

Between Ecclesiology and Ethics: Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society

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Abstract

The author underscores the ethical imperatives incumbent on the community called church in light of the needs and experiences of children. The immediate circumstance relates to ongoing revelation of widespread clergy sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults and the moral duty of the community called church to care for and protect them. This approach unfolds within two overlapping and overarching contexts: first, the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church and, second, African cultural beliefs and religious traditions. A particular focus is placed on the paucity of Catholic theological or ethical reflection on the dignity of the child, and remedies for this lacuna, particularly with respect to the African Catholic Church.

Keywords

African religion, African women, child protection, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, theology of the child, sex abuse

Pope Francis has stated:

The Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the duty that Christ

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himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults.¹

Yet how we define and understand the church affects how we treat children. The scandal of clergy sexual abuse of children and the ensuing public debate have lifted the lid on the reprehensible abuse of power and conscience by priests and church leaders. They prove beyond doubt how crimes of abuse manifest culpable failure to honor the duty of care and protection of minors and vulnerable people from any form of abuse. The underlying paucity of transparency and accountability has conspired to create what Francis names in his letter to the people of God a “culture of death.” For decades this demonic culture sustained by clericalism violently assaulted the lives and conscience of innocent and vulnerable children. These things, Francis insists, amount to a grievous affliction and wound on the body of the church for which ceaseless penance, prayer, and fasting are required.²

The manner in which the church ought to regard and treat children rests on the foundation of a moral duty incumbent on the church and mandated by Christ. Thus, this article lies half-way between ecclesiology and ethics. Rather than separating the two, the theological self-understanding of the church is held to account by a set of ethical imperatives that warrant an unwavering commitment to the care and protection of children inside and outside the church. I argue that this commitment is constitutive of the mission and identity of the church; hence, the necessity of exploring the correlation between church as a community of believers and the ethical responsibility of this community seen through the eyes, voices, and needs of children. In other words, the interstices between these two poles, ecclesiology and ethics, offer useful analytical and interpretative contexts for constructing an ethically informed self-understanding of the church that adopts the lens of the child and of children both as a category of analysis and a strong theological foundation of its duty of care and protection. As I point out in this essay, this approach is rare and relatively new in African Catholic theology.³ Yet the

1. Francis, *As a Loving Mother* (June 4, 2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20160604_come-una-madre-amorevole.html.
2. See Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God* (August 20, 2018), 2, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html.
3. A substantial theological literature can be found on the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics, much from the Protestant and Evangelical traditions, but with Catholic contributions, particularly in ecumenical contexts. See, e.g., Reinhard Hutter, *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Thabo Cecil Makgoba, “Ecclesiology and Ethics: A Critical Self-Reflection,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67 (2015): 498–504, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12191>; Isabel Apawo Phiri, “The Ecclesiology and Ethics Debate and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: An African Perspective,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67 (2015): 621–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12195>; and Linda Hogan and A. E. Orobator, eds., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014). See also the work being done by the triennial conferences of Catholic Theological Ethics in a World Church and publications generated by these meetings: <http://www.catholicethics.com/resources/publications>.

need for such theological enterprise appears topical, considering instances of clergy sexual abuse of children, the negligence and complicity of those in authority, and the evident silence of church leaders in Africa.

Broadly understood, the church is an important social actor, not only in Africa, but in the global South. Over the last one hundred years it has increased its influence in public life. What accounts for this? There are reliable statistics that indicate that Christianity is growing at a phenomenal rate in Africa and across the global South.⁴ A theological analysis of this phenomenon and what it represents for the future of global Christianity is a work in progress.⁵ Yet, it has to be said, accounts of this experience of religious growth and effervescence do not pay attention to the particular needs, circumstances, or the importance of children within this complex of growth. Statistics of church growth almost always assume an adult demography. Consequently, references to children, such as the statistics of those admitted to the sacrament of baptism, tend to consider them as adults in the making. According priority to children in this analysis calls for a more balanced, robust, and inclusive theology.

For the purposes of clarity, we recall that in the doctrinal tradition of Roman Catholicism, the church owes its existence and mission to a trinitarian origin and foundation: the Father who sends the Son, the Son who gathers the people of God by means of the Paschal event (passion, death, and resurrection of Christ), and the Spirit who quickens this body for mission at Pentecost.⁶ It exists as a visible body, regulated by a hierarchical structure of leadership, offering a variety of sacramental ministries, and entrusted with a particular mission of proclaiming the Gospel in prophetic word and charitable deeds. Although straightforward, this view presents some problems of an ethical nature. Historical and recent revelations of child abuse show conceptual gaps and practical omissions which result in elaborating this theology in a manner oblivious to or lacking consideration for the needs and experiences of children. At best, these needs are assumed; but, in reality, they do not play any significant role in constructing the theological self-understanding of the church.⁷ Sustained and in-depth attention to

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4. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 2010), <https://www.pewforum.org/2010/04/15/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa/>; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John L. Allen, Jr., *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).
 5. See my *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018).
 6. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 748–769, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P26.HTM.
 7. This is true of my own writing on the church and its ethical mission. See A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000); Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: A Theology of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005); Orobator, ed., *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

the needs and experiences of children generates issues of ethical significance for the Christian community. I will return later to this understanding of church in regard to the Roman Catholic Church.

