



# Entering God's Kingdom (Not) Like a Little Child: Images of the Child in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas

## Citation

Lim, Eunyung. 2018. Entering God's Kingdom (Not) Like a Little Child: Images of the Child in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Divinity School.

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Entering God's Kingdom (Not) Like a Little Child:

Images of the Child in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas

A dissertation presented

By

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To

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Theology

In the Subject of

New Testament and Early Christianity

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 2018

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Entering God's Kingdom (Not) Like a Little Child:  
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Abstract

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Based on the gospel accounts of Jesus’s welcoming of little children, scholars have often presumed that early Christianity offered a new, uniform, and positive understanding of children against the backdrop of the ancient world. This dissertation challenges this exceptionalist approach to history by exploring imagery of the child used in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas. In particular, it situates the selected texts within discourses and practices related to children in the Roman Empire and explores the cultural context in which childlikeness in each text should be understood. For Matthew, the little child in Jesus’s sayings represents the lowliest of the low in the Roman Empire, functioning to urge the readers to abandon their political and economic privileges. For Paul, “infant” is a term of invective against the Corinthians, whose infantile lack of proper speech and *logos* marks their unpreparedness for God’s kingdom. For the Gospel of Thomas, the child functions as an exemplar of the primordial being in Gen 1:27 who exists without shame, for this gospel idealizes the child’s sexually undeveloped body and liminal status in society.

This research demonstrates that there is no one understanding of children among these texts. The authors diversely deploy the child's marginalized status, intellectual incapability, and non-gendered state in these three focal texts while inviting the adult audience to envision an ideal believer entering the kingdom of God. These images of children concretize spiritual, moral, and social transformations to which believers must aspire—or which they should avoid, presenting the diversity of religious ideals among those who first used these texts. Their references to children cannot be used as evidence to support claims that early Christ followers were kind in their treatment of children. Exploring the developmental characteristics and social situations of children reveals that early Christ followers cast young children as theological imaginaries for expressing various conceptions of an ideal self who is worthy to enter God's kingdom.

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## Acknowledgments

In 2005 when I was a first-year MDiv student at Harvard Divinity School, I did not know how my life would unfold in the next decade or so. I have since spent many days on Harvard campus, perhaps much longer than I ever expected. Several mentors and friends have walked alongside me on this long journey, and without their unstinting support, this dissertation would never have been completed. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Laura Nasrallah whom I often call the best advisor in the world. She sacrificed countless hours to read so many drafts of my work, always providing me with intellectually stimulating feedback. Her selfless dedication to students and scholarly commitment to the field of early Christianity became an exemplar of academic excellence that I always wish to follow. I am also grateful to Karen King for her insightful comments and for her wisdom and warm encouragement. I learned so much from her expertise in the Coptic language and the comparative study of religion. I also thank Giovanni Bazzana for his incisive feedback. He was always there to help me whenever I needed his advice both academically and professionally. In addition to my dissertation committee, I am also thankful to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza for her thought-provoking questions about the theoretical framework of my project. I want to thank two late professors at Harvard as well. François Bovon was a caring advisor and his scholarship opened my eyes to a variety of ancient materials I had not known before. I have many fond memories with Helmut Koester. When I was still a stranger to this country, he invited me in (cf. Matt 25:43). Not only did he give me so much inspiration to grow as a scholar, but he also taught me how to grow fava beans and blueberries in New England.



The collegial and supportive atmosphere of the New Testament Dissertation Seminar at Harvard motivated me to finish this dissertation. My thanks go to Margaret Butterfield, Jung Hyun Choi, Greg Given, Sarah Griffis, Chris Hoklottube, Roberto Mata, Karen Connor McGugan, Heather McLetchie-Leader, Kelsi Morrison-Atkins, Chan Sok Park, Jennifer Quigley, and Tyler Schwaller for making such a wonderful academic community. I also want to thank my friends, Eleanor Craig, Erin Northington, and Young Ra Rhee, for their positive spirit and kind help.

Finally, I am extremely appreciative of my family's support. I was a very sick child growing up, but my father, Yong Soon Lim, and my mother, Sang Nan Yoo, never gave up on me. I cannot thank them enough for their unceasing prayers, deep faith, and immeasurable love. Special thanks are also due to my siblings, extended family, and mentors in Korea who have long cheered on me from afar. Above all, Dr. Shinkyu "James" Lee has been a brilliant and caring partner throughout all the stages of this project. In 2005 when I first met him at Harvard Divinity School, I never knew that we would study, suffer, and laugh together in the years to come. I deeply appreciate his bringing joy to my life and being a wonderful father to our special child, Ethan Gunwoo Lee.

## Abbreviations

<i>AcT</i>	<i>Acta Theologica</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AncSoc</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i>
<i>BMCR</i>	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CChr. SL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>FIRA</i>	<i>Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiustiniani</i>
<i>GNS</i>	<i>Good News Studies</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>History Today</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LCL</i>	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
<i>LNTS</i>	<i>Library of New Testament Studies</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>Liddell, Scott, and Jones. Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed.</i>
<i>NICNT</i>	<i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
<i>NIGTC</i>	<i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OBO</i>	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i>
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
<i>STRev</i>	<i>Swanee Theological Review</i>
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TENTS</i>	<i>Texts and Editions for New Testament Study</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

NB: Abbreviations for classical and historical texts follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 141–70.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Ἄφετε τὰ παιδιά ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά,  
τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ

*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

— Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. PROLOGUE

In the contemporary U.S., it is hard to find someone who has never heard the saying “Jesus loves the little children,” derived from the synoptic gospel story about children and the kingdom. In our modern world, in which children serve as an effective center for public discussions on healthcare, economic crises, and global peacebuilding, the child-

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<sup>1</sup> The three synoptic verses containing this saying are almost identical in Greek, except that Matthew slightly changes the word order in the first half of the sentence and replaces ἔρχεσθαι with ἐλθεῖν. In modern Christian and scholarly discussions of children, people usually pair this synoptic pericope about Jesus’s welcoming of little children (Mark 10:13–6; Matthew 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17) with another synoptic story in which Jesus uses a little child to teach his disciples in the wake of a dispute over greatness (Mark 9:33–7; Matt 18:1–5; Luke 9:46–48). To quote Mark 10:13–16: “People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them. Then, the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And embracing them, he laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

In this dissertation, I use my own translation of the New Testament unless otherwise indicated. For the Greek text, I use: Eberhard Nestle et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28<sup>th</sup> edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

loving Jesus has enabled church leaders and advocates to implement diverse initiatives to defend children's rights and advance children's well-being. Many Christian charities and NGOs feature the verses about children and the kingdom quoted in the epigraph of this chapter to promote their causes of helping children in the midst of poverty, war, and other challenges.<sup>2</sup> To add to the significance of Jesus's sayings, a group of theologians recently organized the "Child Theology Movement," inspired by the passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus puts a little child in the midst of his disciples (Matt 18:1–5). These theologians endeavor to "[rethink] Christian doctrine and practice in light of the child and childhood," offering consultations to ministers and academics around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, the ways in which Christians interpret Jesus's teaching reflect not only the valuation of children in our time but also the public awareness that in so many places, children are vulnerable, lack proper care, and are subject to abuse. As part of this contemporary Christian discourse, it does not take much effort to find on- and off-line images featuring (a white, blue-eyed) Jesus embracing or surrounded by little children. Perhaps for dramatic effect, this portrait of Jesus is often embellished not only by contrasting him with the image of his disciples' unkindness to the children but also by

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<sup>2</sup> To name a few, Will Vraspir, "Church Leaders: Love is Stronger than Hate," *Hastings Tribune*, 18 August 2017, [http://www.hastingstribune.com/news/church-leaders-love-is-stronger-than-hate/article\\_e26dbca8-8487-11e7-918d-f3b3496938e5.html](http://www.hastingstribune.com/news/church-leaders-love-is-stronger-than-hate/article_e26dbca8-8487-11e7-918d-f3b3496938e5.html); Denise C. Koenig, "Pray for People Affected by Conflict in Syria," *World Vision*, 10 March 2017, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugees-prayer>; Robin Munro, "From the Family: Life Belongs to Her," *Holt International Magazine*, 3 September 2013, <http://www.holtinternational.org/magazine/2013/09/03/life-belongs-to-her/>.

<sup>3</sup> Aiming to "do theology with a child in the midst," theologians such as Marcia J. Bunge and Keith J. White serve as the directors of this movement. <http://www.childtheology.org/>.

juxtaposing Jesus's action with the grim reality of children in his day.<sup>4</sup> In today's Christian ministry and theological discourses, such interpretations seem to be accepted quite uncritically, reaffirming Jesus's unique attitude toward children in the ancient world.

Admittedly, the image of Jesus with the little children may bring about noble actions in social sectors. Yet, this interpretive tendency that relies on the historical superiority of Jesus does not come without a price. It extracts from the gospels the evidence that the historical Jesus loved little children much more than his contemporaries, often creating a misconception of the historical reality. As people rush to overemphasize Jesus's welcoming of little children, they compare Jesus's sayings with only a small number of examples from his time that portray children and childhood negatively. In this process, it is easy to heroize Jesus for his "unprecedented" deeds against the backdrop of the ancient world, which also generates and reinforces ideas of Christian uniqueness and supersessionism. We may face undesirable outcomes if we fail to engage thoroughly with a broad range of historical materials attesting to ancient ideas about children and childhood. More seriously, an interpretive approach of this sort may obfuscate the theological significance of Jesus's sayings about children. In their context, their focus does not lie in publicizing how much Jesus values little children. Instead,

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Kevin DeYoung, "Jesus Loves the Little Children," *The Gospel Coalition*, 17 July 2015. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/jesus-loves-the-little-children/>. The author contrasts the synoptic story of Jesus's welcoming of little children with ancient practices such as infanticide and exposure and then uses the biblical passage to speak against abortion in our modern time. As DeYoung notes, "it's worth remembering that the ancient world was unabashedly open to the killing of children. ...ancient Greeks and Romans thought little of little babies and did not hesitate to get rid of them. ...Jesus welcomed children when others wanted to push them away (Mark 10:13-16). ... Jesus loves the little children of the world. Even the ones with an umbilical cord."

these sayings use a childlike condition as an important model for explaining concrete qualifications for entering God's kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, "reign" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably for the Greek word βασιλεία (*basileia*). In line with the current scholarly preference for "the reign of God" as the translation of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, I also use "reign" in most cases. However, in Chapter 2, I use "kingdom" only, for in Matthew the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" underscores not only the sovereignty of God but also the spatiality of God's kingdom as a separate political reality from earthly kingdoms.

Scholars have long discussed whether ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in the New Testament means reign or realm. Classic examples are Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1951; repr., Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 4–10 and Hans Conzelmann, "Jesus Christus" *RGG* 3.641–46, "Reich Gottes," *RGG* 5.912–18. While placing the nature of Jesus's proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in futuristic eschatology, Conzelmann emphasizes its phase ("age to come") and spatiality (a realm to enter) while Bultmann sees it as God's reign or rule. Thereafter, studies have followed exploring different implications of βασιλεία and possible translations. For instance, C. H. Dodd highlights the semantic focus on dominion, not on territory, in the original Hebrew word, *malkut*, lying behind βασιλεία, suggesting "kingship," "kingly rule," "reign," or "sovereignty." *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1961), 21. George Eldon Ladd offers a view synthesizing the eschatological aspect of βασιλεία and its presence in Jesus's mission, and understands βασιλεία as "God's dynamic reign." "The Kingdom of God – Reign or Realm?" *JBL* 81 (1962): 237. Cf. Barclay M. Newman, "Translating 'the Kingdom of God' and 'the Kingdom of Heaven' in the New Testament," *BT* 25 (1974): 401–4; Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Warren Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology: The 'Reign of the Heavens' as an Example (MT. 4.17–5.12)," *JSNT* 67 (1997): 3–27, esp. 14–15, n. 46. In his study of the Gospel of Matthew, Warren Carter translates βασιλεία as 'reign,' 'kingdom,' 'sovereignty,' or 'empire.' *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 62 where he notes that "the term 'empire' or 'kingdom' appears in a wide range of literature to name numerous empires." However, the translation "empire" can also be historically misleading. See Chapter II.3.2 and n. 133 where I discuss Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Kingdom of Bureaucracy: The Political Theology of Village Scribes in the Sayings Gospel Q* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

Meanwhile, feminist scholars have made important interventions to avoid the patriarchal or kyriarchical connotations of βασιλεία. For instance, Letty M. Russell suggests that "one way of making it clear that the gospel confronts the old image of kingdom as domination and exclusion and replaces it with a new image of kingdom as love and community is to use an alternative metaphor, that of the household." *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 83–85. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also highlights the inclusiveness and wholeness of βασιλεία in Jesus's proclamation, which cannot be captured by the priestly, patriarchal, and androcentric understanding of kingdom. For it envisions "a different future and different human relationships on the grounds that *all* persons in Israel are created and elected by the gracious goodness of Jesus's Sophia-God." *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 110–54, esp. 142. Elaborating on this inclusive nature of βασιλεία and incorporating it into the significantly family-oriented experience in Latina culture, Isasi-Díaz proposes the "kin-dom" of God and emphasizes the βασιλεία's aspect of creating a new

This dissertation was developed to advance a constructive discussion of the images of children and childhood in New Testament and early Christian studies. Rather than reconstructing the historical Jesus's or early Christians' attitudes towards children from the New Testament,<sup>6</sup> my research calls attention to the various ways in which individual biblical texts employ portrayals of children according to their theological focus, historical context, and rhetorical situation. In order to explore the differences and diversity of childlike conditions in ancient writings later labeled as Christian, the present research examines a set of texts that frequently mention children and the kingdom of God together, namely, the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas. Then, it delves into *how* each of these texts uses little children to craft "Christian" identity in the first century CE.<sup>7</sup> One key theological maneuver that we shall find is that children are linked with conceptions of God's reign. In the places in which God's reign was envisioned and proclaimed, what did childlikeness mean to early Christ followers? What ethical or spiritual ideals did they wish to see through little children, and how did ancient discourses and practices related to children help articulate them?

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kin/family. See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Kin-dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal," in *In Our Own Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology*, ed. Benjamin Valentin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 171–90.

<sup>6</sup> Many scholarly projects, as their titles show (e.g., *The Child in the Bible*, *Children in the Early Church*), take up this approach, attempting to generalize the ways in which ancient Christians thought about and engaged children.

<sup>7</sup> I use "Christian" or "early Christian" for the reader's convenience. Historically speaking, Jesus's followers and early Christ-believers in the first century CE did not designate themselves as "Christian." Thus, when I apply this term to Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas, I do so in a provisional sense, only because they were later labeled as Christian and are known as Christian documents for contemporary readers.

The Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas provide good content for exploring these questions. Written between the mid-first century and the early second century CE,<sup>8</sup> these three texts (1) commonly use specific Greek and Coptic words that refer to young children, usually seven years old or younger (e.g., παιδίον, νήπιος, κοῦει 𐤎𐤓𐤏𐤃𐤓𐤏 𐤓𐤏𐤓), and (2) when depicting readers' ideal condition for entering the kingdom, speak emphatically of be(com)ing like young children. Although these texts, especially the first two, are likely familiar to modern readers, they may not present the identical picture of children and people under God's reign that we imagine. What are the meanings and functions of children in each of the texts, and how do they relate to the variety of ethical, social or spiritual ideals that early Christ followers wished to achieve?

To examine the ways in which children are portrayed in terms of conceptions of God's reign, two methods are utilized throughout this dissertation. The first sets the selected writings' portrayals of the child within their cultural contexts, which may not hold the same assumptions and ideas about children and childhood as our modern world. We should instead engage in a thorough analysis of these images of children by consulting historical and classical studies of children in antiquity. Second, these portrayals of children must be understood within the rhetorical situation of each text. These texts speak of becoming (or not being) like children in order to persuade their immediate audiences of certain theological ideas. Careful attention to the cultural embeddedness and rhetorical positionality of biblical deployments of the child will lead us to a fresh understanding of these portrayals: Early Christ followers take up various

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding a scholarly debate about the dating of the Gospel of Thomas, see chap. IV n. 279.



aspects of the child from contemporaneous discourses on childhood and use them as effective vehicles for explaining an ideal human condition in which to enter the reign of God. Through children's characteristics and social situations, these texts cast children as theological imaginary for expressing various conceptions of a self that is worthy of God's reign.

## 2. WHEN THE LITTLE CHILDREN CAME TO SCHOLARS

### 2.1 General Background

This research broadly asks how each text represents the child and what kind of assumptions about children the ancient author and his/her audience share. Understanding ancient thinking about and practices in relation to children and childhood provides the necessary context for understanding references to children in Jesus's sayings of the first century CE. In particular, I emphasize this careful contextualization as a critical response to current scholarly discussions of children in New Testament and early Christian writings.

The field of biblical and early Christian studies has witnessed a surge of interest in children and childhood since the 1990s, corresponding to the development of the study of childhood in antiquity.<sup>9</sup> While researchers have conducted a series of meaningful

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<sup>9</sup> On the work of leading scholars in the study of ancient children and childhood, see nn. 16–22 below.

studies of ancient Christian references to children over the past few decades,<sup>10</sup> they have paid less attention to the manner in which early Christ followers present childlikeness, namely, the child as a metaphor or paradigm.<sup>11</sup> Many studies have focused on reconstructing the social history of children, mostly within broader projects on early Christian households and family structures.<sup>12</sup> When childhood metaphors are discussed in New Testament scholarship, the scope of research is usually confined to parent-child relations; from the biblical construction of God as father and believers as children to the

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most prominently, Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, *“Let the Little Children Come to Me”: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009). Other important studies of children in the New Testament and early Christianity include but are not limited to: Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde. Kinder im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1992); Sarah Currie, “Childhood and Christianity from Paul to the Council of Chalcedon” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, England, 1993); William A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996); O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, trans. Brian McNeil (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Reidar Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues,” *Familia: Revista de Ciencias y Orientación Familiar* 33 (2006): 23–46. Cf. Horn and Martens, 40 n. 145.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald’s attention to women and early Christian families have led them to reconstruct the lives of children in house church communities, with a special emphasis on girls. These scholars discuss topics such as birth, childcare, and schooling in early Christianity by reading New Testament accounts of women and children in the context of Greco-Roman family practices. Carolyn Osiek et al., *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Margaret MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Baylor University Press: Waco, TX 2014). For earlier studies with broad interests in the family, see David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (eds.), *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

parent-child relationship between Paul and his audiences, scholars have long analyzed the theological meanings and social functions of these metaphors.<sup>13</sup> In this context, first-century CE documents that use the child as a figurative analogy have rarely received careful attention.<sup>14</sup> Even when scholars interpret Jesus's teaching about childlikeness or Paul's use of childhood language, many fall back on their own cultural assumptions about

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (London: T&T Clark International; New York: Continuum, 2003). Regarding parent-child metaphors in specific New Testament books, see K. O. Sandnes, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994); O. L. Yarbrough, "Parents and Children in the Letters of Paul," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, eds. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 126–41; Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*; Adele Reinhartz, ed., *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, *Semeia* 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1999); S. Guijarro Oporto, "Kingdom and Family in Conflict: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina*, ed. J. J. Pilch (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 210–38.

<sup>14</sup> The following scholars have recently dealt with this topic mostly in a partial manner, and not all of them explore the ways in which imagery of the child contributes to adults' self-fashioning: Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde*; James M. M. Francis, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006); Reidar Aasgaard, "Paul as a Child: Children and Childhood in the Letters of the Apostle," *JBL* 126 (2007): 129–59; Jennifer Houston McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother: Metaphor, Rhetoric, and Identity in 1 Thessalonians 2:5–8* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Note that the scope of all of these studies is circumscribed to canonical writings. For scholarly works that deal with childhood imagery among patristic and late antique Christian authors, see Currie, "Childhood and Christianity from Paul to the Council of Chalcedon"; Graham Gould, "Childhood in Patristic Thought: Some Problems of Theology and Theological Anthropology," in *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History of Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 39–52; Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 56–109.

the innocence or humbleness of children, as though ancient audiences widely accepted these qualities.<sup>15</sup>

Considering the trend in New Testament scholarship of studying children and families, it is critical to fully read early Christ followers' writings in light of the growing field of the study of ancient children and childhood to better understand the meaning of childlikeness in each of these texts. Since the 1960s,<sup>16</sup> scholars of history, classics, and archaeology have clarified different notions of childhood in various historical periods and cultural contexts and have discussed evolving presuppositions about the characteristics of children.<sup>17</sup> From these inquiries, a wide range of source materials and historical findings concerning children in the ancient Mediterranean world has emerged. They are usually

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Howard C. Kee, "'Becoming a Child' in the Gospel of Thomas," *JBL* 82 (1963): 307–14; James L. Bailey, "Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13–16," *WW* 15 (1995): 58–59; Francis, *Adults as Children*, 46; McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother*, 99–103. I will discuss this problem in more detail in each chapter's treatment of current scholarship.

<sup>16</sup> Modern scholarship on children and childhood in classical and late antiquity would not have existed without Philippe Ariès's seminal yet controversial work, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960); trans. R. Baldick, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962). Though later scholarly generations have constantly disputed Ariès' thesis that childhood was not considered a separate stage of life until the Renaissance (especially the 17<sup>th</sup> century), Ariès's understanding of childhood as a social construct, not as a biological category, has enormously influenced historians.

<sup>17</sup> To be sure, new literary and archaeological evidence cannot speak for the lives of ancient children completely, nor does it reflect the total social perception of them. Regarding the methodological limitations and possibilities of current scholarship, see Aasgaard's most recent book chapter, "How Close Can We Get to Ancient Childhood? Methodological Achievements and New Advances," in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, eds. Christian Laes and Ville Vuolanto (New York: Routledge, 2017), 318–31.

categorized into the study of Greek,<sup>18</sup> Roman,<sup>19</sup> and Jewish<sup>20</sup> childhoods, depending on the time periods, geographical regions, and languages of the primary sources. Exploring a

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<sup>18</sup> For example, it would be impossible to study ancient Greek childhood without classicist Mark Golden's seminal work, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Focusing on the characteristics of childhood and children's lives within Greek family relations and social dynamics, this research made way for later studies in the field. Scholars such as Jenifer Neils, Ada Cohen, and Lesley A. Beaumont have followed in the footsteps of Golden, further enriching the study of ancient children with well-researched archaeological and iconographic evidence found in Greece. In particular, they provide new insights into children's life courses (i.e., from birth to puberty), social positions, and the perceptions of their bodies and sexualities by looking at ancient Greek art and burial practices, as well as poetry and mythology. See Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2003); and Lesley A. Beaumont, *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (New York: Routledge, 2012). Regarding child heroes in Greek mythology, see Corinne O. Pache, *Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See also Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter, eds., *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, Hesperia Supplement 41 (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Arguably, the field of Roman children and childhood in antiquity has flourished over the past few decades even more than the study of Greek children. Thomas Wiedemann, Beryl Rawson, Susanne Dixon, Ray Laurence, and more recently, Christian Laes have made important contributions to current scholarship. These historians pay close attention to family rituals, childrearing practices and education, public art, and funerary practices in the late Republic and the imperial period, illuminating the diverse social factors that had a direct impact on children's lives. Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1989); Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, eds., *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire* (Portsmouth, R.I. : Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2007); Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Christian Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Janet Huskinson, *Roman Children's Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and its Social Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> For example, David Kraemer, "Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, ed. David Kraemer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 65–80; Shaye J. D. Cohen, ed., *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, BJS 289 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Amram Tropper, "Children and Childhood in Light of the Demographics of the Jewish Family in Late Antiquity," *JSJ* 37 (2006): 299–343; Kristine Henriksen Garroway, "Gendered or Un-gendered? The Perception of Children in Ancient Israel," *JNES* 71 (2012): 95–114. Cf. idem, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

variety of topics, from cultural views on childhood to medical and social practices related to children,<sup>21</sup> scholars in this area of study have illuminated the ways in which childhood was perceived and experienced in antiquity.<sup>22</sup>

Keeping up with the development of this field, scholars have undertaken interdisciplinary studies of early Christian families.<sup>23</sup> However, as Aasgaard rightly notes, “[r]esearch on children in early Christianity is, if not still in its childhood, then at least in its youth, and clearly still has much to catch up with from work done on other material, particularly in the Roman field. Little has e.g. been done on early Christian children in relation to gender, social class, and regional perspectives.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, scholarly

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<sup>21</sup> More specifically, these topics include but are not limited to: children’s bodies and sexualities, intellectual and moral characteristics, social identity, and cultural and social practices attached to children, not only in the domain of family and kinship (e.g., birth, childrearing, burial) but also in wider social settings (e.g., ritual, education, politics). In the meantime, scholars across disciplines have collaborated to produce edited volumes with broad temporal and geographical scopes, so more generalizing works have become available for historians’ bookshelves: Véronique Dasen, ed., *Naissance et Petite Enfance dans l’Antiquité: Actes du colloque de Fribourg, 28 novembre-1er décembre 2001*, OBO 203 (Fribourg: Academie Press, 2004); Cohen and Rutter, *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*; Beryl Rawson, ed., *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Laes and Vuolanto, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*.

