibited (2:13-18). In a manner reminiscent of the Black Panthers (and Young Lords), in another incidence of children drawing the ire of adult authorities, Jesus and his followers shared meals with two large groups who had followed them with nothing to eat.³⁴ The first group was estimated at 5000 individuals with Jesus (6:30- 44). Upon encountering this group in a deserted place, who appeared as “sheep without a shepherd” Jesus felt compassion for them and fed them following his teachings (6:31-35, cf. Num 27:15-17, Ezek 34:1-31, Matt 9:36). The second group comprised literally 4000 people who had stayed with Jesus for three days in the desert (8:1-10). They were in a such a state of hunger that they are at the risk of collapsing on their way back home. As children

³⁴ See Erin Blakemore, *History: How the Black Panthers' Breakfast Program Both Inspired and Threatened the Government* (A&E Television Networks, 2021). Accessed Nov.10, 2022. <https://www.history.com/news/free-school-breakfast-black-panther-party>

can be so often found doing, sharing what little they have with their friends, seven loaves and a few small fish were found and distributed among them. Some account suggest that this shared meal originated from a boy who was among the group of 5000 (see John 6:5-13). Regardless of the source, the crowd shared a meal that Jesus took, looking up to heaven, blessed, broke, and distributed (6:41, 8:7-8). Every one ate and is satisfied, and there are even leftovers—twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and fish (6:43). Wait a minute! It was, seven baskets full (8:8). Never mind! The point noteworthy is that, they dined together. Irrespective of individual social status, all participants consumed the same meal. As Amanda Miller rightly states, “it is an entirely different experience, for example, to eat a meal with the homeless than to hand them groceries once a month.” This commensality, even among children in extended families, however, stresses the communal dimension of faith, empathy, and the oneness of (God’s) family across all boundaries of difference. Nevertheless, this act of eating together elicited negative reactions and potential violence from the authorities, the Pharisees, who are analogous to the FBI and law enforcement agencies, for feeding the

minority, neglected, and other poor children, whom their unrepresented adult earthly father, the State, had failed to support through neglect and abuse (cf. 8:11-15).

*Child 1: So, did Jesus get into trouble?
~Well, not yet. But Jesus started showing favoritism ~*

Subsequently, Jesus demonstrated a form of preferential treatment in distributing his resources to those in need. A sassy Syrophenician woman, as convincingly argued by Mitzi Smith, approached Jesus to request assistance in healing her daughter from unclean spirit but Jesus was initially hesitant to comply (7:24-30).³⁵ Jesus, the beloved child initially expresses concern solely for other children, saying: “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Jesus’ respond was very mean, referring to the sick child as a dog! The woman’s reply, however, is one that would appeal to your mind: “But the cute little dogs (κυνάρτιον - kunaria) under the table get to gobble up the crumbs that the messy children drop from the table,” the sassy

³⁵ Mitzi J. Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass’: Reading Mark 7:24-30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality,” in [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Syrophenician woman responded (7:27-28). As the child Jesus is aware, sometimes naughty children, unnoticed by their parents, may even toss food items they don't like under the table for the dogs to consume. Consequently, the child Jesus likes the woman's clever answer, and heals her own child as a reward. Then off they went!

*~Children clapping~
~Some jumping in joy~*

Regardless of the appellations applied to him—whether stubborn child, Mary's son, a child with compassion, a special needs child, a school dropout, or the homeless child requiring state intervention—Jesus has demonstrated that he is a child of the Most High. Born of water, and endowed with so much sympathy and authority that even the wind, water, and waves obey him (4:41, 6:51, 8:1-3). Unafraid of the earthly kings and their representatives, Jesus speaks the unspeakable about the deeds of the rulers of his time (11:15-19). However, he communicates exclusively through parables (4:34), and through storytelling, as children are inclined to do. When questioned or asked for clarification, his responses often create further confusion

Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical
[Footnote continued on next page ...]

and fear.³⁶ Nevertheless, he occasionally invites his followers, in response to their questions, to emulate little children, to be able to squeeze into the kingdom of God. He would say: “Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs,” (10:13-14).

~ *Oh, I get what Jesus meant* ~

Child 1: Children assist in the revealing a kingdom of God.

Child 2: If Jesus assert that one needs to be childlike to enter the kingdom of God, then Jesus, as the messenger of the kingdom of God, affirms that he, too, must embody childlike qualities.