The main claim of this essay, then, is that ethics lies at the heart of the Christian community and its mission and that while ethicists have tended to overlook or exclude the needs and experience of children, there is sufficient ground for identifying and justifying the ethical responsibility of care and protection that devolves upon the church as a community of believers. Part of my objective is to root ethics at the heart of ecclesiology and underline the duty of care and protection for children in the wider ministries of church toward children and youth. Of particular interest is how this can be approached from an African perspective. Not content with merely critiquing present flawed systems and practices, I aim to construct a scenario where core ethical values can be retrieved to facilitate the emergence of a culture of life, care, and protection of children.⁸

I employ here resources from African literature and cultures, as well as biblical traditions, to introduce, explore, and critique how the child is perceived and treated in socio-religious and cultural contexts and to identify what ethical imperatives can be gleaned from such analysis for the purposes of protecting children in the church. In many ways, Scripture provides resources for a theological enterprise of this nature. I focus on the New Testament, specifically the gospels, in order to distill new ethical insight for the community called church based on a deeper understanding of children and their needs.

It is important to note that African literature is diverse—so are the cultures. I have opted to use Chinua Achebe's classic novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1959), to explore indigenous religious beliefs and cultural norms in Africa. As a story, *Things Fall Apart* lends itself to various interpretations. For some scholars, it is the quintessential example of the encounter between indigenous religions and missionary Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa; others prefer to read it as a literary depiction of the disruption of pristine African village life by a rapacious colonial adventure; still others, such as cultural anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians, see in it a ready inventory and source of constituent elements of African religion and material for inculturating Christianity in Africa. The majority, though, would read *Things Fall Apart* as another quaint story out of Africa. I am not aware of any attempt to use this novel as tool for exploring issues relating to the care and protection of children.⁹

8. See Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 2.

9. Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole has recently examined *Things Fall Apart* as a resource material for political theology in Africa. As usual the themes of violence, power, domination, and politics are far removed from the experiences and needs of children, except when cast in their usual roles as victims and expendable social appendages (for example, twins and objects of human sacrifice). Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 125–131. Similarly, I have used the novel for the purposes of theological analysis in my *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

Of African Literature, Culture, and Children

With the exception of children's books, African literature rarely, if ever, offers examples of tales told out of "the mouths of babes and infants" (Ps 8:2, NRSV throughout).¹⁰ Pre-colonial African literature prioritized oral narratives by adults targeted at children. In the twentieth century a subtradition of writing known as "African children's literature" gained prominence. This literary genre is "targeted primarily, but not always exclusively, at adolescent and/or pre-adolescent youth."¹¹ There are several illustrations of this repertoire of children's literature authored by some of Africa's most notable writers, including Nobel Laureate for Literature Wole Soyinka (*Aké: The Years of Childhood*, 1962), Chinua Achebe (*Chike and the River*, 1966), Onuora Nzekwu (*Eze Goes to School*, 1977), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Nyamba Nene and the Flying Bus*, 1986; *Nyamba Nene's Pistol*, 1986). "At the heart of all such work lies the desire to provide African children with an Afrocentric view of the world, one that may balance and rectify the cultural, ideological, and other content of non-African text."¹² Although this canon of writing features experiences related to childhood and adulthood and myriad challenges characteristic of the transition from the former to the latter, they are written with a distinctively adult voice. The focus of African children's literature remains firmly fixed on children as objects and audience of a literary menu meticulously crafted and served up by grown-ups. There are a few exceptions to this general trend, distinguished by the fact that the narrative adopts the perspective and lenses of the child. In biblical parlance, they are tales told out of the mouths of babes and infants rather than as adults *in fieri* (adults in the making). Following are three examples.

The first is Guinean novelist Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954). A classic in African literature, Laye's autobiographical novel narrates in exquisite detail the experience of growing up in an enchanted African village defined by an extensive web of family ties, diverse occupations, religious practices, and cultural mores. Although the story is told by the adult Laye, the voice of the child rings loud and clear and the novel lives up to its name by creating a unique portrait of an "African child"—its experiences in a world dominated by adults and defined by their needs. This child never "grows up" to be absorbed into an indistinct mass of adults and their preoccupation. In fact, *The African Child* reads like a view or window on the world of adults by a child.

Skippping many years ahead, Nigerian fiction writer Uwem Akpan's bestseller, *Say You're One of Them* (2009), offers a second significant example of what I would consider a literary approximation of children's narrative. The book is a collection of short stories. In each story, a child narrates his or her experience of a variety of traumatizing events: war, child trafficking, child abuse, religious fanaticism, poverty, and ethnic bigotry. Each narrative captures the gory and terrifying details of growing up in an

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical references used in this article are taken from *The New African Bible* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011). This Bible uses the NABRE translation.

11. Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe, *The Companion to African Literatures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), s.v. "Children's literature," 63–67 at 64.

12. Killam and Rowe, *The Companion to African Literatures*, s.v. "Children's literature," 64.

adult world that has lost its childhood innocence and purity. In this literary production the child is not a distant, grown-up narrator; she or he lives every moment of each event or experience recounted. Each story gives a child a *voice*. Events perceived through and with the *eyes* of children are recounted in a manner that stretches across a literary spectrum of existential and moral challenges and spans time and space in such a way that the reader cannot but feel implicated and called to account by the child.

The third example is Monica Arac de Nyeko's short story "Jambula Tree." Set in her home country of Uganda, this honest and raw child narrative explores the subject and experience of lesbianism between two pubescent girls. The story also broaches child abuse by adults in a country where open discussion of sexuality is tabooed and homosexuality is illegal and criminalized.¹³

The dearth of literary productions that adopt the voice, perspective, and insight of a child is rooted in a combination of other factors that are particular—though not exclusively confined—to African context. Of these factors, besides the taboo on open conversation about sexuality, the most significant concerns cultural attitudes toward the child.