<sup>22</sup> Much attention has been paid to cultural views of childhood and the social history of children within Greco-Roman family structures. See Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, eds., *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Véronique Dasen and Thomas Späth, eds., *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ray Laurence and Agneta Strömberg, eds., *Families in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Continuum, 2012). In the meantime, children’s agency and own experience has been a burgeoning research topic in recent years. See Christian Laes, Katariina Mustakallio, and Ville Vuolanto, eds., *Children and Family in Late Antiquity: Life, Death and Interaction*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion* 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015); Laes and Vuolanto, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*.

<sup>23</sup> See Balch and Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context*.

<sup>24</sup> Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity,” 30.

inquiries into New Testament and early Christian references to children must pay close attention to the socio-cultural milieu of antiquity. Such studies should not assume that the New Testament and early Christian literature was a separate historical and cultural sphere in antiquity. Instead, scholars should properly contextualize biblical references to childlikeness by asking whether this call to “being like a child” seeks to evoke the child’s gender, intellectual characteristics, or social place or something else in the historical and cultural setting of the individual text.

This dissertation seeks to establish a context for images of children in early Christ followers’ writings by exploring ancient historical and literary materials on children. In this process, I call readers’ attention to the political utility of children, cultural assumptions about children’s bodies and sexuality, and ancient philosophical thought on the relationship between the development of reason and maturity. Because our modern perspectives on such topics differ from ancient viewpoints, we stand in danger of misinterpreting ancient texts. As the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas employ certain aspects of what it is to be a child in order to articulate what it means to enter God’s reign, the careful historical and cultural contextualization of these texts can only clarify the meanings of childlikeness that the ancient audiences might have understood.

Such emphasis on contextualization will also contribute to revamping and diversifying current scholarly approaches to children and childhood in early Christianity. While many scholars have recognized that there are “multifaceted views of and attitudes towards children” in the Bible,<sup>25</sup> biblical portrayals of children, especially regarding

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<sup>25</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, “Introduction,” in Bunge, Fretheim, and Gaventa, *The Child in the Bible*, xxiii.

Jesus's sayings about children and God's reign, are often taken literally. From these images, researchers tend to deduce that the beginning of Christianity prepared the way for a real valuation of children in history. As will be discussed below, this sort of claim is historically un-grounded and methodologically problematic. Prior to analyzing each of the selected texts, we can first explore critically how both modern sentiment towards children and a Christian-centric orientation have conditioned the academic understanding of children in early Christianity.<sup>26</sup> For this purpose, the following section begins with one specific example in which historical research on children and God's reign is misdirected by a focus on Jesus as paradigmatic rather than a focus on the diverse ideas of childhood in antiquity.

## 2.2 Scholarly Trends and Methodological Challenges

In 1996, William A. Strange published a short monograph regarding children and childhood in early Christianity,<sup>27</sup> and it begins by noting the gap between Jesus's sayings and the relative silence of "the early church" about children.<sup>28</sup> Taking this gap seriously, his project at the outset raises a historical and exegetical question: "What did children and

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<sup>26</sup> To see a critical evaluation of theological scholarship on children, see Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Jesus Loves the Little Children? An Exercise in the Use of Scripture," *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 1.7 (2010): 1–35.

<sup>27</sup> Strange, *Children in the Early Church*.

<sup>28</sup> "The early church" is Strange's phrase.



childhood mean in the culture of the New Testament world?”<sup>29</sup> To begin to delve into this question, Strange provides a compact survey of the experiences of and the attitudes toward children in the contemporaneous Jewish and Gentile worlds. This survey, as he states, is intended “not to misunderstand what either Jesus or the first Christians said about children.”<sup>30</sup> Despite this judicious methodological goal, Strange’s research does not thoroughly examine Jesus’s attitude toward children within its larger context but insists that Jesus’s treatment of children was unique. This problem becomes clear as he discusses the synoptic accounts of little children and the reign of God (Mark 10:13–16; Matt 19:13–15; 18:3; Luke 18:15–17). As he puts it in particular:

Was there something unusual or even unique about Jesus’s approach to children? It appears that there was, but it was not that he uniquely thought children were important while his contemporaries did not. Our investigation of Jewish education in the previous chapter showed us that the Jewish community was not neglectful of children. Quite the reverse: children were highly regarded as a blessing from God. They were protected by Jewish law and custom from the dangers to which Gentile children were open, such as exposure at birth. The rabbis made provision for teaching children, and for their thorough initiation into the ways of their ancestors. *But Jesus’s openness to children was for their own sake, not principally for their potential, and it was something unique to his ministry.*<sup>31</sup>

Whereas Strange himself cautions against interpreting that Jesus, unlike “his contemporaries,” uniquely considered children important, he nonetheless suggests that Jesus, unlike “the rabbis,” was unique inasmuch as he valued children as children and not for their potential as adults.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., vii. “The New Testament world” is also Strange’s terminology, which this dissertation intends to problematize.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., vii, 2–3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 50. Italics my own.

Many scholarly works published in recent decades reveal lines of thought similar to Strange's. These scholars, whether biblical exegetes, church historians, or theologians, show varying degrees of interest and different purposes in interpreting Jesus's sayings. However, they are strikingly homogenous in their approaches to the synoptic passages on children: there is something special about Jesus, if not about Christian beginnings.<sup>32</sup> For them, the biblical report that Jesus welcomes the little children serves as a proof of his historical extraordinariness. Such scholars tend to combine an emphasis on Jesus's welcoming of little children with other gospel stories about them (usually healing miracles), heavily emphasizing the significance of children in Jesus's ministry. On the basis of other gospel references to children, like Matt 7:9–11 (and Luke 11:11–13), 11:16–19, 11:25, and 21:15, for example, Strange further suggests that “children interested Jesus. References to children, encounters with children and imagery drawn from the world of children are woven into the fabric of Jesus's ministry in a remarkable way. ... Jesus himself gave particular significance to children.”<sup>33</sup>

With differences in degree, several scholars in biblical and historical studies exhibit the same sentiment that Strange does. Peter Müller, Judith M. Gundry, Andries G.

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<sup>32</sup> This is more explicitly found in theological scholarship. To name a few examples: N. N. Ronning, *Jesus and the Children* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1949); Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), see esp. A. Thatcher's article, “Beginning again with Jesus”; More recently, church historian Martin Marty writes, “in no known case in the classic literature of Greece and Rome was a child projected as a paradigm for adult behavior and intention” (p. 77), and that there is something “idiosyncratic” about Jesus (p. 78). *The Mystery of the Child* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). Cf. Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Strange, *Children in the Early Church*, 57.

van Aarde,<sup>34</sup> James M. M. Francis,<sup>35</sup> and Keith J. White<sup>36</sup> are particularly worth noting. They have all dealt with New Testament narratives about children, paying close attention to the gospel passages about children and God’s reign. Some of these authors will be mentioned in the following chapters; here let me briefly introduce their main points and similarities.

First, Peter Müller’s *In der Mitte der Gemeinde: Kinder im Neuen Testament* (1992) is a pioneering work in the study of biblical portrayals of children, and his analysis of the semantic fields of “child” in the New Testament is highly commendable.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he makes an unverifiable historical claim that children were “central to early Christian” communities both in reality and metaphorically.<sup>38</sup> Focusing much more on Jesus’s welcoming of little children in Mark 10:13–16 than any other New Testament passages and providing no comparative study of biblical references and other ancient *comparanda*, he puts forward his argument about the centrality of children in the beginnings of Christianity.

Similar approaches and arguments are found in the work of other New Testament scholars. Judith Gundry, a frequently cited figure in this subfield, has published a series

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<sup>34</sup> Andries G. van Aarde, “Jesus’ Affection towards Children and Matthew’s Tale of Two Kings,” *AcT* 24 (2004): 127–46.

<sup>35</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 97–146.

<sup>36</sup> Keith J. White, “‘He Placed a Little Child in the Midst’: Jesus, the Kingdom, and Children,” in Bunge, Fretheim, and Gaventa, *The Child in the Bible*, 353–74.

<sup>37</sup> This particular analysis has influenced Aasgaard’s article on Paul’s childhood language and also the present dissertation.

<sup>38</sup> Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde*, 392.

of articles on the gospel references to children.<sup>39</sup> She examines the significance of children in Jesus's teaching, understanding his sayings about children and God's reign as a request to "[place] children at the center of the community's attention as prime objects of its love and service, ... and to serve [them]."<sup>40</sup> In another article, analyzing Jesus's blessing of the children in Mark, she argues that Mark portrays Jesus as welcoming and embracing "children's full and equal participation in the eschatological reign of God."<sup>41</sup> However, her overall arguments are grounded in her intra-textual reading of select gospel references to children and the powerless. At one point, she even compares Mark 9:33–37 and its synoptic parallels with Plutarch's *Moralia* 492D and Diodorus 3.58.1–3, in which two women's action of taking children into their arms exemplifies affection toward and care for children. The significant difference she observes between Jesus and these two sources is the distinctiveness of Jesus's action: Unlike these women who became examples "for other *women*, Mark depicts Jesus, a *man*, taking a little child into his arms as an example for his *male* disciples in particular, and *all* disciples in general. There is no gender stereotyping here: welcoming children is the responsibility of all, male and female, who would be 'great.' Jesus thus redefines the service of children as a sign of

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<sup>39</sup> Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "'To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God': Jesus and Children," *ThTo* 56 (2000): 469-80; Judith M. Gundry, "Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus's Blessing of the Children (Mark 10:13–16) and the Purpose of Mark," in Bunge, Fretheim, and Gaventa, *The Child in the Bible*, 143–76.

<sup>40</sup> Gundry-Volf, "'To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God,'" 476. She also adds that "Jesus' teaching on welcoming children (1) informs social practice toward children and (2) suggests that these social practices serve to strengthen faith in Jesus and are themselves a form of this faith" (478).

<sup>41</sup> Gundry, "Children in the Gospel of Mark," 143.

greatness for all disciples” (italics original).<sup>42</sup> As James Murphy aptly observes, Gundry emphasizes “the inclusiveness of children in [Jesus’s] ministry” in contrast with “the contemporary cultural norms that relegated them to a marginal social status. ... [C]onsciously or not, her reading privileges Jesus as extraordinarily unique for his time. ... [S]he simultaneously downplays evidence of affection, sentimentality, and concern for children in the Hellenistic world of Jesus’s day.”<sup>43</sup>

That Jesus is a cultural hero for children in his time is a point that scholars constantly draw out of the gospels. Among them is James Francis. In his book, *Adults as Children*, he acknowledges that Jesus’s own use of child imagery in the gospels “contains a rich diversity and complexity of meanings.”<sup>44</sup> However, when explaining how Jesus highlights Judaism’s inclusion of children in relation to its “wider imagery of Israel as God’s son (child) and servant,” he contends that “[t]he actions and sayings of Jesus involving children are distinctive ... [I]t is therefore worth noting that Jesus’s own references to children and childhood are all non-pejorative, and there is no hint in his language that children represent the immature, the foolish and the stupid.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Andries G. van Aarde calls readers’ attention to the “multiple and independent

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<sup>42</sup> Gundry-Volf, ““To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God,”” 476. In this article, she concludes that “[t]he Gospels teach the reign of God as a children’s world, where children are the measure, rather than [sic] don’t measure up to adults, where the small are great and the great must become small” (480).

<sup>43</sup> James A. Murphy, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 30–33.

<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 145.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., abstract and 146. For Reider Aasgaard’s critical assessment of this book, see Aasgaard, review of *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* by James M. M. Francis, *Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 13 (2008): <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/v13/index.html>.

attestations” to Jesus’s welcoming of little children and uses them as direct evidence that “Jesus’ affection towards children should be taken as historically authentic.”<sup>46</sup> Reading the synoptic gospels and relying particularly on Matthew, he suggests that those children brought to Jesus for blessings are parentless “street urchins,” given the social context of first-century Herodian Palestine.<sup>47</sup> Keith White’s work presents a similar line of thought. As a leader of the Child Theology Movement, White asserts that the synoptic stories of children and the reign (particularly Matthew’s version) are about real children and do not merely use the children as a symbol for adult disciples. As he contends, the historical Jesus was “committed to the well-being of children.”<sup>48</sup>

Such interpretation, which magnifies the child-loving Jesus’s distinctiveness, can also be observed in historical inquiries into the place of children in early Christianity. For example, Sarah Currie is aware that “the child was as a paradigm as well as an anti-paradigm” in the New Testament and distinguishes between how children are presented “in the ideal world of Christian prescription” and “in practice.”<sup>49</sup> However, assuming that the non-Christian “pagan” world perceived children and childhood more negatively, she insists that even “the less ideal aspects of the child were re-written by Christianity. The child, in effect, put up some resistance ... With the coming of Christianity, it is possible to find the much more radical innovation of Christian adults being assimilated to the

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<sup>46</sup> van Aarde, “Jesus’ Affection towards Children and Matthew’s Tale of Two Kings,” 127, 130, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 127. Cf. Andries G. van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as Child of God* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> White, “He Placed a Little Child in the Midst,” 368.

<sup>49</sup> Currie, *Childhood and Christianity from Paul to the Council of Chalcedon*, 10–11.

status of children and manifesting a desire to be like children.”<sup>50</sup> While the objects of her analysis cover a broad temporal range, from the first-century gospels to the fifth-century mosaics of the triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, she neither sufficiently clarifies the distinction and interaction between “the real and conceptual [sic] children” in early Christianity<sup>51</sup> nor provides sufficient cultural *comparanda* for the evaluation of Christian materials. Instead, by mainly analyzing patristic writings and “antique Christian art” in which children are presented in a metaphorical and symbolic manner, she concludes that “Christianity made a considerable difference to the lives of children just as children made a difference to the practice of Christianity.”<sup>52</sup>

In sum, these scholars have made arguments that either idealize Jesus or romanticize children in early Christian communities. Whether they intended to or not, they represent Jesus’s affection and love for children as unique and/or children as central to early Christian communities. Even if some of these scholars present Jesus’s uniqueness or the importance of children to his ministry in passing comments, it is critical to note

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 10, 31.

<sup>51</sup> “The real and conceptual children” in her wording. Ibid., 10.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., abstract and 225. For similar historical arguments, see R. B. Lyman, “Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood,” in *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*, ed. Lloyd DeMause (New York, Psychohistory Press, 1974), 75–100; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*; Bakke, *When Children Became People*. These scholars in general see Christianity as playing a positive role in changing the ancient conception of children. However, recent studies point out that historical evidence of affection toward children, as well as practical, state-sponsored care for poor children, is also found in Greco-Roman materials. See e.g., Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Beryl Rawson, “Children as Cultural Symbols: Imperial Ideology in the Second Century,” in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, ed. Suzanne Dixon (London: Routledge, 2001), 21–42. Cf. Jerry Toner, “Child Leisure in the Roman Empire,” in Laes and Vuolanto, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, 107.

that such ideas often appear in the historical-critical research aiming to read Jesus's teachings in light of the ancient socio-cultural milieu. Behind such interpretive trends, we see a desire to find the valorization of young children in Jesus's mouth or, at least, an assumption that there is something unprecedented and positive about Christian attitudes towards children against the backdrop of the ancient Jewish and/or Greco-Roman culture.<sup>53</sup>

This fundamental problem manifests itself in the ways in which scholars deal with ancient materials about children, whether biblical texts or non-Christian sources. Three specific scholarly habits or tendencies are particularly conspicuous and thus worth discussing. First, as James Murphy recently showed, many studies tend to overstate Jesus's blessing of little children while glossing over his other teachings that might negatively affect the lives of children (e.g., Matt 10:34–38; Mark 10:29; Luke 12:51–53).<sup>54</sup> As much as the New Testament presents a Jesus who welcomes little children, it also contains another Jesus whose sayings can easily fit into anti-familial agendas: Jesus publicly turns away his own mother and siblings (Mark 3:31–35); he says that he has come to bring division to households, not peace (Matt 10:34–39); and he exhorts his disciples to “leave house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:29). For some scholars, a Jesus who cares about children also

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<sup>53</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting Horn and Marten's observation. Pointing out that in the gospel passages children function as models for the disciples' spiritual enlightenment, they attribute the synoptic sayings about welcoming children to the historical Jesus. They explain, “because of their dissimilarity to attitudes of the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. Children were generally not held up as models of spiritual enlightenment in Judaism and only rarely in early Christianity.” *Let the Little Children Come to Me*, 252–53 (cf. 346–52). Cf. Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 284–85.

<sup>54</sup> Murphy, *Kids and Kingdom*, 1–35.



has to be an advocate for conventional family values, yet their arguments become tenable only when they reduce, if not disregard, the significance of the subversive nature of Jesus's sayings. It is interesting to note that even those scholars who do deal with the counter-cultural statements of Jesus strive to tone down their radicalness by limiting the meaning of these passages to a narrow scope.<sup>55</sup>

Behind the overstating of Jesus's welcome of little children and the ignoring of other anti-family messages lurks a more serious problem. When scholars make historical statements about Jesus's positive valuation of children on the basis of the New Testament passages about children and God's reign, they tend to presume the historical factuality of Jesus's sayings in the canonical gospels. This tendency is quite puzzling, since the study of the synoptic gospels and the historical Jesus has informed us that many of the gospel stories may not report exactly what the historical Jesus said and did. There can be much doubt concerning whether or not these gospel accounts about children provide us with sufficient information to reconstruct the place of children in the historical Jesus's ministry. Moreover, Jesus's uniqueness or distinctiveness is always understood only in relation to the canonical gospels. This approach implies that non-canonical materials, though written almost at the same time as or slightly later than the canonical gospels, are less historical and thereby less important for attesting to the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, many scholars also try to tone down the anti-familial nature of some of Jesus's teachings. See, for example, Strange, *Children in the Early Church*, 60: "In the light of the gospels' whole presentation we must recognize that Jesus was not attempting to destroy the family, or to eject children from the family framework in which their lives are set. . . . Perhaps the call here is to leave the secure network of resources and relationships on which the potential disciple depends, rather than to abandon those who depend on him for security and well-being."

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, K. C. Hansen (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). I suggest that we should revisit the canonical vs. non-canonical frame that some scholars use, by which certain gospels are not evaluated with the same

Instead, we should first consider the individual character of each gospel community, as they interpreted and redacted the Jesus traditions quite differently.<sup>57</sup> In a similar vein, we should question whether the literary representation of children in the New Testament serves as a window into the real lives of children during the beginnings of Christianity. To what degree can we insist that those references to children reflect a potentially distinct treatment of children in the Jesus movement and the earliest Christian communities? Rather than attempting to infer one overarching historical view of children from different early Christian materials, we should understand that children are featured in those Christian documents in order to serve certain rhetorical or theological purposes.

Another critical issue lies in the methods that scholars use to configure non-Christian historical materials and compare them with the gospel references to children. Aiming to pursue a comparative enterprise, many recent studies on the topic of children in early Christianity, not just Strange's book, begin with a section or a chapter on ancient children and childhood to provide some historical background.<sup>58</sup> This contextualization sometimes leads to a co-optation of ancient historical materials that can easily feed a

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standards about the historical Jesus. For example, we should ask whether the Gospel of Thomas reflected some of the genuine sayings of Jesus or not.

<sup>57</sup> In line with this idea, it is worth noting that the fellows of the Jesus Seminar judged that most of the synoptic sayings about children and the kingdom did not originate with the historical Jesus. Mark 10:14 and its parallel verses (Matt 19:14; Luke 18:16) drew a pink designation but the scholars "agreed that the words in Mark are probably not an exact reproduction of something Jesus said" (89). With the exception of this case, the other related verses received black and gray votes (and blue in the case of Matt 18:3). Robert Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993), 89, 213, 221.

<sup>58</sup> These section titles are descriptive in nature yet they carry a normative interest. E.g., Strange, "Children in the World of the New Testament" and Bakke, "Children in the Greco-Roman World: Children in Pagan Antiquity."

story of Christian exceptionalism while “conveniently [ignoring]” the fact that “there is a rich body of sacred literature with a wide variety of positions on children.”<sup>59</sup> Such interpretations often exaggerate adult-centered cultural norms in antiquity and draw only on historical, philosophical, and legal material that may paint the lives of ancient children and the social viewing of them unfavorably. Whether they intend to or not, in order to make Jesus (and/or Christianity) look special, these interpretations not only overlook non-Christian source materials that obviously present affection shown by adults towards children but also overstate the low view of children in Jewish and/or “pagan” documents. This sort of approach is often utilized in service of the interpreter’s hopes of finding a scriptural basis for enhancing children’s well-being in the present world. Even so, this selective reading of ancient documents belittles, if not disregards, the values of Judaism or the Greco-Roman world and makes the reader think that Christianity, at least in its treatment of children, represented something enlightening to the uncivilized or cruel ancient world. In this way, many scholars and commentators participate not only in the methodological mischief of artificially separating ancient non-Christian materials from authentically Christian ones<sup>60</sup> but also in Christian exceptionalism in their treatment of biblical passages about children.

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<sup>59</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Jesus Loves the Little Children?,” 9.

<sup>60</sup> As Laura Nasrallah recently pointed out, “scholars of the New or Christian Testament often miss the opportunity to use a range of Roman-period sources. Both fields [Roman history and New Testament studies] have suffered from the Tupperware syndrome of sealing our texts away in separate containers, and/or of thinking that our heuristic categories of Christians, pagans, and Jews were largely separate in antiquity.” Laura S. Nasrallah, review of *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth*, by James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, eds., *BMCR* 2017.08.37: <http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2017/2017-08-37.html>.

For this reason, Amy-Jill Levine calls for more nuanced and sensitive interpretations of biblical references to children, particularly cautioning against anti-Semitism in this growing field. As she suggests, scholarly “re-creations of the early Christian views of children should be much more hesitant, especially concerning the first two centuries.”<sup>61</sup> As Marcia J. Bunge aptly puts it, the child can be used as a category of analysis, like gender, race, and class, and our attention to children can “shed new light on the structure and themes of a [biblical] text as a whole.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, the question of how we can conduct this sort of analysis requires us to reflect critically upon current scholarly practices in the field of children and childhood in early Christianity.<sup>63</sup> Thus, when emphasizing the potential of the child as an analytic category or a thematic focus, we should establish sound methodological grounds for analysis and be ready to offer a critical evaluation of our scholarship.<sup>64</sup> It is an ongoing challenge this fast-growing field faces.

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<sup>61</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Theological Education, the Bible, and History: Détente in the Culture Wars,” in Balch and Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context*, 332.

<sup>62</sup> Bunge, “Introduction,” in *The Child in the Bible*, xviii.

<sup>63</sup> Miller-McLemore’s “Jesus Loves the Little Children?” is a good example of this kind of reflection.

<sup>64</sup> On this point, I am particularly influenced by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who calls for careful evaluations of ideological interests behind scholarly works. See *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 26–27.