Child 1: And the “kingdom of God” is conceptualized as a “kin-dom of children.”

Truly, children and childhood serve as a model contributing to a deeper understanding of the kin-dom of God. Truly, I tell you, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (10:15, cf. 9:36-37). In contrast to the mighty Roman Empire, governed by fearsome male Caesars, the beloved child Jesus establishes a kin-dom of God, populated exclusively by children and

Interpretation (Cascade Books, 2018), 28-45.

³⁶ Hal Taussig and Maia Kotrosits, *Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149-50.

led by God’s only child, who understand the true honor of family—wherein liberation, solidarity, and inclusivity exist—without a sociopolitical, hierarchical systems.³⁷ However, given that throughout Mark’s gospel, events occur immediately (εὐθύς), leaving the audience consistently perplexed, the disciples failed to recognized the call to a kin-dom that is child-like. Thus, the disciples fail to comprehend that Jesus exemplifies the child to whom the kingdom of God belongs. They may be considered un-children who lack the ability to understand the kin-dom of God and the logos of the assertive child Jesus, who questioned, talked back, and challenged opposition and the authorities of the law. Nevertheless, this observation should direct our attention to the fact that the children (we become), even of the kin-dom of God, operate on different levels, necessitating various approaches when addressing children or individual with child-like attributes. Moreover, as Jan Grobbelaar posits that “the use of the childhood metaphor by Jesus of the Gospels

³⁷ On the “Kin-dom of God,” see Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Kin-dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal,” in Benjamin Valentin (ed.), *In Our Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

expresses a positive view of childhood.”³⁸ It provides alternative approaches to understanding the teachings of Jesus and the kin-dom of God. Additionally, the utilization of children, metaphorically or literally, in Jesus’s teachings about the kin-dom of God, effectively place the attribute of logos in the domain of children/childhood. Consequently, the beloved son Jesus who uniquely understands the Kin-dom of God, and fear and amazement are not far from his deeds and sayings as a consequence, invites us to be children as we receive the kin-dom of God.³⁹

THE SUFFERING AND CRUCIFIXION OF THE MINOR(ITY)

Similar to African children, child-Jesus, however, becomes a **διακονος** (servant) who aims at proclaiming the kin-dom of God, and gives his life as a ransom (10:35-45). However, the Greek words **διακονος** and **λύτρον** (ransom) invoke a moral framework. In the colonial context, a servant is a captive or a “no body,” while a ransom

³⁸ Jan Grobbelaar, *Doing Theology with Children*, 7.

³⁹ On fear and amazement, see Hal Taussig and Maia Kotrosits, *Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149-50.

is the payment for the release of slaves, or the captives. Ransom is, therefore, the price given for redeeming or liberating many from misery and the penalty of their sins, or debts. Poverty in Ghana leads families to become debtors. Child slavery, conversely, has become the ransom for redeeming family honor. Hence, parents (predominantly fathers) in debt will readily sell their children to work as servants, a practice sometimes referred to as “boy-boy” in Ghana. Those living in the coastal areas will allow children to be a fisherman’s apprentices in the process of paying a debt. Do you recall the fisherboys image shown earlier? The majority of these fisherboys are ransom. Jesus, at this part of the his-tory is becoming a “boy-boy,” who came διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν (10:45). However, the question arises: whose debt was he to pay? The debt of πολλῶν?

The concept of πολλῶν (pollōn) in Mark 10 signals a ransom paid for collective group of debtors. It can be surmised that the ramson is for the payment of the debt of Jesus’ entire family rather than of the heavenly father, who is not indebted to anyone, but endorsed the payment of a ransom. By the end of the book of Mark,

the author has elucidated that the ransom given is Jesus, the beloved child. That child proceeded to the cross, culminating the redemption of his family's honor. However, positioning Jesus as a child in this horrific role renders the events leading to his crucifixion and his death unthinkable. A *boy-boy* tortured, executed by being strung up or pinned by nails (or something closer to railroad spikes), hanging on the cross-tree presents a profoundly distressing sight—yet such public displays/spectacles of child sacrifice are not unfamiliar in the United States; one need only consider Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Emmett Till, or caged migrant children at the US border crossings and countless others. Emmett Till, for instance, at fourteen years of age, was abducted, tortured, and brutally murdered for allegedly wolf-whistling at the wife of Roy Bryant in the summer of 1955. At his funeral, his mother “forced the world to reckon with the brutality of American racism.”⁴⁰ An adult manifestation of this form of brutality can be observed in the case of George Floyd, who reverted to a childlike state and called for his *momma* at his

⁴⁰ See The Body Of Emmett Till | 100 Photos | TIME. Accessed Dec. 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V6ffUUEvaM>
[Footnote continued on next page ...]

crucifixion or cruc-asphyxiation. Such an event transcends child abuse and is tantamount to infanticide by torture, the unspeakable murder of one's child. In light of these atrocities, how should one interpret the crucified Markan Christ; a beloved child hanging on his cross? Which father (or parent) would commission their beloved child to assume the sins of other children by being crucified on a cross?