In general, children are valued for what they represent for the society rather than as gifts in themselves.¹⁴ Their worth appears to be relative to social expectation and a pressing need to validate cultural norms. This attitude has several implications. For example, in an African worldview that seeks and prizes fertility as a guarantee of communal survival and a criterion for ascending to the ranks of the ancestors, childlessness or barrenness counts as the African woman's worst nightmare. *Things Fall Apart* poignantly captures the dynamics of childlessness and its social, cultural, and personal ramifications, especially for women. In this context, the biblical Hannah could have been an African woman, considering the derision and taunt she suffered at the hands of her "fruitful" co-wife (see 1 Sam 1:6) on account of her childlessness.

The protagonist in Achebe's novel is the bigoted, misogynist, and megalomaniacal Okonkwo, for whom—and his community—not just having a child but having a male child is what ultimately validates a woman's identity and right to respect and dignity. In this highly charged context where marriage has as a principal aim to "produce sons," his second wife, Ekwefi, suffers the agonizing fate of many childless African women, compounded by a high rate of infant mortality which is the lot of many African children. As Achebe narrates:

13. Monica Arac de Nyeko, "Jambula Tree," in *Jambula Tree and Other Stories*, The Caine Prize for African Writing 8th Annual Collection (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2008), 9–19.

14. In *The New African Bible*, the commentary on Mark 10:6 reads: "When a child is born to an African family, he is named after an ancestor linking him to the one whose blood he carries. Children are Africa's wealth and a sign of blessing. They are taken care of and protected by the family. Abortion, street children and orphans are the consequences of the breakdown of traditional African values. Jesus' attitude toward children is a challenge to parents and society to regard them as children of God and respect them as human persons" (1765–66).

Ekwefi had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children and nine of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three. As she buried one child after another her sorrow gave way to despair and then to grim resignation. The birth of her children, which should be a woman's crowning glory, became for Ekwefi mere physical agony devoid of promise. The naming ceremony after seven weeks became an empty ritual. Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko—"Death, I implore you." But Death took no notice; Onwumbiko died in his fifteenth month . . . By the time Onwumbiko died Ekwefi had become a very bitter woman. Her husband's first wife had already had three sons, all strong and healthy. When she had borne her third son in succession, Okonkwo had slaughtered a goat for her, as was the custom. Ekwefi had nothing but good wishes for her. But she had grown so bitter about her own *chi* that she could not rejoice with others over their good fortune. And so, on the day that Nwoye's mother celebrated the birth of her three sons with feasting and music, Ekwefi was the only person in the happy company who went about with a cloud on her brow.¹⁵

Achebe's portrayal of Ekwefi's agony reflects the reality that children are highly prized social goods and fulfillment of cultural norms as "a woman's crowning glory." "Motherhood is envisaged as a source of joy and fulfillment to women."¹⁶ The hint of utilitarianism is unmistakable. Even though children occupy the center of life and are highly sought after, they are hardly prized for their intrinsic values as "gifts of God and sources of joy." Other factors are at play which condition how this social good is valued and ultimately treated in society.

Fiction aside, no existing product of African theological scholarship that I am familiar with comes close to offering an incisive analysis of "the deep-seated antipathy and embarrassment related to childlessness in Africa." The major exception is Mercy Amba Oduyoye's "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," in which she reflects on "the experience of women who belong to traditions where naming is according to fruitfulness in childbearing, but who for whatever reason do not join in 'increasing and multiplying' the human race."¹⁷ In her analysis, Oduyoye demonstrates how the obsession with biological progeny or "child factor" defines the worth of African women exclusively in terms of biological production and reproduction.¹⁸ She writes: "The 'child factor' in Africa (and perhaps elsewhere) is complex, and its public faces are daunting; but nothing is more oppressive than the ordinary meanings imposed on the absence of children in a marriage. The silence that shrouds the issue compounds its potential for the disempowering of women."¹⁹ Strands of biblical

15. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1959; repr., New York: Anchor, 1994), 77, 79.

16. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77 and 79.

17. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, ed. Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 105–20 at 105, 117.

18. Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself," 107.

19. Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself," 119.

tradition and interpretation do not necessarily help overcome the burden of the “child factor”: “On the contrary, the Jewish and Christian traditions tell and retell stories of the Ruths and the Tamars of this world, who will pursue their men until they fulfill their cultural roles as wives and mothers. These are hailed as ‘mothers’ of Jesus.”²⁰ Just as in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, overcoming biblical childlessness culminates in the birth of a male child destined for prophetic, military, priestly, or leadership career. So prevalent is this bias that the denouement of biblical sagas of childlessness simply reinforces the regnant patriarchal cultural mindset and gender discrimination.

Furthermore, the highly ritualized African marriage ceremonies are premised on the biological “fruitfulness” of the bride, typified by prayers offered for a couple at a wedding ceremony: “We are giving you our daughter today. She will be a good wife to you. She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town”; “Prosperous men and great warriors . . . your daughter will bear us sons like you.”²¹ Oduoyoye comments incisively:

African society expects childbearing and homemaking of its women. This is one generalization that can safely be made. It is also more or less a truism that this is usually accepted by African women . . . Yet women and their work as mothers and homemakers have often been bypassed, as if women did nothing beyond producing and raising offspring. Recently, when some African women have begun to question the limitations of their biological role, men have had ready answers: African women are precious, say the African men, they know their place and keep it. Should an African woman disagree with this assessment, she becomes an imitator of Western women, a model in which Africa has no interest.²²

Clearly, this points to a problematic situation of multiple dimensions.