### 3. *HIER STEHE ICH*: MAIN QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The present dissertation seeks to distance itself from a scholarly desire to excavate the historical Jesus's own attitude toward children, which can easily endorse an exceptionalist perspective in which Christian sources are interpreted against other religious and cultural phenomena about children in the ancient Mediterranean world. Instead, my research begins by revisiting the observation that children are frequently mentioned together with God's kingdom (or reign) in early Christian literature. When defining what it is like to enter God's reign, early Christ followers seem to turn to children as a useful model to "think with," yet the ways in which they import images of children from their culture may not be identical. As my analysis of the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas will show, the portrayals of children associated with God's reign may not contribute to a conclusion about *the* early Christian view of children. Instead, the different ways of connecting little children to those entering God's reign urge us to forge new directions in research on this topic. Intending to take a different direction from most of the preceding New Testament studies on children, this dissertation does not attempt to verify whether the historical Jesus loved little children or to reconstruct the lives of children in early Christian communities solely based on their biblical representation. Rather, I direct my readers' attention to the ways in which children are employed in early Christian literature, asking how images of young children contributed to the formulation of the ideas of God's reign.

#### 3.1 Contextualization and Situational Incongruity

The present research pursues deep historical and cultural contextualization, inspired by J. Z. Smith's comparative methods in the study of religion. As he notes,

[T]he study of early Christianities and the religions of late antiquity] is an area of scholarly inquiry, not unlike others within the human sciences, where progress is made not so much by the uncovering of new facts or documents as by looking again with new perspectives on familiar materials. For this reason, matters of methods and models ought to be central.<sup>65</sup>

Questioning how the scholars of religion should be able to choose data, Smith particularly highlights their “effort at articulate choice,” which should not be hampered by the preoccupation with “the boundaries of canon” or by “the limits of a historic community” in constituting the scholars’ intellectual domain.<sup>66</sup> This stance is found in the present study, which aims to deconstruct the academic presumption of dichotomies between Christian and pagan, orthodoxy and heresy, and canonical and non-canonical. These dichotomies have often resulted in “much mischief,”<sup>67</sup> for these sorts of categorization have served to give normative importance to one side of the dichotomy—that is, the winner of history—while eliminating or marginalizing the existence of the other.<sup>68</sup> Responding to this critique, the present study seeks to draw out a corrective comprehension of religious data. In order to avoid privileging normative, canonical

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<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), viii.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi–xii.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “Map Is Not Territory,” in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 294.

<sup>68</sup> Especially by oftentimes labeling the other as “insignificant,” “invisible,” or even “non-human.”

materials of early Christianity in its investigation of images of children, this study pursues parity of interests among primary texts. For instance, I give equal attention and methodological application to both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas without prioritizing the former as a more authentic Christian text.

The same scholarly attitude also applies to religious and historical data of antiquity that are not usually treated as “Christian.” As Smith aptly observes, the Protestant scholarship of New Testament and early Christianity has failed to establish “parity with non-Christian materials” for comparative research.<sup>69</sup> For example, “while [the religions of late antiquity are] usually studied as ‘background’ for the emergence of Christianity, such a perspective radically and illegitimately foreshortens the phenomena and, thus, radically distorts what is most illuminating.”<sup>70</sup> In comprehending data from the first few centuries CE, many scholars’ blind preoccupation with theological conformity and congruency between modern (Protestant) and primitive Christianity becomes problematic.<sup>71</sup> By projecting a Christian triumphalist perspective onto ancient materials, these scholars have repeatedly insisted on the uniqueness, the distinctive nature, or the novelty of Christianity in their comparative research on such phenomena as the Christ-

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<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 87.

<sup>70</sup> He adds, “...[A]lmost every religious tradition [in late antiquity] has had a two-thousand-year history” (Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, xi).

<sup>71</sup> This kind of conception obviously tends to result in a biased interpretation of history. For instance, in many present-day biblical commentaries or ecclesiastical histories, it is not difficult to find the triumphalist perspective that while other mystery religions in antiquity were too fragile to survive, early Christianity’s originality made it durable and long-lasting. For more detailed discussion, see Burton L. Mack, “After Drudgery Divine,” *Numen* 39 (1992): 231. The same sort of critique is applicable to the scholarly discussion of children and childhood in early Christianity.

event, gospel-genre, eschatology,<sup>72</sup> and, I now add, imagery of the child in early Christianity.

In such argumentation, the religions of the ancient Mediterranean world existed only for the sake of elevating the authenticity of Christian origins. For instance, Smith elaborately analyzes the Protestant scholarship's treatment of Judaism: On the one hand, in order to distinguish Judaism's pure origin from the pagan, "Roman" root with which Catholicism was associated, the apologetic scholars use Judaism to insulate early Christianity by "guarding it against 'influence' from its 'environment' [paganism]." On the other hand, like the Hellenistic traditions, Judaism is regarded as "an object to be transcended by early Christianity."<sup>73</sup>

As section 2 above shows, we have seen many examples of improper comparison and apologetic argumentation in scholarly works on children in early Christianity. At the core of their methodological issues lies what Smith calls an "illicit transfer" from theological affirmation to historical statement.<sup>74</sup> When understanding those "Christian" texts in light of other ancient materials speaking of children and childhood, we should end "the imposition of the extra-historical categories of uniqueness" and should abstain from falsely equating difference with uniqueness.<sup>75</sup> By eschewing the apologetic and totalizing impulses toward uniqueness, exceptionalism, and triumphalism, we will be able

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<sup>72</sup> Included in the list of such scholars are Rudolf Bultmann, Albert Schweitzer, H. J. Cadbury, and so on. See Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 39–41.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.



to give proper attention to the diversity, difference, and general messiness that characterize ancient religious data about children and God's reign. Rather than attempting to extract from the chosen texts *the* separate early Christian view of children that is immune to the surrounding cultures, the current study focuses on demonstrating how differently these texts participate in the larger intellectual and cultural discourses on children and childhood in antiquity that can be found in Jewish and Greco-Roman materials.

Moreover, adopting Smith's emphasis on "situational incongruity" in religious data, my research assumes that "for a given group at a given time to choose this or that mode of interpreting their tradition is to opt for a particular way of relating themselves to their historical past and social present."<sup>76</sup> In other words, as I explore how early followers of Christ employ childlikeness in the historical processes of understanding God's reign, I will ask in what kind of historical and rhetorical situation each of these texts deploys images of little children. What aspects of a child do they amplify within their cultural context in order to be intelligible to their audiences? Finally, what kinds of understanding of God's reign do these images construct differently from one another?

The historical and cultural contextualization of the chosen texts is intended to lay the groundwork for answering these questions. Therefore, each chapter begins with a philological and lexical study on the variety of Greek, Coptic, and/or Latin terms used to refer to the child in the select texts. In addition, each text's images of little children will be juxtaposed and considered together with a set of philosophical, historical, and/or archaeological materials pertaining to ancient children and childhood in antiquity. By

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<sup>76</sup> Smith, "Preface," in *Map Is Not Territory*, xi.

articulating the ways in which each text draws on ancient discourses on children, I will demonstrate how creatively and diversely each of these texts constructs the meaning of childlikeness as a process of imagining an ideal human being prepared to enter God's reign.

### 3.2 Rhetorical-Critical Paradigm

Together with historical methods informed by J. Z. Smith's formulation of a comparative study, this research pays close attention to the rhetorical function of childhood imagery by using Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's rhetorical-critical paradigm of biblical interpretation as a theoretical framework. If Smith helps the current study refrain from a Christian apologetic and exceptionalist agenda in situating various deployments of child imagery within their historical contexts, Schüssler Fiorenza helps it avoid accepting literally the textual representation of children and childhood in Jesus's and Paul's teachings.

As I have pointed out earlier, scholars have not paid much attention to what Aasgaard articulates about "the use of children as source for metaphor."<sup>77</sup> Since "notions about childhood serve as means to express ideas about other things" in New Testament references to children, we should note that "the issue of children could be used rhetorically for a diverse number of purposes, while at the same time also revealing certain attitudes towards the children themselves."<sup>78</sup> In the selected texts, Jesus's teaching

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<sup>77</sup> Aasgaard, "Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity," 32.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 32. Cf. Karen L. King, "'In your midst as a child' — 'In the form of an old man': Images of Aging and Immortality in Ancient Christianity," in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body, and*

about becoming *like* little children and Paul's injunction to stop being *like* infants use children figuratively; Jesus and Paul are not speaking to real children as the intended audience or bringing the lives of children to the core of their speeches. Instead, using particular characteristics of the child that are intelligible to their adult readers/hearers, these sayings clearly invite the adult audience to reflect upon an ideal believer's entering (or inheriting) the reign of God.

As the child serves as a figurative analogy to help the reader think about an ideal self, this dissertation seeks not only to articulate those particular perceptions of children or experiences in childhood that are invoked in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas but also to examine the rhetorical functions of child images within these documents as a way of negotiating and promoting particular theological ideas for the audiences. I also see that childhood language and these religious texts using it should be, in Schüssler Fiorenza's words, "conceived as cultural conventions, or sociopolitical practices, that enable speakers and audiences, writers and readers to negotiate linguistic ambiguities and to create meaning in specific rhetorical contexts and sociopolitical locations."<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, I assume that the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas are "rhetorical discourses that must be investigated as to their persuasive power and argumentative functions in particular historical and political situations."<sup>80</sup> The chosen texts' images of children thus serve as

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*Transformative Practices in Early Christianity*, ed. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 59–60.

<sup>79</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 21

<sup>80</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 44.

rhetorical mediums for persuading the readers of certain spiritual/moral values or ideals, shaping and affecting their self-understanding in concrete historical and political contexts.

While situating these texts' references to children and God's reign within the broader cultural context of antiquity, we should analyze how in each case the author emphasizes certain aspects and meanings of what it is to be a child while suppressing others. The way in which each of these texts makes meaning out of childlikeness participates in a larger rhetorical scheme that tries to inculcate the audience with particular idea(s) about a self. Therefore, this dissertation also explores the rhetorical situation of each text by considering the ways in which it constructs the (inscribed) audience, arranges source materials, and juxtaposes childlikeness with other theological ideas.<sup>81</sup> While exploring how imagery of the child operates within each text's presuppositions, resources, and modes of differentiation in a selective and strategic manner, this research will elaborate on "how [these images of children have] come to possess power—what they do in society [and religion] as contrasted to what they are."<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. AN OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Using historical and cultural contextualization and a rhetorical-critical perspective on religious texts, the following chapters analyze the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas in turn. Each chapter begins with a clarification of terminology

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<sup>81</sup> For a complex rhetorical model of interpretation, see *Ibid.*, 123–8.

<sup>82</sup> Rayme McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Practice," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*, ed. J. L. Lucaites et al. (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 454; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 80–81.

and a brief evaluation of current scholarship and then moves on to providing a context in which to understand each text's portrayal of childlikeness. The last portion of each section will explore the rhetorical power and implications of childlikeness for ancient audiences, asking what kind of religious self or human ideal should arise in relationship to God's reign.

Chapter II, entitled "Entering the Kingdom, but Not Like the Sons of Earthly Kings," explores the Gospel of Matthew's references to little children and the kingdom of heaven. All the synoptic gospels contain Jesus's saying "Let the little children come to me ... for it is to such as these that the reign of God belongs" (Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). While scholars have long discussed Jesus's welcoming and blessing of little children primarily by focusing on the Gospel of Mark, Matthew's version of these events (18:1–5; 19:13–15) is worthy of a separate analysis because Matthew makes a more direct connection between the childlike condition and the kingdom of heaven than Mark and Luke do. Thus, this chapter explores how young children function as a symbolic paradigm for the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel by situating the imagery of children within the broader context of antiquity. First, three literary features unique to Matthew's version are discussed: Jesus's injunction to become like little children, the repeated phrase "these little ones" in chapter 18, and the section on the temple tax that is inserted between the second prediction of the Passion and the disciples' question about greatness. Second, these observations lead to the insight that Matthew juxtaposes children and the kingdom of heaven with the socio-political conception of children in the Roman Empire. In particular, reading the Gospel of Matthew's references to "sons of the earthly kings" and little children in light of Josephus and the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, I suggest that

the childlikeness described in Jesus's sayings activates not only the notion of the lowly status of children in the first century CE but also the imagery of foreign princes used to propagate the idea of the Empire's power and dominance. In turn, Matthew's deployment of the childlike condition urges its mostly Jewish readers to abandon their aspirations for political and economic privileges in the imperial context of the eastern Mediterranean. Instead, it asks them to position themselves even lower, to turn to the least and the "other" of their society, and to seek out an alternative religious and political community that anticipates the kingdom of heaven.

In Chapter III, titled "Infants in Christ, Not Children of God's Kingdom: The Rhetoric of Childhood in 1 Corinthians," I observe that while scholars have long discussed Paul's self-portrait as a parent and the Corinthians' status as his beloved children (τέκνα), little has been explored regarding the Corinthians' state as infants (νήπιοι/παιδιά) or this imagery's potential connection to the political language of God's reign. By reading Paul's use of infant-like characteristics in 1 Corinthians alongside other ancient discourses on young children, in this chapter I demonstrate how Paul's rhetoric of infancy draws on the ancient notion of the infant's lack of *logos* (speech, reason, or rationality), thereby signifying the audience's unpreparedness for God's reign. To criticize the Corinthians' preoccupation with both eloquent and charismatic speech, Paul refers to the imperfect speech and irrational attributes of the infant and contrasts them with those of the adult. The temporal difference between infancy and adulthood in turn invokes the two-fold implication of *logos*: the full attainment of *logos* (1) earns a person full participation in civil society and (2) qualifies an heir to receive a parent's property. This understanding suggests that the rhetorical deployment of infancy functions not only

to undermine the Corinthians' equal participation in the *ekklēsia* but also to reinforce a particular notion of God's eschatological reign that only perfect and rational adults (τέλειοι) can inherit.

The last text I analyze is the Gospel of Thomas. Chapter IV, "Entering the Kingdom as a Baby: Age, Gender, and Spiritual Transformation in the Gospel of Thomas," pays close attention to this gospel's four logia (4, 22, 37, 46) that feature the infant as a symbol for seeing Jesus and entering the reign of God. Several scholars have demonstrated how this gospel's presentation of the infant echoes the primordial being's state in Gen 1:27 (cf. Gal 3:27). Behind this argument lies an assumption about the child's sexual purity, which serves to illustrate the ideal condition of being "neither male nor female" for the reign. While outwardly convincing, this approach has rarely been discussed in terms of ancient ideas and practices related to a young child's body and sexuality. By revisiting the idea that the child was considered "asexual" or "innocent" in antiquity, this chapter explores how the Gospel of Thomas deploys images of infants that may have been both culturally recognizable and religiously appealing to its ancient readers. While keeping the subtle differences between the Coptic words used for "child" in mind, I examine the four logia concerning infants in light of the social conceptions of the child's age and gender in the ancient Mediterranean. This inquiry suggests that the Gospel of Thomas draws on and expands the long-held notion that infants (usually zero–two years old) demonstrate no sexual differences between male and female. Highlighting that the description of a seven-day-old baby, nursing imagery, and nudity altogether signify a liminal, non-gendered condition that is beyond sexual purity, I argue that the

infant in this gospel functions to articulate the primordial human's ideal state, which transcends gender boundaries and the social hierarchies of age.

Chapter V concludes my research by emphasizing how creatively and discursively early Christ followers deployed specific aspects of the child to shape their religious self-understanding. The child's marginalized status (Matthew), intellectual incapability (1 Corinthians), and non-gendered state (Thomas) are diversely employed in these documents in order to promote the socio-political, eschatological, or ascetic ideals of God's reign, respectively. Paying close attention to historical-cultural valence and rhetorical effect in early Christian uses of children, this research cautions against Christian exceptionalist historical claims about the treatment of children in antiquity. It requests that we instead look at the functions of children in ancient Christian discourse, the developmental characteristics and social situations of which contributed to shaping and revealing diverse religious ideas about the ideal human condition.



## Chapter II

### Entering the Kingdom, but Not Like the Sons of Earthly Kings: The Socio-Political Implications of Childlikeness in the Gospel of Matthew

#### 1. TEXT AND INTRODUCTION

**17** <sup>24</sup> When they came to Capernaum, those who collect the temple tax approached Peter and said, “Your teacher does not pay the temple tax, does he?” <sup>25</sup> He said, “Yes, he does.” And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom **do the kings of the earth** take toll or tribute? From their **sons** or from others?” <sup>26</sup> When he said, “From others.” Jesus said to him, “Then the **sons** are free. <sup>27</sup> Well, so that we may not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me.”

**18** <sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Then, who is the greatest in **the kingdom [i.e., reign] of heaven?**” <sup>2</sup> He called a **little child**, whom he put among them, <sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you turn and become like **little children**, you will never enter **the kingdom of heaven.**” <sup>4</sup> Whoever lowers himself like this **little child** is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.<sup>83</sup>

**17** <sup>24</sup> Ἐλθόντων δὲ αὐτῶν εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ προσῆλθον οἱ τὰ δίδραγμα λαμβάνοντες τῷ Πέτρῳ καὶ εἶπαν, Ὁ διδάσκαλος ὑμῶν οὐ τελεῖ [τὰ] δίδραγμα; <sup>25</sup> λέγει, Ναί. καὶ ἐλθόντα εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν προέφθασεν αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων, Τί σοι δοκεῖ, Σίμων; οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς ἀπὸ τίνων λαμβάνουσιν τέλη ἢ κῆνσον; ἀπὸ τῶν υἰῶν αὐτῶν ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων; <sup>26</sup> εἰπόντος δέ, Ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων, ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἄρα γε ἐλεύθεροί εἰσιν οἱ υἱοί. <sup>27</sup> ἵνα δὲ μὴ σκανδαλίσωμεν αὐτούς, πορευθεὶς εἰς θάλασσαν βάλε ἄγκιστρον καὶ τὸν ἀναβάντα πρῶτον ἰχθὺν ἄρον, καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εὐρήσεις στατήρα: ἐκεῖνον λαβὼν δὸς αὐτοῖς ἀντὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ σοῦ.

**18** <sup>1</sup> Ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ προσῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες, Τίς ἄρα μείζων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν; <sup>2</sup> καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν <sup>3</sup> καὶ εἶπεν, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. <sup>4</sup> ὅστις οὖν ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν ὡς τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο, οὗτός

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<sup>83</sup> Emphasis my own.

ἔστιν ὁ μείζων ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. <sup>5</sup>καὶ ὃς ἐὰν δέξηται ἐν παιδίον τοιοῦτο ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται.

“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14; cf. Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). All the synoptic gospels contain this saying as part of the well-known story often titled by editors “Jesus blesses the little children.” This pronouncement story is usually paired with another gospel account in which a little child is featured when Jesus’s disciples dispute greatness (Matt 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–7; Luke 9:46–48).<sup>84</sup> Because of the Markan priority and the two-document hypothesis, New Testament scholarship has generally paid more attention to Mark’s version (9:33–37; 10:13–16) than those of the other two gospels.<sup>85</sup> However, while Mark

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<sup>84</sup> These two sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew constitute two separate pronouncement stories about children (18:1–5; 19:13–15), also found similarly in Mark and Luke. On the basis of Markan priority, many scholars acknowledge the similarities in form and content between Mark 9:33–37 and 10:13–17 and believe them to be originally one literary unit. See Peter Spitaler, “Welcoming a Child as a Metaphor for Welcoming God’s Kingdom: A Close Reading of Mark 10.13–16,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 441. This story’s form is described in various ways (e.g., apophthegm, aphoristic story, pronouncement story, aphoristic commentary, etc.) depending on the scholar. This chapter uses “pronouncement story,” following Vernon K. Robbins, “Pronouncement Stories and Jesus’ Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach,” *Semeia* 29 (1983): 42–74, while keeping in mind Crossan’s understanding of Matthew 18:1–5 as an “aphoristic commentary.” John D. Crossan, “Kingdom and Children: A Study in the Aphoristic Tradition,” *Semeia* 29 (1983): 88.

<sup>85</sup> See e.g., Matthew Black, “The Markan Parable of the Child in the Midst,” *ExpTim* 59 (1947–48): 14–16; J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children (Mk 10:13–16 par.),” *NovT* 25 (1983): 1–18; Camille Focant, “Les méthodes dans la lecture biblique. Un exemple: Mc 10, 13–16,” *La foi et le temps* 16 (1986): 119–39; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 266–71; Jean Delorme, “Royaume de Dieu, royaume d’enfance (Mc 10, 13–16)” in *Ta Parole est ma joie: mélanges bibliques offerts au Père Léonard Ramaroson* (Ambatoroka-Antananarivo: Institut supérieur de théologie, 1991), 32–42; Peter Spitaler, “Welcoming a Child as a Metaphor for Welcoming God’s Kingdom: A Close Reading of Mark 10.13–16,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 441; Gundry, “Children in the Gospel of Mark,” 143–76. In addition, scholars tend to discuss briefly the Matthean and Lukan versions when focusing primarily on the Markan passages, e.g., G. Ringshausen, “Die Kinder der Weisheit zur Auslegung von Mk 10:13–16 par.” *ZNW* 77 (1986): 34–63; U. Heckel, “Die Kindersegnung Jesu und das Segnen von Kindern: Neutestamentliche und praktisch-theologische Überlegungen zu Mk 10,13–16 par.” *TBei* 32 (2001): 327–45; F. Beißer, “Markus 10,13–16 (parr)—*doch ein Text für die Kindertaufe*,” *KD* 41 (1995): 244–51; Gundry-Volf, ““To Such as

and Luke narrate the two stories with similar wording and structure, Matthew places more emphasis on childlikeness as a condition for entering the kingdom of heaven.<sup>86</sup> For example, Jesus's aphorism in Mark 9:33–37 and Luke 9:46–48 focuses solely on welcoming a little child as a way of welcoming Jesus and eventually God.<sup>87</sup> There is no overt connection between the child and the kingdom of God.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, Matthew narrates this story quite differently. This gospel not only repeatedly mentions “the

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These Belongs the Reign of God,” 469–80; idem. “The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament,” in Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*, 29–60; James L. Bailey, “Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13–16,” *WW* 15 (1995): 58–67. Concerning scholarly works exploring the Matthean account (more or less exclusively), see White, “He Placed a Little Child in the Midst,” 353–74; Don Garlington, “Who is the Greatest?” *Journal of the Evangelical and Theological Society* 53 (2010): 287–316; and Sharon Betsworth, “The Child and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 1.4 (2010): <http://childhoodandreligion.com/issues/volume-1/>.

<sup>86</sup> This chapter translates βασιλεία as “kingdom,” while acknowledging that current New Testament scholarship prefers “reign.” This is because the repeated phrase characteristic of Matthew, ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (“the kingdom of heavens” or “heavenly reign”), presents a Jewish understanding of God as “heavens” (שָׁמַיִם) and emphasizes God’s βασιλεία as both spatial territory and sovereignty. In addition, ‘the kingdom of heaven’ reads better in English than ‘the reign of heaven’ and clearly shows its antithetical relationship with earthly kings. Cf. Robert Foster “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven’?: Matthew’s Terminology Revisited,” *NTS* 48 (2002): 487–99, who understands the Matthean phrase “the kingdom of heaven” as the gospel author’s deliberate rhetorical and sociological strategies to emphasize the readers’ identity as God’s true people. See also Jung-Sik, Cha, “마태복음의 ‘하늘나라’와 신학적 상상력 (The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew and [its] Theological Imagination),” *한국기독교신학논총 (Korean Journal of Christian Studies)* 46.1 (2006): 57–88. See also n. 5 in the Introduction above.

<sup>87</sup> The entire issue of *Semeia* 29 (*Kingdom and Children: Aphorism, Chreia, Structure*, [1983]) is devoted to the gospel stories about children and the kingdom, and scholars such as John Dominic Crossan, Vernon K. Robbins, and Daniel Patte each provide either a form-critical or structural analysis of Matthew’s version. See n. 84 above.

<sup>88</sup> Both Mark and Luke have a reference to the kingdom (or reign) only in the second pronouncement story (Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17). Whereas this story in Mark and Luke offers a little child as an exemplary figure worthy of the reign of God, the two gospels do not specify the meaning of “receiving the kingdom as a little child” and only leave it to speculation.

kingdom of heaven” in both stories (Matt 18:1–5; 19:13–15)<sup>89</sup> but also places in Jesus’s mouth two sayings that are unique to Matthew’s Jesus in the first pronouncement story: “Unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever lowers himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:3–4).