Child 3: *My father won't do that!*

Child 7: *Neither will mine!*

~Children murmuring~

Perhaps, a father who thinks the end of history is imminent. Subsequently, a heavenly father gave his beloved son as a ransom to achieve a goal. This beloved child was brutally lynched on the week of the Passover. And it all began in this manner:

Leading the way, the beloved child Jesus embarked on the journey to Jerusalem with his pack accompanying him. *Kro chian, kro chian*, on and on, they walked along the hills leading toward the belly of the colonial capital, the hub of bullies and predators. Prior to their final destination, they paused at the Mount of Olives. Jesus instructed, "Go to the village ahead of you and find a colt outside, untie it, and

bring it, for I am in need of it, I must sit on it for the rest of the journey,” (11: 2-8). Consequently, two of his disciples followed his instruction. Was Jesus worn out from his journey? Certainly, he was fatigued from his travels, which would be understandable given his activities of teaching, healing, and traversing the region. So, Jesus requested for a colt capable of bearing his weight. It is worth noting that a colt is analogous to a baby boy in the human term. Rationally, a young male horse requires a young rider. And it happened that, Jesus’ weight was comparable to that of a young child, albeit one exhausted from his journey and the burden of his mission. Following that, the chatters spread the news of Jesus’ approaching Jerusalem. And so many people were gathered at the gate. “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the coming kin-dom! Hosanna in the highest!” exclaimed the crowd as Jesus, in a manner reminiscent of a child emulating royalty, entered Jerusalem. In and out of the city, the child Jesus continued to engage in activities without adult authorization (11:10-19, 27-33). Moreover, Jesus continues to teach in parables. At one point, he alludes to his father avenging the killing of his innocent beloved child—Jesus, himself (12:1-9; 13). However, the disciples never believed a

minor(ity), let alone a beloved child, could be brutally killed like a criminal—crucified on a cross; instead, they sought glory in the kingdom, especially the children of Zebedee (10: 35-40). Do not blame them; remember, everything appears to occur rapidly in the wake of their journey, leading to their forgetfulness of the nature of Jesus’ impending suffering.

Remember, the beloved child Jesus is not fond of fasting. While in Bethany, Jesus and his companions dined at the residence of an individual with leprosy (14: 3) and subsequently in the upper room of a stranger’s house (14: 15). These instances of communal dining—commensality—occurred before and during the festival of unleavened bread/Passover, respectively.⁴¹ During one such meal, a woman anoints Jesus’ head—a beautiful thing women and mothers do: bathing and anointing their children for important events. However, her action elicited diverse emotional responses from those present at the meal. Those who had a negative “affect,” saying “why this waste

⁴¹ At this juncture, pause and explain the feast of Passover for a young audience: “Passover is often celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, especially on the first night, when a special family meal called the seder is held. At the seder, foods of symbolic significance commemorating the Hebrews’ liberation are eaten, and prayers and traditional recitations are performed. Though the festival of Passover is meant to be one of great rejoicing, strict dietary laws must be observed, and special [Footnote continued on next page ...]

of perfume?” were admonished. Jesus responded, “Leave her alone, she has done a beautiful thing and prepared me for my burial,” (14: 3-9). Meanwhile, during the mealtime, the children of the state and law allowed Jesus to eat his last supper, mainly because they feared a potential uprising by the crowd. Nevertheless, that did not deter them from plotting with one of the disciples called Judas and secretly scheduling Jesus’ execution. Similarly, in the United States, inmates on death row are permitted to partake in a feast, also known as the Last Supper. They are left alone in a room or with other inmates to eat their last meal for a brief period, while their execution is secretly finalized. These individuals are then taken to receive their final verdict, asked for any last words or wishes, and ultimately handed over and led to their death. In the case of Jesus, the Passover meal, his death row last supper, is the final meal in the gospel before his death. Children often attempt to negotiate with their parents to persuade them to change their minds, but it does not always proceed as anticipated. However, after eating and drinking, Jesus had a private

prohibitions restrict work at the beginning and end of the celebration.” Britannica, *Passover*, Accessed Oct. 26, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Passover>.