More deafening and troubling is Scripture’s silence on perpetually barren women. According to Oduoyoye, Christianity exacerbates the pain and shame of childlessness or more than it offers resources for overcoming such negative labeling. As she points out, there is “no empowering word and no ceremony to strengthen what may, for many reasons, turn out to be a childless marriage.”²³ The implication is that such cultural norms and social expectations firmly place the child at the center of the marital contract: its presence is a necessary condition for validating this contract, just as its absence provides sufficient ground for nullifying this contract. “In Africa, lives and relationships are ruined daily because of the ‘child factor,’ especially by childlessness within a marriage.”²⁴ Ultimately, in this broad cultural context, the child represents a pawn in the biological game of procreation that often takes religious forms. One dimension of this mindset is that it constitutes a recipe for abuse.

20. Oduoyoye, “A Coming Home to Myself,” 115.

21. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 117.

22. Mercy Amba Oduoyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 81.

23. Oduoyoye, “A Coming Home to Myself,” 116.

24. Oduoyoye, “A Coming Home to Myself,” 106.

One theological and ethical task that Oduyoye does not undertake, although it is implied in her text, is the possibility of valuing children, not as fruits of a biological (re)production, but life-giving gifts in themselves. This represents a critical corrective in the sociocultural and theological valuation of children: “Viewing children as gifts of God to the whole community radically challenges common assumptions of them as property of parents, as consumers, or as economic burdens to the community.”²⁵ This has implications for the theology of church and its ethical praxis, a point to which I shall return below.

Oduyoye’s narrative doubles as a theological odyssey that culminates in her naming God as “the Mothering God,” a concept grounded on the spiritual fecundity of the divine unfettered by the biases and ideologies of biological procreativity or fruitfulness that are employed as yardsticks for defining and patrolling the borders of motherhood and the social and cultural worth of the child. She writes, “I emphasize ‘mothering’ as a quality of relating which is found in God and is expected not only of women but of men and women because we are beings created in the image of God.”²⁶ The Mothering God enthrones life and defeats death, which means transformation and liberation:

African women who have read the Bible with a critical eye discover in it the Triune God as liberator of the oppressed, the rescuer of the marginalized and all who live daily in the throes of pain, uncertainty and deprivation. Added to this is the fact that in African Religion, God is always present in human affairs, as in the rest of creation, as judge, healer and the one who takes the side of the weak and vulnerable.²⁷

Theologically, this image brims with hope for children. However, in light of the other factors mentioned above, it is fair to assert that in most contexts in Africa children have no voice; they are seen but not heard—let alone trusted—in a society where age is revered and political systems prioritize gerontocratic privileges. Added to this is a set of socioeconomic and political factors that make the continent a harsh environment to be a child: the high rate of infant mortality, child labor, child trafficking, abductions, diseases, poverty, the dislocation of families as refugees, and internally displaced persons. In particular, the unstable political history of some African countries has placed children at the receiving end of societal ills, where they have become child soldiers—from Sierra Leone to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Liberia, to Uganda. Together these factors exacerbate the susceptibility of children to various forms of abuse.

I hold the position that the current global abuse crisis in the church heightens the urgency of prioritizing voices (experiences), eyes (perspectives), and status (dignity) of the child as valid areas for theological and ethical reflection. However, there lies

25. Marcia J. Bunge, “The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understanding of Children and Childhood,” *Journal of Religion* 86 (2006): 549–579 at 563, <https://doi.org/10.1086/505894>.

26. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 48.

27. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 50.

here a tension and an irony: How can that which is captured and rendered as a child be preserved from the blemish of adult biases and prejudice?

We need to contend with another practical challenge. I am writing from within the Roman Catholic tradition. It is not a generalization to state that the child is often overlooked and missing from the field of highly dogmatic and intellectualized doctrinal formulations. Still within this context, as mentioned, the neuralgic issues of pedophilia and ephebophilia have convulsed the institutional edifice of the church. To put it simply and starkly, the view is widespread and largely justified that the institutional and clerically regimented church is no longer a safe place for the child. The triple axis of abuse of conscience, power, and persons, and the concomitant “culture of death” has generated an ecclesiological crisis of unprecedented proportions.²⁸ How then to develop a theology and ethics within this same community that pay attention to the voices and the eyes of the child, when what the child hears and sees is laden with painful experiences and memories of abuse and betrayal of trust? This question is critical and provides necessary impetus for the central focus of this essay, namely an ethics of care and protection in the community called church, which I introduce in the following section with an excursus on Jesus and children in the gospels.

Children as Priority: A View from the New Testament

The subject of the relationship between Jesus and children in the Gospel is not a new one.²⁹ Many a preacher or Sunday School teacher would be conversant with and would have dwelt upon instances of Jesus’s encounter with or teaching about children. The effort to create a safe environment for children in church and society is a project that benefits from resources of the New Testament in a variety of ways. For this analysis, I consider at least three windows that the New Testament opens with regard to child protection and safeguarding.³⁰

The first window relates to the two central characters of the Gospel, whose infancy narratives are supplied by Matthew and Luke: John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Both are cast in the mold of Old Testament figures with regard to the circumstances surrounding their birth and their early childhood. Notwithstanding divergent—even

28. Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 1.