This close link between little children and the kingdom of heaven causes us to wonder whether a new idea of being like a child is formulated in Matthew’s redaction. Is Matthew’s gospel seeking to promote a distinctive quality beyond ethical humility (“lowering oneself” in Matt 18:4) by foregrounding childlikeness as a condition for entering the kingdom? This question is worth asking, especially when one considers not only Matt 18:3–4 but also Matthew’s special material placed before the pronouncement story. The temple tax anecdote (17:24–27), unique to Matthew, creates a different interpretive atmosphere for the following passage on children and the kingdom.

This chapter begins its analysis by asking how Matthew’s temple tax episode (17:24–27) might affect the ancient audience’s understanding of the story about the kingdom and children (18:1–5). Of particular importance to this inquiry is a literary observation of Matthew’s special material (17:24–27), which creates two juxtapositions not found in Mark or Luke. First, Matthew’s redaction draws a parallel between “the kings of the earth” (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) in 17:24–27 and “the kingdom of heaven” (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) in 18:1–5. Second, while this juxtaposition directs the reader’s attention to the existence of two different political realities, another significant contrast

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<sup>89</sup> The word “kingdom,” including the phrases, “kingdom of Heaven,” “of God,” and “your kingdom,” is found a total of 53 times in Matthew’s Gospel (vs. 32 times in Luke).

arises from the two pericopae, namely, the earthly kings' children (or "sons" in 17:25–26) versus little children (18:2–5). If we understand these two juxtapositions within the implications that the temple tax had for Matthew's community, we may gain a fresh insight into the meaning of childlikeness in this gospel. In the post-70 CE eastern Mediterranean setting,<sup>90</sup> the question of taxation and royal kinship in Matthew 17:24–27 seems to invoke a traumatic historical memory and political tension familiar to Matthew's largely Jewish hearers who received this text. In light of the Roman occupation of Judea, the contrast between the sons of earthly kings and little children may evoke the issue of socio-economic disparities among children.

As a way of articulating the childlike condition that Matthew's audience is told to emulate in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, this chapter pays close attention to both the historical and the literary details of Matthew 17:24–18:5 and explores how this passage's references to children engage with socio-political aspects of childhood in the Roman Empire. I will first explore the connotations of the Greek words used for the child (e.g., παιδίον, υἱός) and then examine the historical implications of the economic and political terms that Matthew's special material uses (e.g., δίδραχμον, κῆνσος, βασιλεύς). Consequently, I will suggest that Matthew not only draws a theological message from the

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<sup>90</sup> It is generally accepted among scholars that Matthew was written in 80–90 CE. Antioch, the third largest city of the Roman Empire, is often proposed as Matthew's provenance. See Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Carter, *Matthew and Empire*. However, due to a lack of clear evidence, other cities in Palestine and Syria are also sometimes considered. For example, L. Michael White opposes the Antioch proposal and suggests an upper-Galilean/lower-Syrian location for Matthew's geographical setting. "Crisis Management and Boundary Maintenance: The Social Location of the Matthean Community," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991): 211–47. Whether in Antioch, Galilee, or elsewhere, Matthew's community has a predominantly Jewish, Greek-speaking character, which makes it possible to locate it in the eastern Mediterranean region.

lowly, marginalized condition of children living in a region occupied by the Romans but also evokes the imagery of foreign princes whom Rome adopted to propagate the idea of the Empire's dominance and prosperity. What comes to the fore from the tax issue in Matthew's historical setting and this gospel's allusion to the Herodian princes is far beyond an internalized ethical humility that adult disciples should cultivate. Rather, the childlikeness enshrined in the Matthean passage points to the radical abandonment of political and economic privilege in the Roman imperial context, a communal ideal that Matthew's hearers should live out to prepare for the kingdom of heaven.

## 2. MATTHEW'S USE OF CHILDREN AND LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

### 2.1 Terminologies and Scholarship

Matthew uses a variety of words to denote the child. In addition to τέκνον and υἱός (“child” and “son”), terms that assume a relationship to a parent figure,<sup>91</sup> Matthew uses Greek terms like παιδίον, παῖς,<sup>92</sup> νήπιος,<sup>93</sup> and θηλάζων<sup>94</sup> to refer to a young child. Among these words, παιδίον appears most frequently, used for a wide range of figures in diverse contexts: the newborn Jesus (throughout chapter 2), little children in the

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<sup>91</sup> See chap. II.2.

<sup>92</sup> Just as the semantic range that παῖς covers is broad, Matthew's use of this word is likewise broad: it is used for male children from 2 years old and under (ἀπὸ διετοῦς καὶ κατωτέρω; Matt 2:16), the centurion's sick servant/child (8:5–13), Jesus as God's chosen servant (12:18; Isaiah 42:1), the epileptic boy (Matt 17:18) and children who cry out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (21:15).

<sup>93</sup> Matt 11:25; 21:16.

<sup>94</sup> Matt 21:16. “Nursling” or “baby” (from θηλάζω, “to suckle”).

marketplace (11:16), children whose number is not counted in the two feeding miracles (14:21 and 15:38),<sup>95</sup> and little children as a paradigm for the kingdom of heaven (18:2–4; 19:13–14).<sup>96</sup> In the two pericopae that connect children with the kingdom of heaven, the specific age of the little child(ren) is not known. However, one can at least assume from the infancy narrative that Matthew’s usage of παιδίον is inclusive of a newborn (cf. νήπιος). In addition, considering that παιδίον is also a diminutive of παῖς, Matthew seems to use this word in a narrower sense than παῖς (cf. 21:15–16), with an emphasis on being little or young.<sup>97</sup>

This linguistic survey enables us to see two semantic characteristics of παιδίον within the whole context of Matthew.<sup>98</sup> First, while the common assumption about παιδίον’s referents is that the term conveys the idea of servanthood, for παῖς often refers to “slave” in ancient literature,<sup>99</sup> παιδίον does not seem to evoke servanthood *per se*.

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<sup>95</sup> The same expression, χωρὶς γυναικῶν καὶ παιδίων (“besides women and children”), is used at the end of the feeding of the five thousand (14:13–21) and of the four thousand (15:32–38).

<sup>96</sup> This word appears 6 times in Matt 18:1–5 and 19:13–15.

<sup>97</sup> As παιδίον is a diminutive, it can have multiple functions. For example, when used in the present tense, vocative case, this word can be an endearing expression in addressing the second person. For example, see 1 John 2:18. Cf. Walter Petersen, *Greek Diminutives in -ION: A Study in Semantics* (Weimar: Wagner, 1910), 174, 234–236.

<sup>98</sup> Still, understanding what “a little child” (παιδίον) might mean to Matthew’s audience requires an investigation into each pericope’s use of this word.

<sup>99</sup> As far as the literary context of Matthew is concerned, I disagree with James Francis who argues that the use of παιδίον in this pericope is to emphasize servanthood for Jesus’s disciples (*Adults as Children*, 120, 122, 126); cf. Gundry-Volf, “‘To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God,’” 469–80. In fact, Matthew seems to avoid the nuance of servanthood by omitting Jesus’s saying in Mark 9:35 (He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all”). In addition, we do not have many ancient attestations of παιδίον that exclusively denote a slave. See “παιδίον” in James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914–1929), 474.

Rather, *παῖς* expresses the ambiguous and dual meaning of sonship and servanthood in Matthew (e.g., 8:5–13; 12:18; cf. Isa 42:1).<sup>100</sup> Second, *παιδίον* semantically highlights the child’s young age within the literary context of Matthew and does not necessarily convey a sense of kinship, for which this gospel uses *τέκνον*, *υἴος*, or *παῖς*.<sup>101</sup>

From these semantic aspects of *παιδίον* in Matthew, we can make at least two observations. First, we do not know who the parents of the child Jesus called and put in the midst of his disciples are (18:2), though this little child may belong to a household in Capernaum (17:24–25).<sup>102</sup> Similarly, it is even uncertain whether those people who brought little children to Jesus in 19:13 are their parents. Thus, it is not persuasive to argue that Matthew’s pericopae about little children draw on the child’s dependence on or

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<sup>100</sup> The centurion’s sick boy is referred to as *παῖς*, which can be interpreted as son or slave. This ambiguity is clarified in Luke 7:1–10 in which the centurion’s slave is designated as *δοῦλος*. John 4:46–54 mostly uses *υἴος* to denote the official’s sick son while *τὸ παιδίον μου* (“my child”) and *ὁ παῖς αὐτοῦ* (“his son”) each appear once. It is interesting to note that many manuscripts insert *υἴος* in the place of *παῖς* in John 4:51.

<sup>101</sup> This observation becomes clear when we carefully read the original language used in Matthew chapter 2. As mentioned above, the baby Jesus is referred to as *παιδίον* in Greek to express his status as a newly born one. Interestingly, Matthew always uses *υἴος* to refer to Jesus as Mary’s son, but in relation to Herod and Joseph, Jesus is referred to as *παιδίον*. For example, in Herod’s order to find where Jesus (“the child” 2:8–9) *παιδίον* is used. When an angel tells Joseph to go to and return from Egypt (2:13; 2:20–21), the same phrase, “Rise and take *the baby* (*παιδίον* without a possessive pronoun) *and his mother*” (*Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ*). This is contrasted with 2:15 in which the Lord says, “Out of Egypt have I called *my son* (*τὸν υἱόν μου*).” Italics my own. Thus, Joseph never appears as Jesus’s father in Matthew, which goes well with the passive genealogical relationship between Joseph and Jesus in Matt 1:16 (*Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός*). Cf. van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee*, in which the author reflects “on the socio-cultural and theological implications of the fact that Joseph did not play a role in the life of the historical Jesus.” See also idem, “Jesus’s Affection towards Children and Matthew’s Tale of Two Kings,” *AcT* 24 (2004): 129.

<sup>102</sup> Some scholars suggest that this is Peter’s house (cf. Matt 8:5, 14). E.g. William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 99–100.



obedience to a parental figure.<sup>103</sup> The Greek usage and literary meaning of παιδίον in this context points to something else. At the core of these two pronouncement stories is the contrast between the young children and the adult male disciples, which sets up a dialogical scene for Jesus's aphoristic sayings (18:3–5; 19:14). By placing heavy emphasis on the idea of the child's being "little"<sup>104</sup> vis-à-vis the greatness the disciples ask about, Matthew in fact presents the child as a model or thought experiment for discipleship. In other words, the narrative's lens is focused on the symbolic meaning of becoming like little children (γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά), particularly in relation to the ways in which this gospel shapes its readers' understanding of the kingdom of heaven. Each of the two pericopae (18:1–5 and 19:13–15) begins with real child(ren) brought to Jesus, but Matthew's storytelling immediately proceeds to the theological imaginary that this child evokes for the reader.

A series of theologians and commentators have sought to speculate over (the historical) Jesus's attitude towards children or to determine the significance of children to Christian ministry by attending to the gospel passages about children.<sup>105</sup> However, they

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<sup>103</sup> This argument about children's dependence can be found in Francis, *Adults as Children*, 114–24. Cf. Betsworth, "The Child and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew," 11–13. This is partly because scholars read the Matthean version together with Mark or Luke, so that the interpretation of "becoming like little children" in Matthew is outweighed or blurred by "receiving the Kingdom of God like a child." Garlington also offers a similar idea in "Who Is the Greatest?" in which he sees an emphatic connection between childlikeness and servanthood. Again, he does not fully discuss Matthew's particularity, but it is overridden by its similarities to the other synoptic versions.

<sup>104</sup> Matthew maintains this theme in the subsequent passages (18:6–20; 19:16–30, etc.).

<sup>105</sup> For example, Eduard Schweitzer "presumes that Matthew 18:3 is based on an independent tradition traceable back to Jesus" (Eduard Schweitzer, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986], 235) in Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Mathew's View of Salvation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 234 n. 8. Cf. van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee*. For a more extensive critique of current scholarship, see the Introduction.

have not thoroughly articulated the meaning and functions of the childlike condition in each gospel or asked what Jesus's injunction to become *like* little children might mean to Matthew's audience. Both literary and historical details in Matthew's narrative urge the reader to see a certain value or ideal that the childlikeness conveys. In other words, when this gospel asks the reader or hearer to engage in the theological experiment of becoming like a little child, we should ask: what ideas and ideals does it promote by using this childlikeness? As a way of responding to this question, I will explore in the next section (1) how Matthew's literary context presents young children and (2) how the historical context and social construction of children in the first century CE informed Matthew's imagery of young children.

## 2.2 Children and the Kingdom: Matthew's Redaction and Literary Context

The two stories about children and the kingdom are located between the second and third predictions of Jesus's Passion. From Peter's confession until the second prediction, Matthew faithfully follows the Markan order in his series of small pericopae (Matt 16:13–17:23; Mark 8:27–9:32).<sup>106</sup> After Jesus foretells his Passion for the second time,<sup>107</sup> however, Matthew interrupts the Markan sequence by inserting his special material (M) on the temple tax (Matt 17:24–27). Furthermore, Matthew does not narrate the exorcist

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<sup>106</sup> I.e., the confession at Caesarea Philippi, the first prediction of Jesus's Passion, the conditions of discipleship, the transfiguration, the coming of Elijah, the miracle of healing a boy with the spirit, and the second prediction of the passion.

<sup>107</sup> Matt 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–37.

story found in both Mark 9:38–41 and Luke 9:49–50. Thus, in Matthew, Jesus’s warning against temptations occurs immediately after the account of a little child (Matt 18:1–9). As a result, Matthew creates a literary flow of stories distinct from its synoptic parallels, and the three pericopae of the temple tax, greatness in the kingdom of heaven, and temptations create a new set of thematic connections.

Since significant editing characterizes the pericopae after Jesus’s second prediction of the Passion, Matthew’s redaction contributes to connecting the pronouncement story about children (Matt 18:1–5) with its surrounding passages (17:24–27; 18:6–9). For instance, within this gospel’s redactional scheme, the Matthean sayings about children (παιδιά) in 18:3–4<sup>108</sup> present the theme of being little and low, which continues and expands in the following passages (18:6–9; 18:10–14).<sup>109</sup> In addition, and more importantly, the temple tax pericope and the pronouncement story of little children, having been placed back to back, form a new set of thematic connections. In particular, Matthew’s repeated emphasis on “the kingdom of heaven” (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) in 18:1–5 makes a stark contrast with “the kings of the earth” (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) in 17:24–27. As long as the redaction in 17:24–18:5 suggests a distinctive Matthean idea,

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<sup>108</sup> These two verses do not appear in the Markan and Lukan parallels (Mark 9:33–7; Luke 9:46–8) as noted above.

<sup>109</sup> The lack of the exorcist story makes the transition from Matt 18:1–5 to 18:6–9 smooth in both content and form. Not only does the phrase, “one of these little ones” (ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) in 18:6 remind the reader of little children in the preceding pericope, but the repetition of the ὅς construction also makes a neat symmetry between 18:5 (“whoever receives one such child . . .”) and 18:6 (“but whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble . . .”). See the repetition of the same construction (whoever + ἐάν + 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular aorist subjunctive) in vv. 5 and 6: καὶ ὅς ἐάν δέξηται ἐν παιδίον τοιοῦτο ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται. Ὅς δ’ ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ, συμφέρει αὐτῷ ἵνα κρεμασθῇ μύλος ὀνικὸς περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ καταποντισθῇ ἐν τῷ πελάγει τῆς θαλάσσης. This smooth transition in Matthew is quite distinctive when compared to the way in which the first pronouncement story ends and the next story begins in Mark 9:37–38 and Luke 9:48–49.

we can identify an important rhetorical effect on the reader that may arise from the contrast between “little children” in the kingdom of heaven and “the sons of the kings of the earth” in these passages.

As the unprecedented juxtaposition between these different group identities already implies, Matthew’s account of children and the kingdom calls for contextualization and should be carefully distinguished from the foci of Mark and Luke. For the latter two gospels, the first pronouncement story about children strictly concerns an ethical issue sparked by the disciples’ dispute over greatness *among themselves*.<sup>110</sup> However, in Matthew, the disciples do not argue with one another but instead ask Jesus a question: “Who is the greatest *in the kingdom of heaven?*” (Matt 18:1). Placed after the account of the temple tax, this question carries in itself a presupposition that the social or political authority in the kingdom of heaven differs from the earthly kingdom. At the same time, since Jesus and his disciples are subject to the temple tax, the audience already knows who is great on earth. Above all, Matthew’s extensive use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” found not only in 18:1–5 and 19:13–15 but also throughout the gospel, further widens the gap between earthly and heavenly power structures.

What idea does the childlike condition particularly bring to the fore when one reads Matt 18:1–5 after 17:24–27? What does it mean for the reader to become like a little child—whose parents go entirely unmentioned in the literary context and whose young age and low status attract the reader’s attention? The stark contrast between heaven and earth, as the transition from the temple tax anecdote to the disciples’ question

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<sup>110</sup> Mark 9:34b reads, “... for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.” Cf. Luke 9:46: “An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest.”

shows, allows us to think about specific social and political locales in which images of the child come into play. Offered as a paradigm for greatness in the kingdom of heaven, the childlike condition in Matt 18:1–5 represents something contrary to the state of the sons of the earthly kings, not merely to the state of Jesus’s adult male disciples. If we bear in mind the antithetical relationship between the sons of the kings of the earth and little children in the kingdom of heaven, the ways in which Matthew deploys the child imagery can best be understood not only in light of the social status of children in antiquity but also in the context of their political reality in the first-century Roman Empire.

### 3. CHILDREN AND THE KINGDOM: FIRST-CENTURY SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Children vs. Adults: Social Status Reversed in Matthew’s Story?

The vulnerable and marginalized condition of children in antiquity has long been discussed a context for this Matthean text.<sup>111</sup> However, scholars have not considered the potential effect of the temple tax story on the following passage. For instance, in biblical scholarship, Jesus’s favorable attitude towards little children has often been contrasted

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<sup>111</sup> E.g., Warren Carter, *Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19–20* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 96–97; Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives*, 83. In Matthew 2, male children under the age of 2 got killed. Children are seen as those who easily fall prey to violence. If considered together with the rest of Matthew’s use of *paidia*, they represent the very weak, socially marginalized, vulnerable, and those who have no agency.

with ancient family practices such as *expositio* and infanticide,<sup>112</sup> and some commentators suggest that the synoptic account of Jesus’s welcoming of children in fact participates in the Jewish condemnation of these practices as “murder” (Philo, *Spec.* 3.110–119; Josephus *Ap.* 2.24.202; Pseudo–Phocylides 184–85).<sup>113</sup> While this hypothesis may look plausible,<sup>114</sup> it is unclear whether Matthew’s stories (18:1–5; 19:13–15) foreground imagery of the child specifically in terms of *expositio* or infanticide. As a separate matter of discussion, we also need to note that recent historical studies have doubted the pervasiveness and impact of these practices even in the early Roman period.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> E.g., Seneca, *Con.* 10.4.16; Suetonius, *Cal.* 4.5. See also the old Roman law, *The Twelve Tables* (ca. fifth century BCE), which includes a line that “a dreadfully deformed child shall be killed” (4.1).

<sup>113</sup> For instance, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 445–46; John J. Collins, “Marriage, Divorce, and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” in Leo G. Perdue et al., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 140.

<sup>114</sup> It is convincing as far as Mark or Luke is concerned.

<sup>115</sup> See the discussion in the Introduction above. Earlier some (medical) historians thought that high infant mortality in antiquity was partly caused by exposure (*Expositio*) and infanticide due to poverty and gender selection (i.e., male child preference). E.g., Isaac A. Abt, ed., *Abt-Garrison History of Pediatrics, with new chapters on the History of Pediatrics in Recent Times* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1965), 42. Cf. Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 29–30. However, as Beryl Rawson notes, “Shaw (2001) [argues] that the father’s unfettered right to decide on life or death for his child at the time of birth is largely a social construct of the imperial period, not mirrored in formal law or actual practice.” *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 115. Above all, Roman historians have recently suggested that abandonment or infanticide was one of several ancient birth-control methods, and “the exact impact” of those practices, though difficult to calculate, “was rather small.” Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 31–32. In line with this research, Eleanor Scott (“Unpicking a Myth: The Infanticide of Female and Disabled Infants in Antiquity,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference London 2000*, eds. G. Davies, A. Gardner, and K. Lockyear [Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000], 143–51) “argues against the view that ‘societies in the past routinely disposed of particular types of infant because they manifested a biological commodity which we modern observers have arbitrarily decided is inherently ‘unvalued’ or ‘unwanted’.” Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 117. For more details, see W. V. Harris, “Child Exposure in the Roman Empire,” *JRS* 84 (1994): 1–22; M. Corbier, “Child Exposure and Abandonment,” in Dixon, *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, 52–73; and Ville

While it is unlikely that Matthew alludes to *expositio* or infanticide, a “sociological model of center and periphery,” as Wiedemann calls it, may be presupposed and operative in these Matthean passages. Penetrating the ancient Mediterranean world, this social model normalizes the free male adult and thereby positions children as marginal, similar to women and slaves.<sup>116</sup> Regardless of parental affection towards the child valued as an heir or offspring, it seems that an individual child’s social status was considered lowly and insignificant, the opposite of the free male adult.

As the marked contrast between Jesus’s disciples and little children indicates, both physical and social differences between adults and children are overtly deployed in the Matthean texts. The theme of being great (μέγας) versus little (μικρός) that resonates throughout chapters 18 and 19 plays upon the size difference between the adult males and children, since Jesus’s disciples, in order to enter the kingdom, should lower (ταπεινώω) themselves to become as little children. Likewise, the spatial qualifier “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν) also offers an interpretive clue to the reader. This imagery of a child placed by Jesus in the midst of the disciples seems to upend the dominant notion that adults

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Vuolanto, “Selling a Freeborn Child: Rhetoric and Social Realities in the late Roman World,” *AncSoc* 33 (2003): 169–207, *inter alia*. Regarding the matter of how infanticide and *expositio* are consistent with Roman society’s high valuation of children, see Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 336–63. See also Erkki Koskenniemi, *The Exposure of Infants among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009). According to Koskenniemi, early church fathers’ quite frequent prohibitions of infanticide and exposure indicate the converse, that these practices were performed among Christians in late antiquity.

<sup>116</sup> Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 19. However, obviously there are subtle differences among these groups (children, women, and slaves) while they are not always exclusive of one another (e.g., being a female slave-child). In general, scholars see that their qualities of physical weakness and lack of logos were understood as a counterpart to the maturity and rationality of free male urban citizens in the ancient Mediterranean world.

occupy the center of society, while children are marginal or almost unseen.<sup>117</sup> The seemingly simple antithesis between the disciples and the little child, therefore, operates within a set of social binaries in which the physical and age difference extends to the disparity in social standing. As the little child is placed at the center of Jesus’s story and functions as an example for the kingdom, one may want to understand this child to represent “God’s reversal of status,” as Halvor Moxnes and other scholars have suggested.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ancient philosophical, medical, and legal material documents this conception of children’s marginality and social invisibility. For example, Greco-Roman philosophers contrasted little children’s physical weakness and lack of *logos* (“reason” or “speech”) with the maturity and rationality of free male citizens in the ancient Mediterranean world; children were positioned as marginal like women and slaves, though there are differences in terms of each of these groups’ marginality (Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 19). To ancient medical writers, infants meant *infirmitas* (“weakness,” cf. Cicero, *Sen.* 33), for the baby’s health was at greater risk than at any other stage of life (Celsus, *Med.* VII; see Abt, *History of Pediatrics*, 43). Often compared to “wax” (κίρινον), the infant’s body was linked with such qualities as softness, malleability, and wetness—which are opposite of the male adult’s body (Galen, *Temp.* 2.2, cf. Plato, *Leg.* 7.789e; Aristotle, *HA* 7.4.584b3–5; Soranus, *Gyn.* 2.14–15). See Susan Holman, “Molded as Wax: Formation and Feeding of the Ancient Newborn,” *Helios* 24 (1997): 80. Some Greek and Roman philosophers likened a baby to a wild beast, the most intractable of all animals (Plato, *Leg.* 7.808d; Aristotle, *Pr.* 10.895a), because of its absence of reason and inability to speak (Aristotle, *Pr.* 11.902b; Seneca, *Ep.* 118). Ancient society considered the child, before this family ritual (*dies lustricus*), socially and legally non-existent. The widespread Greco-Roman purification rite, *dies lustricus* (“day of purification”), reflects this thought. Celebrated on the eighth or ninth day after birth, this family ritual included naming the baby. Through this ceremony, the child became officially registered and obtained “the status of a juridical person.” Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 288 c-e; Festus, *De sign. verb.* “Lustrici,” cf. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.16.36. Cf. Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 29–30; Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 66. Plutarch adds that a newborn before the *dies lustricus* (“day of purification”) is “more like a plant (φυτόν)” than an animal, because in this period the baby’s umbilical cord has not yet come off: “[T]he seventh is dangerous for newly-born children in various ways and in the matter of the umbilical cord; for in most cases this comes away on the seventh day; but until it comes off, the child is more like a plant than an animal” (*Quaes. Rom.* 102 [Babbitt, LCL]).