moment with his father in a space called Gethsemane to see if the father was still proceeding with the plan of offering his beloved son as a ransom. While Jesus' brothers are asleep, Gethsemane becomes the transitional space (a rite of passage), where the anxious, suffering child's feelings, emotions, mood, and requests are expressed. Yet (like the US prisoners), none of them receive attention from his father. Instead, they weigh heavily on him, causing trauma—distress and agitation (14: 32-38).

Children with sad faces: *That is not fair!!*
~Maybe Jesus could hide in Gethsemane~

“Here comes my betrayer,” Jesus said (14:44), as the crowd armed and ready to assault, bully, and arrest Jesus approached. The crowd's commotion was audible and palpable from a considerable distance. Judas, his brother in the Kin-dom of God, kissed Jesus to identify him for arrest. Oh no, gosh, someone's ear is cut off! A servant of the high priest's blood is all over the place! People are running away for their lives. Some are tripping on rocks and falling to their knees, while others flee and hide in a thick thorn bush. Wait a minute: one person is running away naked! *Shut your eyes, children!*

He is being chased; his only garment is right there on the spot he fled from. Chaos and disarray everywhere! Some are shouting and do not know what to do. When the disciples finally understood the true nature of Jesus and his kin-dom of God teachings, at that moment, they betrayed, denied, and forsook Jesus, fleeing like a bunch of frightened children.

~Hahaha ha-ha ha~

In front of the bullies (the Judean authorities, the Romans, the divine court), Jesus stands alone in trial, and a verdict is passed overnight.⁴² The charges against him read: “The king of the Jews.” Despite inconsistent witness testimonies, Jesus was subjected to physical abuse, including blows to the head, feet, jaw, and side. *You know how cruel children can be to each other:* Some bullies mocked him, blindfolded him, spat on him, choked his, while shouting “Crucify, crucify him! Crucify him! Release Barabbas the criminal instead and crucify Jesus!” (14; 15).

~A long silence~

⁴² Wongi Park, *The Politics of Race and Ethnicity in Matthew's Passion Narrative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 109, 116-7.

THE END, THE BEGINNING!

Jesus, the beloved child, is subsequently treated as a *ward of the court*, brutalized, and punished into obedience, even unto death. In his final moments, he called out to Eloi, saying, “Why have you forsaken me?” (15:34, cf. Ps 22:1). Eloi means “my God.” As observers awaited to see to whom Jesus cried out, he breathed his last (15:37). The women present, looking from a distance, perceived his demise as one of misery (15:40). However, the execution of Jesus both as a minor and as representative of minority communities, is reflected in the twenty-first century. James Cone draws a parallel to this form of execution, noting how the black, minority communities are threatened and punished by the state through lynching.⁴³ As the world is compelled to reckon with the brutality of American racism, the Christian world, including its children, is similarly forced to reckon with the viciousness of Roman’s crucifixion—which becomes the message of the cross. Nevertheless, Raquel St. Clair asserts that

⁴³ Cone James, *The Cross, and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

identifying with the message of the cross is difficult.⁴⁴ This difficulty is particularly pronounced when considering it as a message children can relate. For children, reconciling with the death of the beloved child necessitates envisioning a vivid, childlike, innocent Jesus subjected to crucifixion. Additionally, many will conclude that the crucifixion of a beloved child constitutes child abuse and slaughter that necessitates lament and repentance.

~ *Children in despair* ~

It happened that Jesus was buried by another brother, called Joseph. It was a sad burial—because relatives and loved ones also feared for their association with the beloved son—yet, Joseph covered and placed Jesus in a tomb cut out of rock. And he rolled a stone, bigger than a child’s body to cover the entrance of the tomb. But the women watched where Jesus was laid, and they whispered silently one to another, saying, *if only we could...* And they did...

~*Oh, what were the women discussing?* ~
~*Is Jesus confined within the tomb?* ~
Is that the end!

⁴⁴ Raquel St. Clair, A. *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 2-7.

Considering Jesus as an exemplar of the importance of children and childhood, how might we conceptualize the significance of children and childhood in the twenty-first century? The conclusion marks the commencement of subsequent events.

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