29. And there has been a good deal of parallel scholarship with regard to children in the Hebrew Bible. For example, see Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle*, Brown Judaic Studies 355 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2013).

30. A line of research worth noting but not directly related to the aim of this article is a reading of the gospels that recognizes or refers to Jesus of Nazareth himself as a victim of sexual abuse on account of his cruel execution by crucifixion which involved a form of sexual humiliation by being stripped and exhibited naked on the cross. See, Rocío Figueroa Alvear and David Tombs, *Recognising Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru* (Otago, New Zealand: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago, 2019), <https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/handle/10523/8976>.

conflicting—accounts concerning their prophetic vocation and career, John and Jesus parallel Old Testament personalities like Moses, Samuel, and Samson, including their parentage and their status or condition. The announcement of their birth is for a specific purpose and their conception entails divine intervention.³¹ In Matthew, especially: “When readers finish the infancy narrative, they have been given a whole OT background from the Law and the prophets.”³² After their births, certain ritual demands shape their childhoods and they are the objects of special care and responsibility by parents and extended family. But there are massive gaps in the information regarding how their childhoods actually unfolded, spawning several apocryphal attempts to fill in the gaps in the case of Jesus.

A second window relates to how the adult Jesus treats children. His attitude can be summed up in the simple action of “placing a child in their midst” (Matt 18:1–6; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48) and, in the process, refocusing the direction of a badly conducted theological discourse which, then as often now, was preoccupied with clerical power, privilege, and entitlement. The effect of this action is not only to disrupt the dominant and regnant religious conception; more importantly, it generates new insight in regard to how Jesus and his followers are to understand “the kingdom of heaven.” In this theological space, the powerful symbol and presence of the child alters and shapes the way the discourse unfolds.³³ New hermeneutical possibilities and ethical imperatives emerge. For example, special privileges are attached to childhood: to children belongs the kingdom of heaven. They are exemplars of the kind of attitude (honesty, simplicity, and trust) required for accessing the kingdom of heaven. Besides, wisdom is no longer the preserve of adults. Any disregard for children or willful occasion of scandal provokes severe sanction and repercussion (Matt 18:6). An illustration of this is the attempt by the disciples to deny children access to Jesus (Mark 10:13–16). Reporting on Jesus’s reaction, Mark portrays him as indignant toward the disciples, whereas he reaches toward and lovingly embraces and blesses the children. As in the case of Matthew 18:6, Mark stresses their unique status as privileged guests of the kingdom of God, almost on a par with Jesus; for, to receive children openheartedly is as important as receiving the one sent by God (Mark 9:37). In one of the greatest “signs” recorded in Johannine writings, a child offers the gifts for blessing and feeding the crowd (John 6:1–14), itself a powerful eucharistic event.³⁴

A third and final window concerns miracles involving children (see Matt 15:21–28; 17:14–20; Mark 5:21–42). Whether as healing, exorcism, or resuscitation, they

31. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 256–329.

32. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 176.

33. “The story of five loaves and two fish offers a good outline of what it means to be church and what it means to say that the church is a Eucharistic community.” Haddon Willmer, *Experimenting Together: One Way of Doing Child Theology* (South Woodford, UK: The Child Theology Movement Limited, 2007), 4–9.

34. Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 169.

manifest some common characteristics. In terms of those involved, there is a mix of gender—boys and girls alike are the beneficiaries of Jesus’s mission to heal and to raise from the dead. Without exception each request elicits a response from Jesus. Besides, there is special care for the child before and after the miracle: Jesus goes to the home of the child, touches the child, and makes provision for their care. It is a holistic care and concern for the well-being of the child and a fitting image of the church that “loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless.”³⁵

To sum up this brief consideration of Jesus’s encounter with children in the Gospel, although children do not constitute the primary audience of Jesus’s proclamation and documented encounters, in the limited instances where they do, their priority and importance are never in doubt. Such is the privileged attention accorded them that it permits a general extrapolation regarding ethical concerns and moral responsibility of care and protection of children in church and society.

Ethical Implications of the Theological Self-understanding of the Church in the Context of Child Protection and Safeguarding

I introduce this section with a brief comment on the understanding of church as locus of ethical imperatives and the idea of life in the religious milieu of Africa.

“Church” in Roman Catholic Tradition

Within the broader scope of Roman Catholic theology, church has a fairly stable definition, both as an object of doctrinal formulation and the privileged space for sacramental practice. Drawing on patristic and medieval sources, the Council of Trent (1545–63) and the First Vatican Council (1869–70) laid down a definition that is best described as an institutional edifice and tied to complex theological issues of papal infallibility, sacramentality, and the identity of the Roman Catholic Church as the unchallenged recipient of the tradition and possessor of truths passed down via an unbroken succession of apostles. The classic expression of the ensuing model of church is epitomized in the writings of Robert Bellarmine: “The one and true Church is the communion of men brought together by the profession of faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of the legitimate pastors and especially the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff.”³⁶ He also compared the church to a visible political society: “as visible and palpable as the community of the Roman people, or the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice.”³⁷

35. Francis, *As a Loving Mother*.

36. Robert Bellarmine, *De controversiis*, vol. 2, bk. 3, ch. 2, “*De definitione Ecclesiae*” (Naples: Giuliano 1857), vol. 2, 75, as quoted in Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* Expanded Edition (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 8.

37. Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, 75. Quoted in Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 34.