<sup>118</sup> Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 93. Cf. Gundry-Volf, “‘To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God’.”



However, this interpretation still needs more elaboration. Even though the nature of the kingdom of heaven that Matthew portrays often contrasts with a worldly social order, one should carefully ask if Matt 18:1–5 implies a status elevation on the child’s part or promotes a radical reversal in the social hierarchy of adults and children.<sup>119</sup> The text itself does not explicitly grant any sort of agency to the child, and throughout the text the child still lacks any voice or independent action. Indeed, within the literary context, Jesus turns to the little child as a way of instructing the adult disciples, through whom Matthew’s hearers may reflect upon themselves. The story is concerned with how the disciples should live in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, not with how the child proper should be viewed in God’s kingdom.

If the primary purpose of mentioning little children is to have the audience imagine an ideal condition of self through the view of Jesus’s disciples in the narrative, the temple tax scene’s coming right before this pericope further complicates the status-reversal interpretation. As introduced above, by the time Matthew’s readers reach 18:1, they have already been informed of Jesus and Peter’s discussion concerning their payment of the temple tax (17:24–27). Without this passage, Matthew 18:1–5 would be similar to its Markan and Lukan parallels, in which Jesus teaches ethical humility as a necessary qualification for discipleship. However, in the context of Jesus’s response to the temple tax, the disciples’ question in 18:1 (“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”) now has a different nuance from Mark 9:33 or Luke 9:46. While the “kingdom

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<sup>119</sup> This is particularly the case when we consider Matthew’s omission of a reversal statement. If Matthew knew the Markan passage as a source just as we have it now, there must have been a reason that the author of Matthew did not include Mark 9:35, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

of heaven” is repeated three times in 18:1–5, Matthew’s audience might already remember the earlier reference to those “kings of the earth” in 17:25. Who are “those sons” of “the kings of the earth” from whom these kings do not take toll or tribute (Matt 17:25)? By contrast, who are those “little children” whose representation seems so different from that of the sons of the earthly kings? While our understanding of the social context of children in antiquity helps to interpret the Matthean pronouncement stories, we should not ignore the strongly political sentiment invoked by the pericope on the temple tax.

### 3.2 Taxation and Children of the Kings of the Earth

How does the temple tax anecdote create a particularly political context for understanding the childlike condition? Paying close attention to 17:24–27 reveals that this Matthean material features a series of terms sufficient to evoke important aspects of the Roman imperial system, ranging from taxation (δίδραχμον, τέλος, κῆνσος) to political authorities (βασιλεύς cf. βασιλεία in 18:1) to royal kinship (οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν versus ἀλλοτριῶν). These terms should be understood within this gospel’s concrete historical setting, i.e., the post-70 CE context of a largely Jewish community geographically located in the eastern Mediterranean.

First, the colonial reality of the Roman Empire resonates with those specific words used for taxes. On the surface, the literary setting of Matt 17:24–7 is a pre-Jewish war period during which any Jewish man 20 years old or older paid the half-shekel

temple tax.<sup>120</sup> However, after the Jewish war, the pre-70 CE temple tax (δίδραχμον, Matt 17:24) imposed on Jews turned into the Roman tax (*fiscus Iudaicus*), which Jews, as the conquered, had to pay annually with the same amount of *didrachmon*<sup>121</sup> for the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (Josephus *Bell. Jud.* 7.6.6; Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2).<sup>122</sup> Considering that

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<sup>120</sup> The origin of this temple tax goes back to Exod 30:11–16 (cf. Neh 10:32), in which Yahweh told Moses that “This is what each one who is registered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty *gerahs*), half a shekel as an offering to the Lord. Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord’s offering” (Exod 33:13–4, NRSV). David Garland objects the Matthean temple tax story’s link with the post-70 Roman tax levied for the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, assuming a strict divide between Matthew’s Christian community and Judaism in the late first century. “The Temple Tax in Matthew,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1987*, ed. K. H. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987): 190–209. Luz’s commentary interprets this passage mostly within the context of the pre-70 Jewish temple tax, considering it to be pre-Matthean special material. However, the majority of scholars have put this story in the context of post-70 Jewish debates over Roman taxes. See Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 132–3, *inter alia*. Also, regarding Matthew’s references to taxes (Matt 17:24–27; 22:15–22), commentators are divided, some arguing that they are “a matter of pragmatic survival for a marginal community,” others that they are “an acknowledgement of or submission to Roman sovereignty” (132).

<sup>121</sup> The δίδραχμον amounts to two [Tyrian] drachmas, also equivalent to the half-shekel silver coin. The coin (στατήρ) mentioned in 17:27 is equivalent to four drachmas (τετράδραχμον), displaying the sum of the tax that Jesus and Peter pay. Josephus *Bell. Jud.* 7.6.6 (Thackeray, LCL): “About the same time Caesar [Titus] sent instructions to Bassus and Laberius Maximus, the procurator [of Judea], to farm out all Jewish territory. For he founded no city there, reserving the country as his private property ... On all Jews, wheresoever resident, he imposed a poll-tax of two drachms, to be paid annually into the Capitol as formerly contributed by them to the temple at Jerusalem. Such was the position of Jewish affairs at this date.”

<sup>122</sup> Sara Mandell suggests that the *fiscus Iudaicus* is not identical with this didrachomon tax itself but it functioned as a provincial treasury (i.e., the institution of the Jewish treasury) or “a collection agency,” which collected many other taxes in addition to this temple tax for Jupiter Capitolinus. Sara Mandell, “Who Paid the Temple Tax When the Jews Were Under Roman Rule?” *HTR* 77 (1984): 223–32, esp. 228–29. However, the common scholarly use of *fiscus Iudaicus* identifies it with this Roman temple tax. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 42–44, 62 in which he discusses the scope of Jewishness and the *fiscus Iudaicus* by interpreting Suetonius (*Dom.* 12.2) and Tacitus (*Histories* 5.5.1–2). In particular, Cohen clarifies those who paid the annual temple tax in the pre-70 CE period (not just native Jews but also converts to Judaism paid the temple tax) vis-à-vis those who were obliged to pay the *fiscus Iudaicus* in the post-70 CE setting. As Suetonius’s report shows, the Roman administration persecuted people who “lived a Jewish life” but did not register themselves as Jews as well as those native Jews who masked their Jewish birth to avoid the tax. According to Cohen, Mandell misses this point in her article (n. 150). For a more extensive study of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, see Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Iudaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Roman taxation was not only a means of sustaining the ruling class's power and wealth but a symbol of the Roman imperial victory over provinces, this *didrachmon* tax in Matt 17:24–27 must have reminded Matthew's largely Jewish audience “of their status as a defeated people, conquered by Rome's military might and at the will of Jupiter.”<sup>123</sup>

With this historical context in mind, the question Matthew puts in Jesus's mouth in verse 25 has a strongly political edge. When Jesus asks Simon, “From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?”, Matthew uses Greek terms τέλος (“toll”) and κῆνσος (“tribute”). While τέλος is a broad term for tax used widely from the time of Plato to the Roman period,<sup>124</sup> κῆνσος is the Greek transliteration of *census*, i.e., the Latin loanword specifically designating the Roman poll tax. Appearing only four times in the New Testament, with three instances in Matthew,<sup>125</sup>

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Meanwhile, Suetonius reports that the following incident regarding the *fiscus Iudaicus* happened in the city of Rome during the reign of Domitian: “Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people. I recall being present in my youth when the person of a man ninety years old was examined before the procurator and a very crowded court, to see whether he was circumcised” (Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2 [Rolfe, LCL]). Later Dio Cassius also writes in his *Roman History*, 65.7 (Cary and Foster, LCL): “Thus was Jerusalem destroyed on the very day of Saturn, the day which even now the Jews reverence most. From that time forth it was ordered that the Jews who continued to observe their ancestral customs should pay an annual tribute of two denarii to Jupiter Capitolinus.”

<sup>123</sup> As Carter continues, “To add further insult, the tax was used to rebuild and maintain Jupiter's temple in Rome” (*Matthew and Empire*, 44). This was also the case during the reign of Domitian, the time when Matthew's gospel was composed.

<sup>124</sup> For example, in Egypt, both during the Ptolemaic period and under Roman rule, τέλος was used to denote various types of taxes related to sales and trading, followed by the commodity subject to taxation or sometimes by the amount of the tax to be paid; e.g., τέλος ζυτηρᾶς (the beer-consumer tax), τέλος γερδίων (the tax on weavers), τέλος ὄνων (the tax on the ownership of donkeys), τέλος τῆς τετράτης (the one-quarter tax on trades and custom dues), and so on. For more details, see Livia Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province* (New York: Routledge, 2005), esp. chapter two “The Roman Conquest of Egypt: The Precedents and the Aftermath,” 5–12.

<sup>125</sup> Mark 12:14//Matt 22:17; Matt 17:25; 22:19. As far as literary evidence is concerned, there is no attestation to this Greek transliteration in Matthew's time except one mention in Hero of

κῆνσος cannot be treated as a mere financial term mentioned in passing, for its usage connotes the history of Roman imperial expansion. As Capponi points out, this poll tax began to be imposed on provincials only after “a census of the population to assess the number of people liable for it, ... [which] marked the formal annexation of a region as a Roman province” (as in the census of Quirinius in 6 CE).<sup>126</sup> The term κῆνσος should be understood in light of the socio-political reality of Matthew’s audience in the late first century CE, for whom the use of κῆνσος is not only a reminder of the Jewish war that arose from the Jews’ resentment of the Roman census<sup>127</sup> but also a marker of their current

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Alexandria’s *Definitiones* 131.1: κατὰ τὴν νῦν κατάστασιν τῆς γεωμετρίας, ἡγουν τῆς ἀπογραφῆς τοῦ κίνσου (“according to the current institution of land survey, namely, the register of the poll tax”).

<sup>126</sup> Livia Capponi, *Roman Egypt*, Classical World Series (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 19–21. This type of poll tax would continue to exist until the early third century CE, when the expansion of citizenship through the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 CE would change the imperial tax base. See also Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, 11–12. According to Heemstra, the administration of the *fiscus Judaicus* was based in Rome and the tax lists for provincial *fisci* were called *capitularia*. Thus, *capitularia* can be thought in close association with “the Jewish poll tax introduced in Judaea in 6 CE” and scholars like Alpers view that “both taxes (*tributum capitis* levied from the residents of Judea and the Jewish tax levied from all Jews in the Roman Empire) may have been collected by the *fiscus Judaicus*” (n. 6). See I. A. F. Bruce, “Nerva and the *Fiscus Judaicus*,” *PEQ* 96 (1964): 37; M. Alpers, *Das nachrepublikanische Finanzsystem. Fiscus und Fisci in der frühen Kaiserzeit*, *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte* 45 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 303.

<sup>127</sup> Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* 2.8.1; 2.17.2; *Ant.* 18.1.1. In particular, the fact that this temple tax scene is staged in Galilee can be seen as a deliberate choice, for Matthew’s audience might likely recall Judas the Galilean who rose up against the poll tax introduced by the governor Quirinius. The way in which he perceived this taxation is worth noting. According to him, God’s sole sovereignty cannot be violated by means of paying taxes to Rome. “As for the fourth of the philosophies, Judas the Galilaean set himself up as leader of it. This school agrees in all other respects with the opinions of the Pharisees, except that they have a passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable, since they are convinced that God alone is their leader and master. They think little of submitting to death in unusual forms and permitting vengeance to fall on kinsmen and friends if only they may avoid calling any man master” (*Ant.* 18.23 [Feldman, LCL]).

status. From the Roman ruling class's perspective, Jews are foreigners (ἀλλοτριῶν), not Roman citizens, and colonial subjects on whom Rome levied the κῆνσος.

Given the significance of κῆνσος as well as the temple tax in the post-70 CE setting, Jesus's question in Matt 17:25 seems to underline precisely the differences in citizenship and status in terms of tax liability in a colonial province. The two groups presented in the question, namely foreigners versus children (or sons) of the earthly kings, are divided by the issue of whether or not they should pay τέλος and κῆνσος. In light of the fact that not only Roman citizens but also certain privileged people (e.g., public officials, certain priests, and even favored cities) in Roman-controlled provinces were exempted from such taxes as κῆνσος,<sup>128</sup> Jesus and Peter's payment, however odd its source may have been,<sup>129</sup> confirms the reality that members of Matthew's community are not children of the kings of the earth (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) but belong in the category of foreigners (ἀλλοτριῶν).

The issue of paying taxes thus leads us to the issue of royal kinship, raising a question about the possible connotation of "the kings of the earth" (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς). Quite readily, Matthew's Jewish characteristics may help us regard terms like βασιλεύς (Matt 17:25) and βασιλεία (18:1) as derived from the traditional prophetic or psalmist's language. Indeed, the use of king and kingdom in LXX is not difficult to find, particularly in the (often apocalyptic) context of elevating the Lord's sole authority over earthly kings

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<sup>128</sup> Capponi, *Roman Egypt*, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Carter (*Matthew and Empire*, 142–3) sees it as a kind of resistance to the imperial power as the money does not come directly out of Jesus's pocket. However, this interpretation does not seem to pay enough attention to the historical connotations of βασιλεῖς. Cf. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.10.

(e.g., Psalm 2:2; 76:12 [=75:13 LXX]; 102:15 [=106:16 LXX]; Isa 24:21; Lam 4:12).<sup>130</sup>

We should take this reference in Matthew seriously, yet we should note that the post-70 CE tax situation in which the Matthean pericope is engaged makes this terminology more concretely political.

Nevertheless, the political valence of these terms does not mean that βασιλεία and βασιλεύς in Matthew are used to denote Roman imperialism *per se*. In the first-century CE political context, βασιλεύς as well as βασιλεία, as Bazzana has recently argued, belong to a discourse of Hellenistic royal terminology from which Augustus ideologically distanced himself from the beginning of the Roman Empire.<sup>131</sup> But, if not Roman emperors, who are the earthly kings (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς)? Why does Matthew’s Jesus speak about their children? Matthew’s royal kinship language (17:25–26) points to the children of vassal kings and provincial authorities who pay allegiance to Rome, for βασιλεύς and βασιλεία are also used to refer to Rome’s client kings and their reigns in the first centuries BCE and CE.<sup>132</sup> Matthew’s introduction of the phrase “sons of the earthly kings” serves as an effective device that points to the large social and economic gap between the ruling elite and the general populace in Roman provinces. As with κῆνσος, the statement that “sons of the earthly kings” are free from any tax obligation prompts the reader to think of the range of people who enjoy financial benefits under Roman rule.

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<sup>130</sup> See also Isa 14:9, 18; Jer 25:26; Eze 27:33; 28:1; 1 Esdras 8:74, etc. In the New Testament, cf. Matt 8:12; Acts 4:26; Rev 6:15; 18:9; 19:19; 21:24.

<sup>131</sup> “Greek terms relating to the semantic domain of ‘kingship’ were not associated with the names of Roman sovereigns until after the end of the second century CE.” From Augustus up to Septimius, the adopted titles for emperor were αὐτοκράτωρ or Καῖσαρ; βασιλεύς was not used (Bazzana, *Kingdom of Bureaucracy*, 229).

<sup>132</sup> There are numerous examples. See e.g., Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* 1.20.

### 3.3 Sons of the Earthly Kings in the Roman Empire

If the political and economic resonance of the temple tax pericope is clear, how can we elaborate on the deployment of the sons of the kings of the earth vis-à-vis little children? In order to make sense of the historical meaning that this juxtaposition involves, I suggest that we turn our attention to both Jewish literature and Roman imperial art in and around the first century CE, particularly Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. This literary and archaeological data helps us approach the Matthean pericopae in light of the historical memory and experiences that Matthew's readers would have readily recalled. Who would have come to their mind when they heard about the tax-exempt status of the sons of the earthly kings? As Josephus and the *Ara Pacis* help to clarify the scope of royal kinship from Rome's political perspective, we will eventually be able to explore why this gospel casts "little children" as exemplars for the kingdom of heaven after evoking specific images of the children of earthly kings.

First, in the literary context of Matthew, the narrative's temporal setting is the reigns of Herod the Great (2:1ff) and Herod Antipas (14:1–12). The direct references to these kings (βασιλεῖς) make it possible to read Matthew 17:24–18:5 in light of Josephus's account of the Herodian dynasty. According to Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 17.1.3),<sup>133</sup> many sons of Herod the Great, including Herod Antipas, Herod Archelaus, and Philip, were sent to

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<sup>133</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 17.19–21 (Marcus and Wikgren, LCL): Ἡρώδη δὲ τῷ βασιλεῖ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον συνώκουν ἑννέα γυναῖκες... Ἀρχέλαος δὲ καὶ Ἀντίπας ἐπὶ Ῥώμης παρά τινι Ἰουδαίῳ τροφᾶς εἶχον. Κλεοπάτρα δὲ Ἰεροσολυμίτις ἐγεγάμητο αὐτῷ καὶ παῖδες ἐξ αὐτῆς Ἡρώδης τε ἐγεγόνεισαν καὶ Φίλιππος, ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τροφᾶς εἶχεν. "Now at this time there were nine women married to King Herod: ... Archelaus and Antipas were brought up in Rome by a certain Jew. Another wife was Cleopatra, a native of Jerusalem, by whom he had two sons, Herod and Philip, who was also brought up in Rome."



Rome and educated there. Likewise, Herod Agrippa also lived in Rome as a boy and built a close relationship with Drusus (Tiberius's son) from a young age. Moreover, Herod Agrippa II, the last client king for the Jews, who was incumbent when Matthew was written, also grew up in Rome under the emperor Claudius.<sup>134</sup> Spending their boyhoods in Rome, these foreign princes were “seen in public company with boys of the imperial family and sons of senators.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, these sons of the foreign rulers are considered to be

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<sup>134</sup> Agrippa II stayed in Rome even after his father's death, for he was only sixteen years old at that time. Josephus, *Ant.* 19.354–364 (Feldman, LCL): Ἀγρίππας μὲν οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς τρόπῳ τοιοῦτῳ κατέστρεψεν τὸν βίον, γένει δὲ αὐτῷ κατελείπειτο υἱὸς μὲν Ἀγρίππας ἄγων ἔτος ἑπτακαίδέκατον, τρεῖς δὲ θυγατέρες, ... Ὁ δὲ τοῦ τεθνεῶτος υἱὸς Ἀγρίππας ἐπὶ Ῥώμης ἦν ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ τρεφόμενος παρὰ Κλαυδίῳ Καίσαρι. πυθόμενός γε μὴν Καῖσαρ, ὅτι τέθηκεν Ἀγρίππας, Σεβαστινοὶ δὲ καὶ Καισαρεῖς ὑβρίκασιν εἰς αὐτόν, ἐπ' ἐκείνῳ μὲν ἤλγησεν, ἐπὶ δὲ 362 τοὺς ἀχαριστήσαντας ὠργίσθη. πέμπειν οὖν εὐθέως ὄρμητο τὸν νεώτερον Ἀγρίππαν τὴν βασιλείαν διαδεξόμενον ἅμα βουλόμενος ἐμπεδοῦν τοὺς ὁμωμοσμένους ὄρκους, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐξελευθέρων καὶ φίλων οἱ πολλοὶ παρ' αὐτῷ δυνάμενοι ἀπέτρεψαν, σφαλεῖρόν ναι λέγοντες κομιδῇ νέῳ μηδὲ τοὺς παιδὸς ἐκβεβηκότι χρόνους ἐπιτρέπειν βασιλείας τηλικούτου μέγεθος, ὃ μὴ δυνατόν τὰς τῆς διοικήσεως φροντίδας ἐνεγκεῖν, καὶ τελείῳ δ' οὖν εἶναι βαρὺ βάσταγμα βασιλείαν. “Such was the final scene of King Agrippa's life. He left one son, Agrippa, in his seventeenth year, and three daughters. ... Agrippa, the son of the deceased, was at Rome at this time, where he was being brought up at the court of Claudius Caesar. Caesar, on hearing of the death of Agrippa, and of the insults heaped upon him by the people of Sebaste and Caesarea, was grieved for him and angry at his ungrateful subjects. He had accordingly resolved to send Agrippa at once to take over the kingdom, wishing at the same time to maintain the sworn treaty with him. He was, however, dissuaded by those of his freedmen and friends who had great influence with him, who said that it was hazardous to entrust so important a kingdom to one who was quite young and had not even passed out of boyhood and who would find it impossible to sustain the cares of administration; even to a grown man, said they, a kingdom was a heavy responsibility.”

<sup>135</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 53. A later example of a foreign prince living in Rome is Philopappos, the Greek prince of the Kingdom of Commagene. While he was first raised in his kingdom until seven years old, he spent the rest of his youth in Rome. By the time he arrived at Rome, King Antiochus IV of Commagene, Philopappos's grandfather, had surrendered to Paetus, the Roman governor of Syria, without fighting, and reaffirmed his allegiance to Rome. Growing up in Rome, Philopappos became another example of a foreign prince leading a wealthy and honorable life and symbolizing loyalty to Rome. He held both Roman and Athenian citizenship and served as magistrate in the city of Athens. See Diana E. E. Kleiner, *The Monument of Philopappos in Athens*, *Archaeologica* 30 (Roma: G. Bretschneider, 1983).

“dependents” of the emperor’s family.<sup>136</sup> The imperial rhetoric engraved in and promoted by this public representation of foreign princes publicized Rome’s power and dominion over all provinces.

The portrait of foreign babies on the *Ara Pacis Augustae* can be read in tandem with Josephus’s witness of the Herodian dynasty. To be clear, the installment of this monument is dated some decades earlier than Matthew’s historical setting, and we cannot affirm whether Matthew or his community was aware of this altar in Rome. However, it is worth considering that this monument was erected when Herod the Great was the client king of Judea, the time during which Matthew’s infancy narrative is set. More importantly, recent Roman historians’ interpretations of *Ara Pacis* make it possible to use this archaeological information to understand Matthew, since Augustus’s monument and Josephus’s account of the Herodian dynasty provide historical reports on the consistent presence of foreign princes in Rome. The *Ara Pacis* is essential visual evidence of how early the imperial practice of adopting royal children from foreign kings began, a practice directly relevant to the sons of Herod the Great. The *Ara Pacis* helps to situate Josephus’s account of the Herodian princes in a wider historical context. It also provides a venue in which to explore the representations of children in the beginning of the Roman Empire, informing us of the identities of children presented in Rome’s imperial art, and its lingering effect of spreading Rome’s propaganda throughout the course of the first century CE.

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<sup>136</sup> Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 110.

As recent historical studies have suggested, the rise of the Roman Empire marked a monumental change in representations of children in antiquity.<sup>137</sup> This phenomenon was directly related to Augustus's reforms and refashioning of his own public image as he set himself as a father over all families and also over the state.<sup>138</sup> From coinage to public monuments, children began to appear in imperial imagery,<sup>139</sup> and they functioned to communicate the emperor's new role as *pater* and to propagate the idea of the "stability and continuity of the new regime."<sup>140</sup> Yet, such Roman public art employs not only Roman children but also children the Romans would have considered foreign, such as those the *Ara Pacis* features on its north and south friezes. Who are these foreign princes, and how does their status or ethnicity relate to the effective promotion of Rome's imperial ideology? How might this historical information contribute to our understanding of "the sons of the earthly kings" in Matthew?

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<sup>137</sup> Recent research has extensively explored the art of ancient Rome. See n. 19 above; Rawson, Severy, and Huskinson have largely contributed to the field, *inter alia*. This insight into the representational change is also critical to our understanding of "Christian" attitudes towards children in the first century CE.

<sup>138</sup> Augustus sought to strengthen family life in the Empire. See Rawson and Paul Weaver, eds., *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 213; Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 56. In order to "define citizenship and civic duty," he introduced new legislation regarding marriage, childrearing, and sexual life (*lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and *lex Iulia de adulteriis*), and in this context marriage and having children were considered as an adult citizen's important duty. These laws were passed in 18 BCE and as Severy continues to explain, "the childless were not allowed to accept inheritances and legacies ... [there was a] ban on the attendance of the unmarried at public games ... A free woman who had three children, or a freed woman who had four, was exempted from lifelong guardianship" (Ibid., 52–53).

<sup>139</sup> For instance, in 13–12 BCE when new gold and silver coins were minted under Augustus, these featured the emperor's children for the first time in Roman history, thereby "[marking] a change in the public presentation of the family of Augustus" (Ibid., 75–77).

<sup>140</sup> Rawson and Weaver, *The Roman Family in Italy*, 207–13; This is sharply contrasted with the scarce use of children in public and private art till the late Republic period.

Voted for by the Senate in 13 BCE and dedicated in 9 BCE to honor Augustus, this altar features many children, among whom two figures on the north and south friezes are distinctively non-Roman children (figs. 1 and 2). Though they were formerly identified as the commander Agrippa's sons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, there is now scholarly consensus that these two youths in foreign dress represent "barbarian" children who were brought to Rome from the eastern and western regions of the Empire after Augustus's and Agrippa's successful military campaigns.<sup>141</sup> The toddler on the north frieze is identified as a Gallic baby (fig. 1), while the small boy on the south is a child from Bosporan royalty (fig. 2).<sup>142</sup> As Beth Severy puts it, these identities "visually represent imperial benefaction."<sup>143</sup> As a result of Augustus's and Agrippa's military activities in the West and East, foreign princes were brought to Rome to be "educated with coevals in the imperial family, socialized to become Romans and loyal allies to

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<sup>141</sup> Charles Brian Rose, "Princes and Barbarians on the Ara Pacis," *AJA* 94.3 (1990): 453–67.

<sup>142</sup> These children look different in dress, hairstyle, and pose from typical Roman children. For example, the western toddler in fig. 1 "[wears] a sleeveless tunic, thick torque, and other jewelry, [turning] to the figure next to him in such a manner as to expose his bare behind. His undignified pose and lack of a *bullā*, a Roman child's protective amulet, distinguish him from the other children. Moreover, his dress, hairstyle, and pose bear a striking resemblance to the Gallic children Drusus is shown presenting to Augustus on one of the Boscoreale cups and on coins of 8-7 B.C.E." (Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 110). Meanwhile, the portrait of the child on the south frieze (fig. 2), "[resembles] that of an eastern prince: the diadem wrapped tightly around his forehead clearly marks him as the member of a royal family [esp. together with the Eastern queen behind him,] and the hairstyle, which features a series of fairly long corkscrew locks reaching down to his shoulders, is paralleled in portraits of eastern kings, specifically those of the Bosphorus and Parthia" (Rose, "Princes and Barbarians on the Ara Pacis," 456).

<sup>143</sup> "[T]he leaders of Gaul gave their children to Augustus through his stepson Drusus to be raised like Romans, and Augustus' relatives had many connections with the families of the Hellenistic client kings" (Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 110). However, there were various causes for foreign royal heirs to be in Rome. As Rawson notes, "[s]pecially favored sons of foreign rulers were sometimes brought to Rome – in effect, as hostages, but they could be presented as honored guests" (Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 51).

Rome, symbols of Rome's policy of peace, harmony, and stability for the Empire."<sup>144</sup>

Without a doubt, the symbolic kinship that provincial authorities established by sending their heirs to Rome both authorizes and embodies Augustus's role as the *pater* of all.<sup>145</sup>



Fig. 1: A foreign child. Ara Pacis Augustae (altar), Rome. Enclosure wall, exterior. North. © Harvard Fine Arts Library, Digital Images & Slides Collection d2006.00092 (Image ID: olvsurrogate635153)

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 51–52. See Suetonius, *Aug.* 48; Josephus, *Ant.* 17.20–21.

<sup>145</sup> As Severy puts it, “[o]n the Ara Pacis, the Roman Empire from Asia to Gaul is thus presented as dependents of Augustus’ family, and international relations are shown to be within the purview of his house. The role of *pater* over this family thus connotes a distinctly paternal relationship to Rome, and on its behalf, Augustus is shown perpetually in the process of interacting with the gods and ensuring the continuation of the *pax deorum*” (*Augustus and the Family*, 110).



Fig. 2: A young boy with imperial family. Agrippa (left) and a foreign woman (behind) with her hand on the boy. Ara Pacis Augustae (altar), Rome. Enclosure wall, exterior. South. © Harvard Fine Arts Library, Digital Images & Slides Collection d2004.06292 (Image ID: olvsurrogate 812482)

From the *Ara Pacis* to Josephus, the foreign princes in these materials display the kinship relations between their home provinces and Rome, symbolizing the client kingdoms' unbreakable loyalty to the Empire. In turn, these foreign royal heirs in Caesar's household are granted political and economic power, becoming and living like Romans. Such evidence, when incorporated into the philological and historical understanding of βασιλεύς as a client king, suggests that the sons of the kings of the earth in Matt 17:24–27 do not directly denote those sons in the Julio-Claudian or Flavian dynasties. Rather, this phrase, originally denoting the rulers who succeeded Alexander the Great, functions in the first century of the Roman Empire to evoke images of the sons of vassal kings, such as Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa II, who are directly associated

with Matthew's narrative and historical settings. In other words, when hearing about the sons of the earthly kings and their exemption from tax obligations, Matthew's immediate audience may have remembered those sons of the Herodian dynasty who spent a much more protected and privileged youth under Rome's cloak than most of the children in the province of Judea and the eastern territory of Rome. Unlike those princes growing up in Rome, Matthew's hearers—including Jesus's disciples in the narrative—are Rome's subjects, defeated and underprivileged. To a great extent, they still live within the painful history of the recent past, that of Roman imperial presence in Judea, heavy taxation imposed by Rome, and the aftermath of the Jewish wars (66–73 CE). In this context, Jesus and Peter's act of paying the temple tax brings to the fore their identity of "others" (ἄλλοτριοῖ), who are not treated as members of the extended imperial family and are not financial beneficiaries vouchsafed by Rome. Featuring the sons of earthly kingdoms in the temple tax anecdote, Matthew calls the readers' attention to the political utility of these royal children, from whom the multilayered issues of kinship, citizenship, and wealth clearly distance those in the Matthean community.

#### 4. CHILDLIKENESS AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

If we bring Josephus's report and the historical interpretation of the *Ara Pacis* into conversation with Matt 17:24–27, we gain greater insight into the socio-political implications of children. Framed within the sharp contrast between the earthly kings' sons and "others" (ἄλλοτριοῖ), Jesus and Peter's tax payment proves their identities not as

sons of the kings or provincial elites who are exempted from taxes but as ἀλλοτριῶν.<sup>146</sup> Thus, when encountering the disciples' question in 18:1, "Then, who is the greatest (or 'greater') in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt 18:1),<sup>147</sup> the reader already knows who is greater *on earth* and sees that the themes of status and power arising from the taxation issue continue in the disciples' question.<sup>148</sup> In this context, Matthew clearly indicates that the disciples' concern is not about which one of them is the greatest (cf. Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46). They do not compare themselves with one another, but their question directly touches upon the issue of status and power *in the kingdom of heaven*.<sup>149</sup> For this reason, the anxious nature of the disciples' question (ἄρα),<sup>150</sup> when read in light of the temple tax anecdote, seems to indicate that Matthew's historical audience is aware of the political power and socio-economic privileges that the sons of the kings of the earth have.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Regarding the ruling elite, Carter explains that "[i]n the provinces, provincial governors and their staffs, appointed either by the emperor or by the senate, exercised control through tours and assizes, administering justice, collecting taxes, and deploying troops. They also formed alliances with local landowning elites, who exercised some political and economic power through city councils, as common beneficiaries of the empire's power structure. Throughout the ruling class, influence and status were gained and exercised through networks of patron-client relationships, friendship, and kinship" (*Matthew and Empire*, 11).

<sup>147</sup> Literally, μείζων is 'greater,' but this kind of comparative is substituted for superlative (Luz, *Matthew*, 426 n. 22 [BDF §§ 60, 244]). The question could be translated more literally, "who is greater, the sons of the earthly kings or others, in the kingdom of heaven?"

<sup>148</sup> Considering that the "μέγας ("great") implies position and honor, the greatest in a kingdom are the governors and ministers" (*Ibid.*, 426).

<sup>149</sup> Luke makes clear the comparison among the disciples by adding, "the last among all of you is the greatest" (Luke 8:48b).

<sup>150</sup> The interrogative particle ἄρα ("then"), when used in a question, expresses the anxiety or impatience of the questioner.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 359. Unlike my interpretation, Gundry argues that the connection between the temple tax pericope and 18:1 is based on the disciples' understanding that they are actually sons of a king.



Accordingly, the disciples' inquiry about greatness suggests not only their relatively lowly status in earthly, political life but also an expectation that there is and should be a different sort of power system in the kingdom of heaven.

Given its literary setting, Jesus's response in 18:2–5 presents a clear polarity between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms yet complicates the contrast between the disciples and the sons of the vassal kings. Instead of answering the disciples' question immediately, Jesus, in verse 2, calls upon a little child and puts her (or him) in the midst of them.<sup>152</sup> Then, his injunction follows: “Unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever lowers him/herself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:3–4). In particular, verse 3 challenges the rigid social hierarchy of the disciples and little children, for Jesus speaks as if his disciples have yet to meet the childlike condition required to enter the kingdom of heaven. This might be surprising to Matthew's readers, since from the pericope regarding the temple tax, they already know that the disciples' status in the Roman imperial context is much lower than that of the sons of the earthly kings.<sup>153</sup> Yet, the disciples are now asked to become like little children, whose status in social hierarchy is lower than the adult male disciples'. In this narrative flow, the little child whom Jesus called upon makes a sharper contrast with the sons of the earthly kings than with Jesus's disciples. As they are already categorized as “others” who have no familial ties with the earthly kings, the fact that these disciples are told to “lower” themselves like this little child directs the reader's attention to the notion of lowliness ascribed to the child.

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<sup>152</sup> Note that *παιδίον* is a neuter noun.

<sup>153</sup> See section 3.1 above.

Who is this little child—particularly in light of the historical reality that those sons of vassal kings represent in the first century CE? Though almost no information is provided about this little child’s identity, we can at least infer that the child lives in Capernaum, Galilee, for the text establishes this location as the geographical setting of the temple tax story and the following passages (Matt 17:24). Throughout Matthew, Capernaum is described as the hometown of Peter and Jesus (4:13; 8:5, 14), and Matt 17:24 also notes that “the temple tax was collected in the hometown.”<sup>154</sup> This background allows us to consider the little child as likely having the same ethnic and geographical origins as Jesus and Peter (17:25),<sup>155</sup> although no information on this child’s family is present in the text. Matthew’s use of παιδίον invites much speculation regarding this child’s personal background. Not only does this Greek word indicate the child’s young age (no older than seven), but the way that Matthew uses it in the literary context potentially implies that this child has no parents.<sup>156</sup> Thus, this nameless child living in Capernaum likely represents the lowliest of the low in Matthew’s time.<sup>157</sup>

Among all the elements that put this child in dramatic antithesis to the sons of the earthly kings, the child’s hometown is worth further consideration, as Capernaum and its neighboring region in Galilee were directly ruled by Herod Antipas (r. 4 BCE–39 CE) in

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<sup>154</sup> Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven*, 233.

<sup>155</sup> See Matt 8:5; 8:14 for Peter’s home; for Jesus’s 4:13; 17:25. One might wonder, could it be Peter’s child? But if that were the case, we might expect the text to note it (cf. Peter’s mother-in-law).

<sup>156</sup> See section 2.1 above. Matthew always expressly identifies an individual child of a parent as someone’s son or daughter.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. van Aarde sees children in Mark 10:13–6 as “street children” who were part of the “expendable class,” “about 5–10% for whom society had no need or place” (van Arde, “Jesus’ Affection toward Children,” 131, 135–6).

the narrative's temporal setting and by Herod Agrippa II (r. 48–92 CE) in the actual composition period of Matthew. To Matthew's audience, both of these rulers would represent not only "kings of the earth" but also "their sons," for both Antipas (son of Herod the Great) and Agrippa II (son of Agrippa I) were educated in Rome as young foreign princes. Though they have Galilee in common, these sons of the earthly kings and the little child in Matthew 18:2 had completely different childhoods. Whether hostages or adopted sons, these children in Rome served to mark the strong Roman-Jewish symbiosis,<sup>158</sup> and when these royal sons grew up as the dependents of the Roman imperial family, the consequences were never favorable for the subjects left behind. Consider Herod Agrippa II, in particular. Matthew's mostly Jewish audience must have known that he was still ruling the region of Galilee when this gospel was put forth. This son of the Herodian dynasty was raised in Rome, became Rome's faithful agent, and urged his countrymen to pay tribute to Rome. Once the Jewish war broke out, he even sent armed forces not to protect Jews from Roman military power but to support Vespasian.<sup>159</sup> As a result, many Jews were killed in Galilee, and women and children were sold into slavery. In this context, the drastic contrast between "the sons of the earthly kings" and the little child in Galilee may have been bitter to Matthew's hearers or triggered their resentment of the Herodian dynasty.

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<sup>158</sup> Regarding these Herodian princes' fathers, it is worth noting that "[t]he Roman Jewish symbiosis was at its peak during the reigns of Herod the Great and his grandson Herod Agrippa (41–44 CE)." Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>159</sup> Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* 2.16; 3.4.2; 4.1.2–4.2.2 cf. *Ant.* 20.9; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.81; 5.1; Dio Cassius, 55.15.

Unlike those royal heirs, the little child in Capernaum has none of the political power or socio-economic privileges that only a small number of locals in the ruling class could possess through their allegiance to Rome.<sup>160</sup> As long as the *didrachmon* tax in Matt 17:24–27 alludes to the *fiscus Iudaicus*, Matthew’s audience may have recalled that this little child was also subject to the *fiscus Iudaicus* in the post-70 CE setting. Unlike the temple tax in the pre-70 CE situation, the tax for Jupiter Capitolinus applied not only to male Jews but also to women and children three years old and older (*CPJ* 421).<sup>161</sup> From Rome’s perspective, this little child thus belongs to the “others” (ἄλλοτριῶν) residing in a client king’s territory, who are subject to the heavy tax to rebuild and maintain the Roman temple. On the contrary, the sons of the Herodian dynasty, thanks to the Roman practice regarding foreign princes, are not defined as “foreigners” but as Romans and as members of the imperial household. The temple tax story functions to put in the foreground the royal princes’ exceptionally privileged childhoods, alien to most children like this little one in Capernaum. The narrative’s presentation of the Galilean child vis-à-vis the Herodian heirs who are free from the toll and tribute evokes an imbalanced socio-economic disparity among children in an eastern frontier of the Roman Empire.

In this historical and geographical context, the royal kinship language employed in the temple tax pericope highlights the Galilean child’s otherness and lack of belonging. As much as the sons of the earthly kings highlight this child’s lack of royal kinship

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. Géza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

<sup>161</sup> A papyrus receipt found in the city of Arsinoë in the Roman province of Egypt (*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* 421, dated 73 CE) attests that “children (from the age of three onward) and women (the oldest woman being sixty-one years old) were liable for the [fiscus Iudaicus]” (Heemstra, *The Fiscus Iudaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, 13).

relations—or of any sort of kinship—in Galilee, the Matthean redaction makes this disadvantaged “foreign” child emblemize the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In this way, the childlikeness in Jesus’s sayings takes on a different layer of meaning in Matthew than in their synoptic parallels, for in Matthew, this little child’s low social status and otherness in the Roman imperial context lie at the core of his or her eligibility to enter the kingdom of heaven. Accordingly, what Jesus presents to his disciples—and Matthew’s historical audience—is the necessity of distancing themselves from the ruling class among earthly kingdoms, whose power and honor are ensured only through their kinship loyalty to the *pater* of all.

Traditionally, “turning” (στρέφω) in Matthew 18:3 (“Truly I tell you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”) has been understood as conversion or repentance<sup>162</sup> and the injunction of “lowering oneself like this little child” (ὅστις οὖν ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν ὡς τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο) as an act of ethical humility. Yet, interestingly, not many scholars interpret Jesus’s sayings in the context of Matthew’s redaction and from Matthew’s socio-political location. If the socio-political implications of the temple tax story are obvious, as seen above, nowhere in the text do we find evidence that humbleness is presented as the child’s innate quality. Rather, through contrast with the sons of the vassal kings, this Galilean child allows the reader to see this lowliness in relation to the social conditions of the child’s birth.

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<sup>162</sup> From Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Matthaei* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1914), 88; to Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Mattäusevangelium 16:21–28:20. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung. Die Neue Echter Bibel I/2* (Würzburg: Echter, 1987), 168. However, this word, which occurs 21 times in NT, mostly concern the bodily move of turning, going back, returning, and rejecting. Only in Matt 18:3 may we consider an additional figurative connotation.

This insight leads to a new interpretive possibility for Jesus's injunction to turn (στρέφω, 18:3) and become like little children. What Matthew's gospel promotes and invites hearers to experience here through its extensive redaction is neither an internal spiritual repentance nor an individualized ethical humility but a more social and communal value. This turning and becoming like little children is presented as a paradigm shift, one that Matthew's audience can achieve only when they refuse to be like the children of the earthly kings. Jesus's pronouncement on the kingdom of heaven thus encourages his disciples and thereby the Matthean audience to distance themselves from their rulers, who live as dependents of the Roman imperial family.<sup>163</sup> If the sons of the earthly kings earn power and status in exchange for their submissive alliance with Rome, Jesus's disciples are asked to turn to this child in Galilee, whose foreignness to the imperial family defines the qualification for and the status of greatness in the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, Jesus's injunction, "unless you turn and become like little children," when situated within Matthew's historical context, urges the disciples not to side with "the sons of the earthly kings" but with "little children." The childlikeness in Matthew's context is not intended to elevate those little children's status on earth but draws on their concrete social and political reality in Galilee to ask the audience to "turn" from this earthly system of greatness. The childlikeness proffers the kingdom of heaven as an imagined community that Jesus's disciples are told to build. In that community, the sons of the earthly kings have no standing, but the least and "others" of this world are well received (Matt 18:5–6). The little child in Matthew's redaction articulates the socio-

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<sup>163</sup> If they did not pay the tax in the preceding passage, that might signal either Jesus's and Peter's direct refusal of Roman power or their wish to be (like) sons of the earthly kings.

political dimension of the kingdom of heaven in which a new paradigm of power, kinship, and belonging governs its people. For these reasons, it may not be a coincidence that this nameless, powerless child lives in Capernaum, Galilee, where Jesus proclaims the coming of the kingdom of heaven for the first time (4:17) and where he declares that “the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (8:12).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Embedded between Jesus’s second predication of the Passion and the story of little children, the special material on the temple tax provides new exegetical insights into the power of childlikeness in Matthew’s historical context. By delineating a contrast between the privileged lives of the Herodian princes and the precarious life of a Galilean child in the Roman imperial setting, Matthew retells the Markan story of childlikeness from his own socio-political location. In Matthew, we do not hear of a brawl among Jesus’s disciples concerning their ranks. Nor does it seem that the religious ideal that the little child signifies is a self-denial of personal ambition that the disciples should cultivate. Rather, the little child in Matt 18:2 embodies not only a lowly status in an adult, male-centered ancient society but also the quality of otherness, the loss of power, and the lack of belonging that constitute the extreme opposite of the Herodian princes. Therefore, Matthew’s emphasis on “turning and becoming like little children” persuades the reader to turn away from the ethos of the sons of the earthly kings, whose freedom, wealth, and honor are established on the grounds of their collaboration with Rome and exploitation of their own people. By putting this little child in the middle and by drawing the audience’s attention to the child, Matthew’s Jesus invites the audience to turn to the socially

marginalized, economically disadvantaged, and politically oppressed that this little child symbolizes.<sup>164</sup> Though colonial subjects themselves, Jesus’s disciples are asked to look down to see those who are even lower.

This analysis has prompted us to see that Matthew, through this image of a little child, envisions God’s reign in a social sense. Jesus’s injunction to become like little children does not promote a self-focused ethical or spiritual transformation of Matthew and his hearers. However, it proffers the idea of voluntary downward mobility, urging the reader to seek a social transformation. Within the Matthean context, the childlikeness that one should obtain in order to enter the kingdom of heaven cannot be reduced to an innate quality of children. Instead, the injunction to become childlike demands immediate action from its hearers, asking them to identify who one such child (ἐν παιδίον τοιοῦτο) is in their own communities. The teaching of receiving one child like this Galilean child thus expands into that of offending none of those little ones (μικρά), which endows Jesus’s disciples’ social responsibility with significant weight (18:5–6).<sup>165</sup>

Within Matthew’s larger literary context, the theme of taking care of the lowly is recurrent. For instance, while not overtly political, the other passage about little children and the kingdom of heaven and what follows also resonate with this theme. If we can

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<sup>164</sup> Margaret Hannan, *The Nature and Demands of the Sovereign Rule of God in the Gospel of Matthew*, LNTS 308 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 212.

<sup>165</sup> Consider v. 6: Ὅς δ' ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ, συμφέρει αὐτῷ ἵνα κρεμασθῇ μύλος ὀνικὸς περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ καταποντισθῇ ἐν τῷ πελάγει τῆς θαλάσσης (“whoever gives offense to one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea”).



contrast those little children who come to Jesus for blessings (Matt 19:13–15)<sup>166</sup> with the rich young man who goes away grieving (19:14–22), it seems that Jesus asks his audience questions along the lines of his injunctions in chapter 18: Are you ready to abandon what you have and follow Jesus in order to “enter the kingdom of heaven” (19:23)? Can you welcome to your communities the “others” who are like these little children and who have no evident parents or economic power? As Matt 19:27–30 goes on to explain, those who have followed by radically giving up their social and economic privileges will inherit eternal life “at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory” (19:28). This theme reappears in Jesus’s apocalyptic preaching (25:31–46), in which he speaks of the judgment of all the nations: The Son of Man will gather those who are worthy of the kingdom of heaven by saying, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me*” (25:34–35).<sup>167</sup>

This care for and attention to the lowly amid the oppressive socio-political structures of the Roman Empire are embedded within the Matthean vision of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew’s audience would have interpreted Jesus’s injunctions about entering the kingdom of heaven like little children as not living like those sons of the earthly kings. Only when refusing the way of life that the Herodian sons lead and breaking the

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<sup>166</sup> Where the text reads, “Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.” These children that were brought to Jesus’s disciples seem to have had no parents. See II.2 “Terminology” above.

<sup>167</sup> Emphasis my own. In Greek, it reads, ξένος ἦμην καὶ συνηγάγετέ με.

socio-political structure in which only a small number of people can taste peace and prosperity would Jesus's disciples be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. While this eschatological kingdom is promised and has yet to come (Matt 25:31–35), this new social and political structure is to be envisioned and lived by the disciples on earth (cf. 6:9–13, the Lord's Prayer), who are expected to receive one such child, one of those little ones (μικρά), and one of those strangers (ἄλλοτριῶν; 18:5–6). The Galilean child serves to articulate the religious ideal embedded in the kingdom of heaven: In that kingdom, God acts as the sole sovereign (*pater* of all), greater people on earth relinquish their privilege, and the least and the others of society are fully embraced.

## Chapter III

### Infants in Christ, Not Children of God: The Rhetoric of Childhood in 1 Corinthians

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus offers childlikeness as a paradigmatic example for those entering the kingdom (or reign) of heaven. By contrast, we have another text in the first century CE that urges its readers not to be like little children while it extensively discusses the qualifications for God’s reign.<sup>168</sup> Among the undisputed Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians distinctively presents the child as an important example (παράδειγμα) to support Paul’s deliberative argument.<sup>169</sup> It is the only letter in which Paul likens both his recipients and himself to infants (νήπιοι):<sup>170</sup> Apart from the vocative ἀδελφοί that directly addresses Paul’s audience, “infants in Christ” is one of the very first identifiers in the letter that Paul uses to characterize the Corinthians (ὕμῖν ... ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ in 1

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<sup>168</sup> Throughout the Pauline corpus, there are seven instances in which Paul refers to the reign of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), and five of them are found in 1 Corinthians (4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50). The other two are at Gal 5:21 and Rom 14:17. Cf. 1 Thess 2:12 (τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν).