This understanding of church established a strict boundary of affiliation based on a verifiable and unflinching allegiance to a set of creedal statements. Although this approach gave visibility to the church as a recognizable institution that could claim separate existence and authority grounded on a divine mandate, it nevertheless assumed some problematic characteristics that continue to define it, despite the emergence of other more pastoral and inclusive models of church.³⁸ These characteristics are embedded in a set of doctrinal markers: clericalism, juridicism, and triumphalism.³⁹ In this rigid doctrinal framework, church is the equivalent of a political society with a clearly delineated hierarchical structure for exercising authority and power over all things doctrinal, sacramental, liturgical, and legal. The top of this pyramid narrowed to one sole authority, namely the papacy. At the base, the lay faithful participated in worship and ministry to the extent that the clerical class permitted. As Pope Francis makes clear, the insidious clericalism that bolsters this ecclesial structure constitutes a risk factor for the care and protection of children.⁴⁰

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) marked a watershed in the transition from a rigid, clericalist, juridicist, and triumphalist definition to a more pastoral understanding of church by reopening the debate about the nature, theology, and mission of the church. While recognizing a variety of ecclesiological symbols and models that have their roots in both Old and New Testaments, the council adopted a definition of church that understood it as the People of God. Although it maintained a hierarchical order of power and authority, this model offered a more inclusive approach based on shared identity and communion of all believers in Christ.⁴¹ In general, this understanding of church creates a more receptive space for paying attention to the voices, needs, and perspectives of children.

38. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 43–45.

39. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 39.

40. Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 2.

41. There has, of course, been a rich development of Roman Catholic ecclesiology in recent years, building upon Vatican II but advancing beyond the horizons of the mid-twentieth century and into the era of Pope Francis. For a sampling, see, e.g., the work of William Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016); Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hannenberg, eds., *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015); Clemens Sedmak, *A Church of the Poor: Pope Francis and the Transformation of Orthodoxy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016); Bradford E. Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016); Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018); Rafael Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017); and several articles in this journal, including Richard Lennan, "Beyond Scandal and Shame? Ecclesiology and the Longing for a Transformed Church," *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 590–610, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919856370>; Agnes M. Brazal, "Church as Sacrament of Yin–Yang Harmony: Toward a More Incisive Participation of Laity and Women in the Church," *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 414–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919836444>; and Amanda C. Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 370–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919836225>.

Yet church documents typically conclude with exhortation or appeals addressed to different categories, including priests, religious, lay people, professionals, men, women, and youth. Rare are the references to children. Here particular reference must be made to the church in Africa. Prior to 1994, African theology espoused a more or less diffused understanding of church. In its main line, this understanding replicated the officially sanctioned doctrine of church as a hierarchical community, albeit a particularly African twist was given to the notion of community that allows wider participation, solidarity, and cooperation. At the first African synod in 1994, a specific option was made for a theology and model of church grounded in the notion of family. This option was judged to reflect particular values rooted in Africa cultures and religious beliefs. The second African synod of 2009 confirmed this image of church and expanded the church's mission to include reconciliation, justice, and peace.⁴² Although hitherto unexplored in regard to the care and protection of children, the theology of church as family committed to reconciliation, justice, and peace offers a rich terrain for exploring the ethical implications for how the Christian community treats children. Of particular salience is the claim to be a sacrament of life for all members of the church as family of God. This concept of life is vitally important for creating and guaranteeing "a greater culture of care" in church and society.⁴³

Talking about Life

A wide consensus exists among African theologians that life constitutes the core of ethical reflection and foundation of the principles of morality:⁴⁴

Everything is perceived with reference to this [life]. It is no wonder, then, [that] Africans quickly draw ethical conclusions about thoughts, words, and actions of human beings, or even of "natural" cosmological events, by asking questions such as: Does the particular happening promote life? If so, it is good, just, ethical, desirable, divine. Or, does it diminish life in any way? Then it is wrong, bad, unethical, unjust, detestable . . . This most basic understanding of morality in African Religion is incorporated systematically in the people's way of life . . . It constitutes what Africans perceive as the mystique of life.⁴⁵

In particular, life is viewed in a rather extensive manner, as a continuum, rather than confined to biological existence. In this sense, the continuum of life extends to and includes the constituents of nature:

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42. Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* (November 19, 2011), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html; Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).
 43. Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 2.
 44. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, "Ethics Brewed in an African Pot," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31 (2011): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jsce201131127>.
 45. Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 77.

The notion of expansiveness of life relates to the fact that life is not construed only as a reality constituted by the living; it also includes the ancestors and the yet-unborn. Furthermore, the category of life extends to and includes the natural universe. In this sense, therefore, from an African religio-cultural perspective, the moral imperative to protect human life also warrants the protection of sacred forests, trees, rivers, mountains, streams, and animals. This moral imperative or duty to protect the physical environment is founded on the vital link between the survival of human life and the environment. To protect the environment is to protect human life, since the survival of the latter ultimately depends on the survival of the former.⁴⁶

The morality of human actions is evaluated on the basis of whether or not they enhance the quality of human life as a communal experience. Yet we cannot avoid the fact that the claims of this “ethics brewed in an African pot” faces two significant challenges. The first is the extensive destruction of human life through civil, political, and religious conflicts. Clergy sexual abuse counts as a particular instance of the violation of the sanctity of human life. The second is the strict regulation of the scope of participation in leadership and ministry for women and children in church and society. It is the latter category of children that concerns me here, without meaning to diminish the importance of the issues surrounding women.⁴⁷

The question that I raise in light of the foregoing is simple: Given the cultural and religious conceptions regarding children in an African context, assuming this understanding of church, and considering the tenets of Catholic ethics, how might the self-understanding and praxis of the church be reshaped and transformed in a manner that gives priority to the care and protection of children? Stated differently, if the church took the care and protection of children seriously, how might we adjust or transform its theological self-understanding and assume concomitant ethical and moral imperatives, in line with the inclusivity of the family model of church and the emphasis on life as an ethical or moral category? I adopt here the methodological approach of child-in-the-midst that recognizes their *agency* in formulating and generating new theological and ethical insight. Although “agency” implies action, it

does not mean that children must act or do something to impact the adults in contact with them. Children are agents because their lives naturally make demands upon human society

46. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “Ethics of HIV/AIDS Prevention: Paradigms of a New Discourse from an African Perspective,” in *Applied Ethics in the World Church: The Padua Conference*, ed. Linda Hogan (New York: Orbis, 2008), 147–54 at 149, https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_fac/458/.

47. As mentioned above, a cursory review of church documents reveals a tendency to overlook children. This claim is not negated by the fact that there are experiences that provide children a space to experience church. One example would be the Sunday School. Many Catholic children would have grown into the church via the weekly Sunday School that offered basic catechism, songs, games, and didactic activities. Another typically Catholic experience for children is the Children’s Mass. This varies from place to place and its frequency ranges from weekly to monthly or special occasions. The celebration of Children’s Mass comes with a complement of specially composed liturgical prayers for “Masses for Children.” At such masses, children routinely read from Scripture, sing in the choir, and recite bidding prayers.

as a whole and upon adults in particular. They are agents because through them changes take place in the adults who are in contact with them, as a helpless infant on arrival causes a household to change. Therefore, the agency of children is not about abilities or virtues impacting adults but about children as children encountering adults.⁴⁸

I reiterate, however, the point that any answer to the questions raised above carries the risk of appearing as slightly contrived: this article is written by an adult and, thus, my contribution lies open to the limitation of an unintended projection of adult biases and prejudices. Aware of this limitation, I identify three key points regarding the possibility, necessity, and urgency of relocating the ethics of care and protection of children at the heart of the mission and identity of church.

Particular Ethical Concerns

These points foreground the positive elements obtainable in an African cultural milieu in consonance with the mandate of care and protection contained in the Gospel. They lead to a consideration of three areas of ethical concern: including the child in the church's gender imaginary; the imperative to care for and protect children; and the particular vulnerability of girl-children.

Inclusivity: No Child Left Behind

The idea of house churches and sacramental eucharistic and baptismal experience variously attested to in the New Testament offers us a useful matrix for envisaging an ecclesial arrangement that includes the child as a valued and honored member of the body of Christ. Added to this is the phenomenon of mass (family) conversions in the early churches. The New Testament widely attests to this phenomenon in the apostolic era. There is no doubt that as a theological experience, both writers and eye-witnesses focus on the adult experiences—questions that are asked, actions performed, and teaching proclaimed. Reference to children is either rare or non-existent.

In the field of Catholic ethics a similar situation obtains. For all the claims of a consistent ethic of life, ethical considerations rarely count children or include them in their purview. If anything, they tend to presuppose an adult audience, acting and making decisions with a well-informed conscience. The category of “child” is best considered, if at all, as a vulnerable subject who counts in moral discourse to the extent that it is affected by the actions and decisions of adults. This is evident, for example, in sexual ethics on the question of marriage, contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage or unions as formulated in church documents and statements. Interestingly, in instances of controversy and disagreement over the precise nature of sexual ethics, both sides of the ethical divide would claim to be champions and advocates of the rights and well-being of the child. Reviewing contemporary doctrine from the

48. See Sunny Tan, *Child Theology for the Churches of Asia: An Invitation* (South Woodford, UK: Child Theology Movement, 2007), 12–13.

perspective of the child implies reclaiming the notion and practice of inclusivity, with no child left behind. As presently envisaged in debates relating to sexual morality, sacramental participation, and ministerial leadership, the matrix of debate follows a typically binary and polemical axis: man vs. woman; male vs. female. For some, this axis exhausts the gender debate. Allowing for the possibility of a dynamic and multi-valent gender composition of the church, the category of child eludes such configurations or, rather, invites us to break free of the bonds of binary antagonism. Such an approach opens up the possibility of formulating a more inclusive ethics of life in the Christian community that puts the child first.

Duty of Care and Responsibility to Protect

As already demonstrated, the plight of children in the church has come under the spotlight on account of actions by adults who violate the Gospel injunction against misleading or mistreating children. Revelations abound of heinous cases of child sexual abuse and concomitant cover-up by clergy and religious leaders. Consequently, the scandal of abuse exposes the hypocrisy and abuse of clerical and ecclesiastical power and, in many instances, renders the institutional church an unsafe environment for children. The enormity of the harm done to children by people to whom they were entrusted is still emerging and the full scale may never be known, considering the sophistication of the cover-up and the psychological cost of retrieving painful memories and reliving the experience of abuse, itself an obstacle to telling one's story of abuse.