<sup>169</sup> In terms of the use and function of examples (παρδείγματα) in deliberative rhetoric, see Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 39–60.

<sup>170</sup> In Galatians 4, Paul does mention νήπιοι. However, he uses this term in a general sense to denote all believers’ status in the pre-Christ era when they were bound with the law. In 1 Corinthians, while νήπιοι’s meaning as minors is maintained, this term specifically applies to the Corinthian audience’s *current* state.

Cor 3:1).<sup>171</sup> The same term “infant” (νήπιος) appears in the midst of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), yet Paul uses it to describe his own past. Contrasting his adulthood with his childhood, Paul considers this childhood particularly to be the time when he “spoke, thought, and reasoned like an infant” (13:11). Furthermore, in the same “proof” section (11:2–14:40),<sup>172</sup> Paul makes a specific injunction against childish thinking, asking the Corinthians not to be little children (παιδιά) in their thinking but to be infants (νήπιοι) in evil while adults (τέλειοι) in their thinking (14:20).

Childhood language seems to resonate throughout 1 Corinthians, yet the portrait of infantile Corinthians may look puzzling at first if one remembers the letter’s beginning. For Paul says, “I give thanks to God for you ... that in every way you were enriched in [Christ Jesus] with all speech and all knowledge ... you are not lacking in any spiritual gift” (1:4–7). Whereas this thanksgiving section portrays Paul’s audience as intellectual, spiritually mature people (τέλειοι cf. 2:6), Paul’s depiction of the readers as infants not only ascribes immaturity to them (3:1–3) but also directly raises a concern about speech and knowledge manifested in their spiritual gifts (14:20). This observation in turn raises the question of how Paul is engaging this language about infants and childishness in his response to the Corinthians’ current state. If his references to infants are ultimately to support the main purpose of this letter (1:10)<sup>173</sup>—namely to critique

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<sup>171</sup> Consider that Paul’s tone changes at 3:1. He uses the first person plural form (“we”) in 2:6–16, but here he distinguishes between himself (“I”) and his addressees (“you” [pl.]).

<sup>172</sup> In this letter’s rhetorical schema, this section (11:1–14:40) belongs to one of those ‘proofs’ (πίστεις) that support Paul’s main argument (πρόθεσις) in 1:10. For a useful compositional analysis of 1 Corinthians’ rhetorical structure, see Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 184–294.

<sup>173</sup> Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες, καὶ μὴ ἦ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἧτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ

“factionalism” while promoting “unity” in the *ekklēsia*—it is important to explore how he identifies those images of infants with the Corinthians.<sup>174</sup> What aspects of infants (νήπιοι and παιδία) are particularly broached in this letter to challenge the Corinthians’ religious practice and self-understanding? What kind of theological ideal does Paul’s rhetoric of childhood defend and promote? What might this message to stop acting as little children have meant to the Corinthian audience?

This chapter examines the meaning and functions of the νήπιος and παιδίον language in 1 Corinthians. In order to comprehend the range of philosophical and cultural implications that this imagery of the child might have carried for the Corinthian audience, I first discuss the necessity of being aware of the different semantic ranges of νήπιος/παιδίον and τέκνον. I then explore how the deployment of νήπιος and παιδίον in 1 Corinthians operates within the ancient discourses on children and childhood, calling particular attention to the fact that Paul’s use of childhood imagery is directly involved in the issue of speech and talk within the Corinthian *ekklēsia*. Writings contemporaneous to Paul’s present ideas of infancy as an absence of *logos* (speech, reason, rationality), thus placing the young child as both antithetical and in a progressive relationship to adulthood. This insight, I argue, is key to understanding the functions of the infancy imagery within

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γνώμη: “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that all of you speak of the same and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”

<sup>174</sup> Those who have studied the rhetorical form and content of 1 Corinthians agree that the historical situation in this epistle does not bear on “the exigence as theological battles among the groups of 1:12 rather than as ethical dimensions of division itself.” Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 103–4. Likewise, Mitchell also notes, “Like Aristides, Paul begins his argument for unity by preparing his hearers to accept his advice through his common praise of them all ... [H]e combats, not individual factionalists or factions, but the very phenomenon of factionalism itself” (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 196–97).

the historical-rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians.<sup>175</sup> As the imperfect speech, irrationality, and physical immaturity of the *logos*-less infant are deployed in this letter, the *ekklēsia* at Corinth is asked not only to revisit its self-knowledge and religious practice but also to develop fully into the ideal state of τέλειοι (“the mature” or “the perfect”). My chapter ultimately offers a new perspective on the way in which 1 Corinthians promotes its religious ideal. Functioning as a negative example for the Corinthians’ transformation, this imagery of the “infant” reveals the nature of the impending reign of God (4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50), which only rational and mature “adults” (τέλειοι) can inherit.

## 2. “CHILDREN” IN 1 CORINTHIANS: TERMINOLOGY AND CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

Just as the connotations of “the child” vary in both antiquity and the contemporary world, so do various words and meanings appear in Paul’s references to the child. A brief terminological clarification of νήπιος and παιδίον will help to narrow the scope and meaning of childhood imagery used in 1 Corinthians. It is important to recognize the linguistic difference between νήπιος/παιδίον and τέκνον,<sup>176</sup> particularly as a way of engaging critically with contemporary scholarship on 1 Corinthians.

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<sup>175</sup> See Schüssler Fiorenza, “Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians,” in *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 105–122.

<sup>176</sup> For more detailed analysis of childhood terminology, see Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde*, 194–200. Cf. Aasgaard, “Paul as a Child,” 133.

Even though τέκνον and νήπιος/παιδίον appear to have the same referent (“child”), their semantic difference is much larger than their similarity in meaning. The word τέκνον belongs to kinship language,<sup>177</sup> whereas νήπιος and παιδίον, often interchangeable,<sup>178</sup> are age-specific terms. In other words, no matter what τέκνον denotes—e.g., a person’s child (either a minor or an adult), heir, beloved disciple, or servant—this word functions as a relational term that connotes the τέκνον’s ties with its parent or guardian. Quite differently, νήπιος and παιδίον both refer to an underage individual who is most likely younger than seven, if not zero to three years old.<sup>179</sup> Paul in 1 Corinthians only uses νήπιος and παιδίον rather than παῖς, a more general term for a child.<sup>180</sup> Unlike the wide range of meanings and age groups that παῖς covers, νήπιος and

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<sup>177</sup> This is also the case for other relational terms such as υἱός (“son” or “child”), κληρονόμος (“heir”), and σπέρμα (“offspring”).

<sup>178</sup> Some ancient authors distinguish between these two words’ different age groups, for instance, using νήπιος for a baby (nursling or infant as we imagine it) and παιδίον for an older child, perhaps equivalent to modern English terms such as preschooler and kindergartener. However, it is also notable that these words, as well as βρέφος (“newborn”), appear together in ancient medical literature indiscriminately denoting infants. As Susan Holman notes, “Soranus prefers βρέφος, yet occasionally uses νήπιος or παιδίον. Rufus uses παιδίον almost exclusively. Oribasius (c. 320–400 CE), the personal physician of Julian the Apostate, uses παιδίον and βρέφος interchangeably, sometimes in the same sentence when referring to the same care of the same infant” (“Molded as Wax,” 78).

<sup>179</sup> Liddell and Scott’s Greek Dictionary notes παιδίον as a *little* or *young child* (up to 7 yrs., acc. to *Hp. ap. Ph.* 1.26). This fits with a wide range of ancient authors from the fourth century BCE to the end of late antiquity who used the “hebdomatic calculation,” dividing human life into sets of 7 years. See also Plato, *Leg.* 7.794c; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1336b; Aristophanes of Byzantium, fr. 37–66 (Slater); Hippocrates in Philo, *Opif.* 36.105; Solon, fr. 27W; Cicero, *Fin.* 5.15.42; Quintilian, 1.1.18, etc. Interestingly, παιδίον is also used for an unborn child, as Hippocrates’ medical treatise *περὶ φύσεως παιδίου* (or *De Natura Fetus*) shows. Note that this work, usually translated as *On the Nature of the Child*, is cited or alluded to by many medical authors in antiquity, including Galen and Soranus. See Hippocrates of Cos, *Nature of the Child in Generation. Nature of the Child. Diseases 4. Nature of Women and Barrenness. Hippocrates Volume X*, ed. and trans. Paul Potter, LCL 520 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 25–93.

<sup>180</sup> For a careful philological analysis of παῖς, see Mark Golden, “Pais, ‘Child’ and ‘Slave,’” *L’Antiquité Classique* 54 (1985): 91–104. Here Golden remarks that from the time of ancient Athens παῖς had a wide range of meaning, covering both relative and absolute usage. It could

παιδίων particularly emphasize a person’s young age, relating to the very first stage of human life. When figuratively employed to depict an adult’s state, both νήπιος and παιδίων always convey and often negatively amplify the notion of being “young,” connoting foolishness, ignorance, or recklessness that does not match the level of maturity expected from an adult. This negative perspective on being like a child was so widespread in Greek-speaking cultures that one can easily find lexical evidence reflecting such thinking; derived from παιδίων and νήπιος, terms like παιδαριώδης (childish, puerile), παιδικός (childish), and νήπιος (infantile) refer not just to one’s physical weakness (“feeble”) but also to ignorant and foolish thoughts or behaviors. This sort of usage drawn from νήπιος or παιδίων differs from the possible metaphoric dimensions of τέκνον. The word τέκνον often carries emotional or even positive connotations, not because of the child’s own qualities but because of his or her affectionate relationship with a parent(-like) figure.

This brief linguistic survey is quite telling if brought into conversation with contemporary scholarship, for Paul’s metaphoric language that compares adults to infants (νήπιοι and παιδιά) is a rather underexplored topic in Pauline studies. Much ink has been spilt on Paul’s self-portrait as a father and mother<sup>181</sup> but not on his references to the

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mean a young person, someone’s child (regardless of age), and a slave. The usage of τέκνον might be similar to παῖς, but τέκνον was used in emotional and relational contexts and didn’t denote ‘slave.’ Because of the vague and broad usage of παῖς in later Greek (from the fifth century BCE onwards), “[d]ifferent words had to be developed and adapted for young children in particular – *brephos* in verse ..., *paidion* in prose and popular speech. ... In Athens, *pais* was [also] the word for any male citizen who had not yet officially come of age” (Ibid., 93).

<sup>181</sup> E.g., Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), esp. 97–117; Eva M. Lassen, “The Use of the Father Image in Imperial Propaganda and 1 Corinthians 4:14–21,” *TynBul* 42 (1991): 127–136; O. L. Yarbrough, “Parents and Children in the Letters of Paul,” in White and Yarbrough, *The Social World of the First Christians*, 126–141; Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment*, 184; Trevor J. Burke, “Paul’s Role as ‘Father’ to His Corinthian ‘Children’ in



Corinthians and himself as infants.<sup>182</sup> Along this line of study, Paul’s construction of the Corinthians as his beloved “children” (τέκνα) has long been dealt with primarily as a way of establishing Paul’s own apostolic authority (1 Cor 4:14; cf. 4:17). By contrast, the Corinthians as infants and little children (νήπιοι and παιδία)—though these words are more prevalent than τέκνα in this letter—have received little scholarly attention. Paul’s use of νήπιοι and παιδία is not duly contextualized in relation to these terms’ linguistic and cultural connotations but only understood to confirm his parent-child relationship with the Corinthians. As a result, many scholars have only stressed that Paul’s depiction of the audience as young children, together with his own fatherly imagery, functions as a rhetorical device to reinforce his apostolic authority and pastoral control over the Corinthians.

A handful of commentators have engaged with the image of infants (mostly focusing on 1 Cor 3:1–2). However, they have only debated whether the issue behind this particular portrait of the Corinthians concerns their childish condition in contrast to

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Socio-Historical Context (1 Corinthians 4:14–21),” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. K. Elliott (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 95–113; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 109–116. Cf. Norman R. Peterson, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 104–50.

<sup>182</sup> There are a few exceptions. See James M. M. Francis, “As Babes in Christ — Some Proposals regarding 1 Cor. 3:1–3,” *JSNT* 7 (1980): 41–60; Aasgaard, “Paul as a Child,” 129–159. Cf. McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother*.

“being spiritual” (πνευματικοί)<sup>183</sup> or their failure to progress from the elementary stage of faith to deeper knowledge.<sup>184</sup> In both cases, the scholarly discussion seems properly undergirded with a comparative study of 1 Corinthians and its contemporaneous thought (mainly Stoicism and Philo).<sup>185</sup> Still, such contextualization tends to fall short of situating this childhood imagery within the rhetorical-theological realm of the entire letter or fails to examine fully the relationship between the “infantile” Corinthians and Paul’s self-representation as an infant. These commentators’ conclusions are not much different from those of the studies focusing on the Corinthians as Paul’s τέκνα; they usually fall back on what Paul has in mind when using this language of childhood, thereby demonstrating how this rhetoric serves to defend his status as a parent or a “preacher.”<sup>186</sup> Therefore, in order to understand the full resonance of this childhood imagery, we must still investigate how Paul’s deployment of childhood language participates in the ancient discourses on children and human development. At the same time, scholars should also examine the

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<sup>183</sup> Johannes Weiss, for example, highlights that in 1 Cor 3:1 the contrast is made between babes and the spiritual, not between babes and the mature (τέλειοι). *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 71–73. Building on Weiss’s observation, but also agreeing with Rudolf Schnackenburg’s argument that τέλειοι “envisages all Christians” (“Christian Adulthood According to the Apostle Paul,” *CBQ* 25 [1963]: 354–70), James Francis further suggests that Paul’s emphasis is put on childishness, namely, “a state of immaturity incompatible with that of spiritual understanding,” not on an early stage of growth in the faith (“As Babes in Christ,” 41–60).

<sup>184</sup> Ulrich Wilckens is representative of this opinion. See his *Weisheit und Torheit: eine exegetisch-religions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Kor. 1 und 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959), 89–96. Focusing on the different diets assigned to νήπιοι and πνευματικοί, he posits that πνευματικοί denotes those who are advanced in knowledge, thereby corresponding to τέλειοι. Cf. M. D. Hooker, “Hard Sayings: 1 Cor. 3.2,” *Theology* 69 (1966): 19–21.

<sup>185</sup> H. M. Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); W. Grundmann, “Die νήπιοι in der urchristlichen Paränese,” *NTS* 5 (1958–59): 188–205.

<sup>186</sup> E.g., Francis, “As Babes in Christ,” 53; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 290–91.

ways in which this childhood language interacts with Paul’s other theological ideas presented in 1 Corinthians so as to evaluate its “persuasive power” and rhetorical “functions”<sup>187</sup> in Paul’s back-and-forth correspondence with the Corinthians.

This chapter begins with the historical and cultural premise that Paul lived in a world in which the individual child (νήπιος or παιδίον) was rarely viewed in a positive manner at least in intellectual discourses—whether such terms refer to a very young person in reality or apply to an adult figuratively.<sup>188</sup> The three pericopae in 1 Corinthians (3:1–4; 13:8–12; 14:18–25) in which the Corinthians as well as Paul himself are likened to infants seemingly exhibit a similar line of thought to this ancient perception of the child (νήπιος or παιδίον). Just as the earliest stage of human life was generally marked by physical vulnerability, intellectual incapacities, and moral incompetence in antiquity,<sup>189</sup> the infant-like Corinthians are portrayed as those who cannot digest solid food but only drink milk (3:1), whose speech and thinking (or reasoning) are incomplete (14:20; cf. 13:11), and who shall remain infants as far as their ignorance of evil is concerned (14:20). By comparing these images of infants to those in works contemporaneous with Paul’s, I will articulate the specific attributes or qualities of infants that may have been

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<sup>187</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 44.

<sup>188</sup> As implied above, in philosophical and fictional literature, this usage is contrasted with, and separate from, the cases of ‘children’ (τέκνα) as heirs or descendants whose relationship with their parents is positively conceived. In the early Roman period, the child as an ‘object’ who requires parental love and care—not the child *per se*—is used as a symbol to promote imperial prosperity. To quote Aasgaard, “in art children figures often served as symbols for happiness, and the emperor Augustus also used children imagery as means for creating a notion about the durability and future prosperity of the empire” (“Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity,” 32).

<sup>189</sup> See chap. II, n. 117.

intelligible to Paul’s audience. This analysis will allow us to specify the rhetorical and theological interests of this letter that this childhood imagery serves.

### 3. CHILDHOOD VS. ADULTHOOD IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE

In the first section of 1 Corinthians (1:10–4:21), Paul calls his addressees “infants in Christ” (νηπίους ἐν Χριστῷ), together with another designation, “people of the flesh” (σάρκινοι) (3:1):<sup>190</sup>

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving [or walking] according to human inclinations?<sup>191</sup>

In the whole literary context of 1 Corinthians, infants and people of the flesh stand on one side of a hierarchical binary. Paul contrasts infants (νήπιοι/παιδία) with adults (τέλειοι, 13:11–13; 14:20) and the fleshly (σάρκινοι, cf. 15:50) with the spiritual (πνευματικοί, 3:1–3). In order to distinguish between the Corinthians’ fleshly condition at present and their ideal condition as spiritual people, Paul uses the analogy of infants versus adults. This was not Paul’s own invention but was a prevalent cultural trope in ancient intellectual discourses.

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<sup>190</sup> See the Greek apposition in v. 1: ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις.

<sup>191</sup> 1 Cor 3:1–3: Καὶ γὰρ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθητε λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ. γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα, οὐπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε, ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοί ἐστε. ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις, οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε καὶ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε;

We have already explored the figurative usage and connotations of νήπιος and παιδίον above. In line with this linguistic tendency, many ancient authors—regardless of their philosophical orientations or cultural backgrounds—found in the imperfect image of a young child (νήπιος or παιδίον) an apt vehicle to describe and even mock an irrational, feeble, or inexperienced adult.<sup>192</sup> For instance, Polybius, writing in the second century BCE, depicts the courageous character of Philip V of Macedon by using the analogy of the adult in contrast to the infant:

For while [the Aetolians] had hoped to find a helpless infant in Philip, owing to his tender years and inexperience, they really found him to be a grown-up man, both in his projects and in his performances, while they had shown themselves contemptible and childish both in their general policy and in their conduct of particular operations (*Histories* 5.29 [Walbank and Habicht, LCL]).<sup>193</sup>

In opposition to the helplessness and inexperience of an infant (ὡς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ), Philip’s state appears to be that of a grown-up man (τέλειον ἄνδρα). In the presence of his political competence and maturity, only the Aetolians’ administrative and military incapability proves “childish” (παιδαριώδεις).

In a similar vein, Pliny the Younger (first century CE) criticizes those “grown-up men” going to the Circensian Games as being childish (*pueriliter*). He notes in his letter to Calvisius:

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<sup>192</sup>An early example from classical antiquity is found in Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 3.12. Here he compares the adult’s self-indulgence to childish faults (τὰς παιδικὰς ἁμαρτίας); he thinks that this [childhood] “metaphor appears apt enough,” “for children [like profligates] live at the prompting of desire [κατ’ ἐπιθυμίαν γὰρ ζῶσι καὶ τὰ παιδία]; and the appetite for pleasure is strongest in childhood, so that if it be not disciplined and made obedient to authority, it will make great headway” (Rackham, LCL).

<sup>193</sup> ἐλίψαντες γὰρ ὡς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ χρῆσασθαι τῷ Φιλίππῳ διὰ τε τὴν ἡλικίαν καὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν, τὸν μὲν Φίλιππον εὖρον τέλειον ἄνδρα καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιβολὰς καὶ κατὰ τὰς πράξεις, αὐτοὶ δ’ ἐφάνησαν εὐκαταφρόνητοι καὶ παιδαριώδεις ἔν τε τοῖς κατὰ μέρος καὶ τοῖς καθόλου πράγμασιν.

I have spent these several days past among my papers with the most pleasing tranquility imaginable. You will ask how that can possibly be in the midst of Rome? Why, the Circensian Games were taking place; a kind of entertainment for which I have not the least taste. They have no novelty, no variety, nothing, in short, one would wish to see twice. I am more astonished that so many thousands of grown men should be possessed again and again with a childish passion to look at galloping horses, and men standing upright in their chariots.<sup>194</sup>

Whether in Latin or Greek, being like a child (*puerilis* or ὡς παιδίῳ νηπίῳ) readily meant “childish,” and ancient authors brought out this negative quality of childlikeness in order to depict those who were not living up to the level of maturity and rationality expected of adults. In ancient intellectual discourse, this figurative usage of the child<sup>195</sup> is found in the νήπιος metaphor (or παιδίον). Particularly in Paul’s time, it is noticeable that many ancient thinkers pair νήπιος/παιδίον with τέλειος, a term that not only denotes an adult but often signifies a perfect person. For them, this νήπιος versus τέλειος analogy serves as a way to ponder the topic of self-cultivation, particularly in relation to one’s intellectual, moral, or spiritual improvement. For example, upon discussing the proper behaviors of a good citizen, Paul’s contemporary Epictetus admonishes his interlocutor not to be a “childish” adult:

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<sup>194</sup> The last sentence reads in Latin: *Quo magis miror tot milia virorum tam pueriliter identidem cupere currentes equos, insistentes curribus homines videre*. Pliny then goes on to describe these people who are possessed with such a childish passion: “If, indeed, they were attracted by the swiftness of the horses or the skill of the men, one could account for this enthusiasm. But in fact it is a bit of cloth they favor, a bit of cloth that captivates them. And if during the running the racers were to exchange colors, their partisans would change sides, and instantly forsake the very drivers and horses whom they were just before recognizing from afar, and clamorously saluting by name” (*Ep.* 9.6 [Melmoth and Hutchinson, LCL]).

<sup>195</sup> In Greek, νήπιος, παιδίον; in Latin, *infans*, *puer*.

Therefore, when you have been introduced into this city-state by the gods, and find it now your duty to lay hand to the work of a man, do you yearn for nurses and the breast, and does the weeping of poor silly women move you and make you effeminate? And so will you never get over being an infant (οὐδέποτε παύσει παιδίον ὦν νήπιον)? Don't you know that, when a person acts like a child (ὁ τὰ παιδίου ποιῶν), the older he is the more ridiculous he is? (*Disc.* 3.24 [Oldfather, LCL]).<sup>196</sup>

Elsewhere, Epictetus uses a similar infant analogy in order to contrast an immature adult's state with a noble and courageous citizen's way of life: "Will you not be weaned at last, as children are (Οὐ θέλεις ἤδη ὡς τὰ παιδιά ἀπογαλακτισθῆναι), and take more solid food, and cease to cry 'nurse' and 'mommy,' cries for old women's ears?" (*Disc.* 2.16 [Oldfather, LCL]). At this juncture, it is nearly impossible to dismiss the similarity between Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians and the Stoic philosopher's, as we see the milk imagery that signifies the weakness and unmanly character of a childish adult as well as his request for the interlocutor to cease to be an infant.<sup>197</sup> Like Epictetus, Paul discourages the childish behavior of his audience, who appear capable of digesting milk only (1 Cor 3:1–2); that is, they should cast aside fleshly, imperfect inclinations. Later, Paul also urges the Corinthians to cease to be like children, expecting that they are surely able to think, reason, and speak as adults (14:20; cf. 13:11–12). Just as Epictetus employs

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<sup>196</sup> πρὸς ταῦτα ὑπὸ θεῶν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ταύτην εἰσηγμένος καὶ ἤδη τῶν ἀνδρῶς ἔργων ὀφείλων ἄπτεσθαι τιτθὰς ἐπιποθεῖς καὶ μάμμην καὶ κάμπτει σε καὶ ἀποθλύνει κλαίοντα γύναια μωρά; οὕτως οὐδέποτε παύσει παιδίον· ὦν νήπιον; οὐκ οἶσθ', ὅτι ὁ τὰ παιδίου ποιῶν ὄσῳ πρεσβύτερος τοσοῦτῳ γελιοότερος;

<sup>197</sup> Regarding a recent study that situates this milk imagery (1 Cor 3) within a broader "discourse of formation" in antiquity, see John David Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). Penniman argues that "for ancient Jews and Christians, nourishment symbolized a transformative process, a transfer of essential qualities and characteristics that could mold the one being fed into the likeness of the one doing the feeding." Idem, "Dissertation Spotlight," *Ancient Jew Review*, 13 January 2016, <http://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2016/1/11/dissertation-spotlight-john-penniman>.

childlike behavior and status as the antithesis of good citizenship, so the contrast between childhood and adulthood in 1 Corinthians serves as an important *topos* from which to argue for a properly spirit-driven state of being. By taking “adults” to be his audience’s supposed and self-proclaimed status, while identifying their current state with “little children,” Paul offers the child as a negative paradigm that opposes an ideal identity of being τέλειοι (13:11; 14:20) and πνευματικοί (3:1–2).