In light of this grave development, the theology of the church must seriously assume the demands of an ethical imperative to ensure the safety, care, and proper teaching of children, young people, and vulnerable adults. In many places in Africa, the church is synonymous with schools and hospitals, two key social structures that have contributed to the evolution of a more educated and healthier population of Africa children. This is a laudable achievement. The issue that I advance here does not seek to undermine the importance of the church's contribution to the education and health of African children. Rather, it is about developing an understanding and practice that is self-critical, one that not only denounces the ills of society, but focuses on where, as a Christian community, it might be failing to fulfill Jesus's command to honor, respect, and protect children as members of church and the kingdom of God. In other words, what is envisaged here is a church that can look honestly into its own history, practice, and institutions in light of whether or not they conform to the Gospel truth that to children belong the kingdom of heaven. This calls not only for a repentant and contrite church, but also a church that defines and judges the authenticity of its identity and the credibility its mission by the level of its commitment to the duty of care and the responsibility to protect children.

Human Dignity and Equality

It is common knowledge that the girl-child faces particular challenges in African societies. From female genital mutilation to early and forced marriages, to denial of educational opportunities, Africa is a tough place to be a girl-child. I mentioned earlier that the

African child is often valued for how it fulfills social expectations and validates cultural norms, rather than as a gift in itself. This statement needs to be further nuanced from the point of view of gender. The status of the girl-child differs significantly from the status of the boy-child. The latter enjoys ascribed privileges on account of its gender. In this sense African societies do not necessarily differ from other societies, say in Asia, where preference for the boy-child in some instances leads to widespread feticide.

An illustration of the cultural gender-based bias against the girl-child comes from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The protagonist, Okonkwo, has sired a son, Nwoye, whom he considers effeminate and emasculated. He laments: "I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yam can throw him in wrestling match." His perpetual regret is that his eldest daughter was not born a boy: "If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit."⁴⁹ Years later, when Nwoye turned his back on his family and indigenous religion to cast his lot with the Christian missionaries, Okonkwo summoned his five sons to his hut to deliver an admonition redolent of the ingrained patriarchal bias and gender-based discrimination: "You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am still alive so that I can curse him."⁵⁰ Achebe adds: "Okonkwo was very lucky in his daughters. He never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl."⁵¹ As indicated above, this gender-based bias is not particular to African societies.

It is a safe assumption that African societies have not always prioritized the protection of the rights of the child, particularly the girl-child.⁵² In the context of the church, this situation defines a new domain of mission and ministry: defending the rights of the girl-child and affirming her dignity as a human being created in the image and likeness of God—*imago Dei*. This point calls for a theology of church that challenges and overcomes practices that reinforce gender discrimination and affirms the equality and dignity of all. This task is better demonstrated than merely expressed. There is no dearth of church documents affirming the dignity of the human person—man and woman, male and female, boy and girl alike. What remains to be seen is how this rhetoric effectively translates into ethical action, of the type that takes the side of the vulnerable, specifically the girl-child. In the Roman Catholic Church where roles are gender-specific, with priority accorded males, it becomes easy for the girl-child to lower her expectations for lack of a visible and credible role model who not only models leadership, authority, and

49. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 66.

50. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 172.

51. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 172.

52. Several African countries are signatories to the UN General Assembly, Resolution 44/25, Convention on the Rights of the Child (November 20, 1989), https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=_en. The Organization of Africa Unity, now The African Union, also has *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (1999), https://www.unicef.org/esaro/African_Charter_articles_in_full.pdf. The level of commitment and adherence of individual countries to the articles and protocols remain open to debate.

participation, but is also empowered to act and lead *in persona Christi*. For the Roman Catholic Church steeped in a tradition of patriarchal leadership, this proposition raises the ethical stakes. Perhaps, more significantly, it demonstrates how theology—in this case, ecclesiology—could benefit from a radical reformulation of its assumptions as a matter of ethical imperative to care for and protect children.

Conclusion: “And a little child shall lead them”

This article argues the priority of children in church and society by drawing on an analysis of sociocultural and theological beliefs and practices, especially from the perspective of Africa. It affirms the critical importance of an ethics of care and protection in the context of widespread clergy sexual abuse of children and the complicity of religious leaders.

Looking beyond Africa, the present global crisis engulfing the church reveals the ethical imperative of care and protection of children everywhere. But it also points to the exceptional capacity and agency of children to call a church and society of adults (wont to ignore and overlook them) to a credible and authentic way of being and acting with justice, accountability, and transparency. Thus, Isaiah’s prophecy is validated: “And a little child shall lead them” (Isa 11:6).

When Jesus called the child over and placed it in the midst of his squabbling disciples, he relocated the child from the periphery of theological relevance to the center of the body of Christ. By inviting the church to pay attention to the child in its midst, Jesus transformed the ensuing theological discourse into a sacramental experience, mediated by the child. The child-in-the-midst serves as a concrete symbol directing focus to what God is doing within the church. Thus the status of the-child-in-the-midst resembles “a light that throws existing theology into new relief.”⁵³

In the final analysis, my point is simple: Listening to and honoring the child bears ethical implications for the community of the disciples of Jesus. Prioritizing the child allows for a mutually reinforcing ethics of care and protection, and a theology of church as a sacrament of life. This focus on the child corrects the illusion that ethics and ecclesiology run on parallel tracks. In the present and future, the identity and mission of the church will rest on the practice of a radical inclusivity, a celebration of the dignity and equality of all, and placing children foremost, as the Gospel proclaims.

Author Biography

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53. Keith J. White and Haddon Willmer, *An Introduction to Child Theology* (South Woodford, UK: Child Theology Movement, 2006), 6; see Bunge, “The Child, Religion, and the Academy,” 575.