From this observation, one may propose that Paul’s paired analogy of νήπιος/παιδίον and τέλειος conforms to a common philosophical *topos* in antiquity. As many commentators have pointed out,<sup>198</sup> the antithetical relationship between infants and adults or spiritual people in 1 Corinthians seemingly stands in line with the philosophical trope of two life stages. Indeed, this trope is often deployed to articulate different levels of knowledge or different spiritual ranks in human society. For instance, Pythagoras called his disciples of a lower rank νήπιοι, while more advanced ones were τέλειοι.<sup>199</sup> More relevant to the present discussion and more contemporaneous with Paul’s case is the first-century Jewish thinker Philo, who frequently uses the example of νήπιοι and τέλειοι in his philosophical treatises. For instance, in *On the Migration of Abraham* 9.46 (Colson and Whitaker, LCL), he notes, “first of all, God wishes to make it understood by you that there is one place for infants (νήπιοι) and another for full-grown men (τέλειοι), the one being called practice (ἄσκησις) and the other wisdom (σοφία).”<sup>200</sup> The

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<sup>198</sup> To name a few, Hooker, “Hard Sayings: 1 Cor. 3.2”; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Francis, “As Babes in Christ”; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

<sup>199</sup> Lightfoot, *Notes*, 173; Francis, *Adults as Children*, 181.

<sup>200</sup> ἀλλὰ πρῶτον ἐκεῖνό σοι βούλεται παραστήσαι, ὅτι ἕτερος νηπίων καὶ ἕτερος τελείων χώρος ἐστίν, ὁ μὲν ὀνομαζόμενος ἄσκησις, ὁ δὲ καλούμενος σοφία. Meanwhile, it is notable that this



hierarchical relationship between practice and wisdom is couched in human beings' two distinctive life stages. A passage in *On Husbandry* also expands the understanding that infancy differs from adulthood, and infants do need practice before growing into an adulthood that is characterized by wisdom. Here, Philo figuratively takes up these two stages of life and uses diet to mark their significant difference:

[W]ho else could the person that is in each of us be save the mind, whose place it is to reap the benefits derived from all that has been sown or planted? But seeing that for babies, milk is food, but for adults, wheaten bread, there must also be soul-nourishment, such as is milk-like suited to the time of childhood, in the shape of the preliminary stages of school-learning [encyclical science], and such as is adapted to adults in the shape of instructions leading the way through wisdom and temperance and all virtue. For these when sown and planted in the mind will produce most beneficial fruits, namely fair and praiseworthy conduct (Colson and Whitaker, LCL).<sup>201</sup>

Embedded within the agricultural imagery of planting and harvesting,<sup>202</sup> “milk” and “wheaten bread” (or cakes) show a stark contrast between infants and fully grown persons and accordingly represent the two different degrees—basic and advanced—of

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contrast between infants and adults immediately follows a similar distinction between “slaves” and “the friends of God” (*Migr. Abr.* 9.45).

<sup>201</sup> *On Husbandry* 2.8–9: ἄνθρωπος δὲ ὁ ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν τίς ἂν εἴη πλὴν ὁ νοῦς, ὃς τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν σπαρέντων καὶ φυτευθέντων ὠφελείας εἴωθε καρποῦσθαι; ἐπεὶ δὲ νηπίοις μὲν ἐστὶ γάλα τροφή, τελείοις δὲ τὰ ἐκ πυρῶν πέμματα, καὶ ψυχῆς γαλακτώδεις μὲν ἂν εἶεν τροφαὶ κατὰ τὴν παιδικὴν ἡλικίαν τὰ τῆς ἐγκυκλίου μουσικῆς προπαιδεύματα, τέλειαι δὲ καὶ ἀνδράσιν ἐμπρεπεῖς αἱ διὰ φρονήσεως καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ ἀπάσης ἀρετῆς ὑψηγήσεις· ταῦτα γὰρ σπαρέντα καὶ φυτευθέντα ἐν διανοίᾳ καρποὺς ὠφελιμοτάτους οἴσει, καλὰς καὶ ἐπαινετὰς πράξεις. The translation is modified slightly for gender-neutral language.

<sup>202</sup> Interestingly enough, the passage immediately following the “infants-in-Christ” pericope uses agricultural imagery of planting and watering. See 1 Cor 3:6–8: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each” (NRSV).

instruction. The soul in its childhood is nourished by encyclical science, an elementary level of knowledge, whereas “instructions leading the way through wisdom and temperance and all virtue” are suitable for adults, from whose minds the most advantageous fruit (good and praiseworthy actions) is to be reaped. Philo portrays the transition from childhood to adulthood as the process of achieving virtue, describing a person as able to reap what is sown and planted, the “perfect food,” which infants are not yet able to eat. As long as this metaphor is predicated upon the natural growth of human beings, the contrast between the two life stages intrinsically entails an understanding of progression.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, in other places in which Philo discusses two different categories of humanity with regard to philosophical achievement, he places νήπιοι in opposition to τέλειοι (e.g., *Congr.* 4.19;<sup>204</sup> *Som.* 2:10–11; *Leg. All.* 1.94). For Philo, νήπιοι, παιδία, and βρέφη—whose characteristics run counter to τέλειοι’s—represent those who are lower in status than “all lovers of wisdom and knowledge” (*De Abr. Migr.*

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<sup>203</sup> This statement is my response to scholars like Francis (“As Babes in Christ,” 41–60, esp. 57), Schnackenburg (“Christian Adulthood,” 354–70), and Weiss (*Korintherbrief*, 71–74) who think that Paul’s contrast between childhood and adulthood (or between infants and people of the spirit) does not necessarily carry the meaning of progression from the former to the latter stage. See n. 183 above. Meanwhile, Hooker suggests that 1 Cor 3:1–2 echoes a distinction that Paul’s addressees have already made. In other words, there is a possibility that the Corinthians themselves, by analogy with the two different diets, distinguish between the members of a higher spiritual state and those of a lower one. See Hooker, “Hard Sayings: 1 Cor. 3.2,” 19–22. However, it is difficult to prove whether and how the Corinthians called some of their members ‘infants,’ solely based on Paul’s statements.

<sup>204</sup> “Observe too that our body is not nourished in the earlier stages with solid and costly foods (πεπηγυίαις καὶ πολυτελέσι χρῆται **τροφαῖς**). The simple and milky (γαλακτώδεσιν) foods of infancy (ἐν ἡλικίᾳ τῆ βρεφώδει) come first. Just so you may consider that the school subjects and the lore which belongs to each of them stand ready to nourish the childhood of the soul (παιδικῶς ... τροφᾶς), while the virtues are grown-up food (τελειοτέρως δὲ καὶ πρεπούσας), suited for those who are really men(άνδράσιν).” Philo, *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* 4.19 (Colson and Whitaker, LCL). Here the distinction between milk (γάλα) for infants (βρέφη, cf. “infantine food,” παιδικῶς ... τροφᾶς) and solid food (τροφαῖς) for adults (άνδρες) represents the different degrees of maturity between “the soul” and the “fully-grown men.” Emphasis my own.

10.57; *Leg. All.* 3.133). In his writing, therefore, the first stage of life serves as a useful tool for illustrating the elementary and underdeveloped stage of a philosophical life (thus, ἄσκησις) that precedes one's attainment of the ideal state of the perfect.

From all these *comparanda*, we may readily locate Paul's metaphorical use of infancy within the same cultural milieu of the ancient world as Epictetus's or Philo's. Broadly speaking, these authors make much of the contrast between infancy and adulthood in order to guide their audience to progress in the right direction. All of this figurative use of childhood language can be seen as a philosophical device employed to cultivate a self that is perfect and mature. This is part of the reason that some scholars have attempted either to align Paul's thought with Philo directly<sup>205</sup> or to reconstruct the strong Stoic character of the Corinthian audience.<sup>206</sup> While we must set Paul's language of childhood within the general cultural perception of children in antiquity, we cannot immediately conclude that Paul or his audience was mainly influenced by one

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<sup>205</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "Πνευματικός vs. Ψυχικός: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians," *HTR* 69 (1976): 269–88. Horsley discusses the difficulty in determining the backgrounds of the πνευματικός–ψυχικός terminology in 1 Corinthians as "there is no convincing terminological parallel whatsoever in contemporary comparative material" (270). While his demonstration of the similarity between 1 Corinthians and the Philonic analogy (esp. infants vs. adults and the earthly Adam vs. the heavenly *anthropos*) is useful, he does not attend to the question of how the relationship between infants and σάρκιννοι might complicate his understanding of the πνευματικός–ψυχικός terminology. Cf. Birger Pearson, *The PNEUMATIKOS–PSYCHIKOS Terminology in 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 12 (Missoula: University of Montana, 1973).

<sup>206</sup> Brookins pays attention to the "consistently Stoic character of the Corinthians' wisdom," thereby arguing that influence from Stoic teaching—including the Corinthians' self-understanding as wise men—could have contributed to every problem reflected in 1 Corinthians. However, this alignment of the Corinthian audience with Stoicism fails to explain the obviously non-Stoic phenomena of the spiritual gifts, such as speaking-in-tongues and prophecy. See, Tim Brookins, "The Wise Corinthians: Their Stoic Education and Outlook," *JTS* 62 (2011): 51–76. For a more recent and nuanced discussion on the relationship between Paul and Stoicism, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

philosophic trend at that time or that he uncritically imported some Platonic or Stoic ideas into his letter.

For instance, Philo's association of infancy with the state of the soul only descriptively points to an undeveloped, beginner's stage.<sup>207</sup> However, Paul's phrase "[speaking] to you as to infants" (ὕμῖν...ὡς νηπίοις) in 1 Corinthians contains obviously negative overtones, particularly when combined with the image of the fleshly people (σάρκινοι) who "walk according to human inclinations" (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε, 3:3). Meanwhile, both Epictetus and Paul invoke the negative aspects of infancy in order to urge their interlocutors toward proper behavior. However, Epictetus does not use the infant imagery to refer to the collective identity of the group to which he is speaking. This stands in contrast with Paul's letter, in which "infants (νήπιοι) in Christ" clearly defines the character of his immediate audience as a whole (note 3:1 in which the object ὑμῖν is followed by the repeated ὡς phrase).<sup>208</sup> Rather, his construction of the *entire* audience as "infants in Christ" or "young children" functions as a rhetorical invective against the *ekklēsia* as a whole, implicitly invoking the contrast between these Corinthian νήπιοι and the entirely absent (according to Paul) τέλειοι. Therefore, a careful analysis of the audience and concrete situation of 1 Corinthians will allow us to see the specific ways in which Paul deploys childhood imagery, fitting it into the letter's own rhetorical arrangement.

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<sup>207</sup> Philo and Paul may agree on the point that infancy is a period during which human beings need ἄσκησις (cf. 1 Cor 3:1–3; 4:14–17) prior to achieving wisdom or virtues.

<sup>208</sup> Regarding the use of ὡς in adverbial phrases of similes and comparisons, see Smyth § 2481, 2990.

#### 4. THE CORINTHIAN *EKKLĒSIA*: SPIRIT-FILLED ADULTS OR *LOGOS*-LESS INFANTS?

##### 4.1 τέλειοι at Corinth: The Historical and Rhetorical Situation

While the imagery of the infant in 1 Corinthians subscribes largely to the ancient philosophical *topos* of the νήπιος versus τέλειος analogy, the aforementioned dissimilarities between Paul and his contemporary thinkers turn our attention to the concrete polemical situation of Corinth. When he first compares the adult Corinthians to infants, Paul does so in the context of his critique of their factionalism (σχίσματα), the very issue that led Paul to write this letter (1:10–4:21). In addition, Paul believes that the Corinthians' attachment to speaking in tongues (γλῶσσα) has resulted in disorderly worship; this is why he characterizes *glossolalia* as childish speech that has nothing to do with νοῦς (14:14, 20).<sup>209</sup> However, this construction using infancy imagery must have been striking to Paul's audience, for the Corinthians may have claimed an elevated spiritual status or philosophical fulfillment as a result of the spirit that God's wisdom brought to them (2:6–8, 12, 15).

Indeed, many (self-)designations of the Corinthians can be found throughout the letter that obviously contrast with Paul's labeling of them as infants (3:1). According to Paul, whose voice, not his audience's, is the only one available for us to hear, it appears that the Corinthians claim to be “kings,” “the rich,” “the wise” (4:8–10; cf. 3:18), and “those who have knowledge” (8:1, 10; cf. 1:5) and also adhere to freedom by

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<sup>209</sup> 14:14 reads, ἐὰν [γὰρ] προσεύχωμαι γλῶσση, τὸ πνεῦμά μου προσεύχεται, ὁ δὲ νοῦς μου ἄκαρπός ἐστιν: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind (νοῦς) is unfruitful.”

proclaiming, “everything is permitted to me” (6:12; 10:23). Such portraits might lead us to think that the Corinthians are haughty and full of self-confidence (e.g., 3:21; 4:6–7; 5:6). However, reading Paul’s statements against the grain allows us to reconstruct a possible historical context for what is at stake behind Paul’s deliberate and possibly sarcastic characterization of the audience.

Scholars have long strived to identify the social status or philosophical backgrounds of Paul’s intended audience—or even Paul’s “opponents”—in Corinth.<sup>210</sup> In the context of Roman Corinth, a newly built colony (est. 44 BCE) and a center for “the developing networks of travel and trade in the early Roman Empire,”<sup>211</sup> we may readily picture a diversity of groups and statuses in the *ekklēsia*.<sup>212</sup> However, as Laura Nasrallah

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<sup>210</sup> Oh-Young Kwon summarizes this scholarship on Paul’s “opponents” quite well. See “A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Pauline Opposition and the Nature of its Wisdom [σοφία] in 1 Corinthians 1–4,” *CurBR* 8 (2010): 386–427. However, I do not think that Paul’s real adversaries are addressed among his inscribed audience. On the relationship between Paul’s intended audience and this letter’s deliberative rhetoric, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 105–22.

<sup>211</sup> David K. Pettegrew, “The Changing Rural Horizons of Corinth’s First Urban Christians,” in *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth*, eds., James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 176. In this study, Pettegrew critiques the longstanding scholarly view that characterizes the Corinthian *ekklēsia* as urban and argues that it is important to consider Corinth and its neighboring territory as an area undergoing an important change and development in the 40s–60s CE, not in terms of its “timeless geographical centrality” due to the Isthmus. For a fuller discussion, see idem., *The Isthmus of Corinth: Crossroads of the Mediterranean World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

<sup>212</sup> Previous generations of Pauline scholarship focused on examining the Corinthian congregation as a mixture of various social strata (men, women, Jews, Greek, slaves, free, rich, poor, etc.). See, e.g., Gerd Theissen, “Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community: A Contribution to the Sociology of Early Hellenistic Christianity,” in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 69–119; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, GNS 6 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983). However, recent sociological and archaeological studies have highlighted that the majority of believers in the Corinthian *ekklēsia* were very poor and there may have been only a few members who belonged to the upper class. See Steven J. Friesen, “Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth among the Churches,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth*, eds. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 351–

demonstrates, archeological and demographic evidence calls our attention to the “more general reality” of Corinth as a colonial settlement. Those in the Corinthian *ekklēsia* — mostly “ex-slaves [or “freedpersons” (ἀπελεύθεροι)], migrants, poor”—“may have been striving for upward mobility, but they were likely in large part living at or below subsistence level and facing the griefs of the city.”<sup>213</sup>

Paul’s statements about his readers in 1 Cor 1:26 and 4:8–10 thus can be contextualized in this community’s challenging circumstances, which are marked by poverty, inequality, and griefs.<sup>214</sup> Paul writes, “look at your calling, brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were powerful; not many were of noble birth” (1:26).<sup>215</sup> For most of these Corinthians, who had suffered exile, slavery, or poverty, their calling into the *ekklēsia* in Christ (cf. 1:4–9) may have meant a status

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70. Cf. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters, eds., *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

<sup>213</sup> The griefs are caused by exile, poverty, slavery, and high infant mortality. Laura S. Nasrallah, “Grief in Corinth,” in *Contested Spaces: Houses and Temples in Roman Antiquity and the New Testament*, eds. David L. Balch and Annette Weissenrieder (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 121.

<sup>214</sup> Friesen aptly points out that “[i]n Pauline studies, ... there has been a persistent tendency in recent decades to highlight a few believers who might have been wealthy.” Preoccupied by “an ideology of upward mobility,” many scholars have ignored the majority in Pauline assemblies who were not wealthy at all. When adopting “an ideology of inequality” instead, we can productively find “evidence of the unequal distribution of material and spiritual goods and for religious solutions to those phenomena .... [and] ask what congregational life was like when nearly everyone lived near the level of subsistence.” Steven J. Friesen, “The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis,” in *Corinth in Context*, 256; Steven J. Friesen, Sarah A. James and Daniel N. Schowalter, “Inequality in Corinth,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 1–17. Cf. Welborn, “Inequality in Roman Corinth: Evidence from Diverse Sources Evaluated by a Neo-Ricardian Model,” in *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth*, 47–84.

<sup>215</sup> Consider also 1 Cor 6:20 and 7:22, where Paul evokes imagery of the slave market by saying, “you were bought with a price.” See Laura S. Nasrallah, “‘You Were Bought with a Price’: Freedpersons and Things in 1 Corinthians,” in *Corinth in Contrast*, 54–73.

elevation to being the wise, the powerful, and those in honor (4:10), not a mere change in their “character traits.”<sup>216</sup> The good news they heard upon baptism into Christ was that whether they were Jew or Greek, slave or free(d), male or female, and regardless of their pre-existing social conditions, they all had gained equal access to God’s wisdom and power (12:13; cf. Gal 3:27–28).<sup>217</sup> This message, well-fitted to the socio-historical situation of Corinth, seems to have empowered them to identify themselves as people of the spirit (πνευματικοί)<sup>218</sup> or the mature/perfect (τέλειοι).<sup>219</sup> If the Corinthians’ self-

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<sup>216</sup> Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 63. Here Wire convincingly argues that “a six-factor gauge [wisdom, power, rank, ethnicity, servitude, gender] should be broad enough to reveal the basic inconsistencies and changes in social status within this community. . . . That the three qualities of wisdom, power, and rank apply to social station and not to character traits is clear in the accompanying phrase, “by human standards” (literally, “according to the flesh”), and is confirmed by the focus on shaming others that follows immediately (1:27–28), by the later appearance of this triad [wisdom, power, honor] to describe Paul’s social debasement (4:10), and by Paul’s subsequent use of “calling” to mean a social condition (7:14–24 [again, the categories of gender/sex, ethnicity, servitude]).

<sup>217</sup> Cf. John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 285.

<sup>218</sup> 1 Cor 2:12, 15; cf. 3:1; 15:46. Regarding the Corinthians’ “pneumatic self-understanding,” see Conzelmann, “The Community in Corinth,” in *1 Corinthians*, 15–16; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 120. Gregory E. Sterling argues that the Corinthians’ pneumatic existence points to their particular interpretation of Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7 (i.e., God breathed the divine image into the *anthropos* and this breath is understood to be the same as the spirit). Gregory E. Sterling, “‘Wisdom Among the Perfect:’ Creation Traditions in Alexandrian Judaism and Corinthian Christianity,” *NovT* 37 (1995): 361, 366, 370–72.

<sup>219</sup> 1 Cor 2:6 cf. 14:20. Joseph B. Lightfoot (1895) claims that this term has a sense of “initiated” in a ritual setting, deriving from Hellenistic mysteries. However, I found no instance before Paul in which τέλειος *per se* was used in relation to rituals or mysteries (cf. Delling, *TDNT* 8:69). Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 60-61) notes that Philo makes a connection between τέλειος and the mysteries (*Cher. 2*: “we are about to teach those initiated persons [τούς τελετών] who are worthy of the knowledge of the most sacred mysteries”). However, Philo’s “esotericism” (in Conzelmann’s word) does not directly arise from a mystery-religion setting, since in the context of *Cher. 2* the phrase “those initiated persons” concerns spiritual awakening (cf. *Corpus Hermetica* 4.1). It seems to me that there is a confusion between τέλειος and τελετή in Conzelmann’s commentary.



understanding is fully grounded in the likely pre-Pauline baptismal formula,<sup>220</sup> it is not even impossible to imagine that they drew a new identity in Christ from having become “sons of God” (υιοὶ θεοῦ) or “Abraham’s offspring, and heirs” (τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ... κληρονόμοι).<sup>221</sup>

Therefore, the Corinthians’ collective identity as those who possess wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual authority<sup>222</sup> cannot be taken at face value as reflecting “their objective reality,” but it seems to indicate their “self-perceived status” as a result of baptism.<sup>223</sup> Whether the Corinthians’ belief is expressed as adherence to the exalted Lord,<sup>224</sup> realized eschatology,<sup>225</sup> or otherwise, this transformative experience certainly does not release this new community from quotidian problems such as lawsuits,

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<sup>220</sup> See, e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 120, *inter alia*. Gal 3:28 reads, οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ: πάντες γὰρ ὁμοῦ εἰς ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

<sup>221</sup> Gal 3:26–29. See Cavan Concannon, *When You Were Gentiles: Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>222</sup> 1 Cor 1:17–25; 2:6; 3:18–20; 8:1–3; 12:8.

<sup>223</sup> Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 63. Many commentators have agreed that Paul and his audience had different interpretations of baptism. See, for example, Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Cf. Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit*, 16; R. M. Grant, “The Wisdom of the Corinthians” in *The Joy of Study: Papers on New Testament and Related Subjects Presented to Honor F. C. Grant*, ed. S. E. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 51–55.

<sup>224</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 15–6. I agree with his point that “[t]his [baptismal] formula [Christ died and rose again] can be interpreted in the sense that death is nullified, so to speak, and that faith has now to focus solely on the exalted Lord.” However, the Corinthians’ “ecstatic experience of the self” is no longer understood in terms of the proto-Gnosticism that Conzelmann and others (e.g., Schmithals, Wilckens) have proposed. For this debate, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 34.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 (1978): 510–26.

sex/marriage, food practice, and disorder in worship (1 Cor 5:1–14:40). From Paul’s letter, we can glimpse various opinions in the Corinthian *ekklēsia* regarding how to live “the new life in Christ.”<sup>226</sup> Regardless of how the Corinthians thought of their situation in the community, Paul defines their disagreements as factionalism (1:10) and ascribes this “jealousy” and “strife” to the Corinthians’ infantile and fleshly human inclinations (3:3). The striking discrepancy between the Corinthians’ self-understanding and Paul’s construction of them as infants may point more to a theological disagreement between Paul and his audience than to party strife among the members of the Corinthian *ekklēsia*. For this reason, it is not appropriate to assign the category of *νήπιοι* to a particular group of Corinthian believers. To be sure, Paul distinguishes between the strong and the weak (1:26–31; cf. 8:7–13), and it is possible to imagine “issues of status” that resulted in “much of the conflict among the Corinthians.”<sup>227</sup> As Dale Martin argues, there may be high-class members in the *ekklēsia* who are educated and have access to wealth and whose ideology of the body engenders theological ideas and practices in much conflict with those of the majority of the Corinthians.<sup>228</sup> Yet, Paul’s antithesis between *νήπιοι* and *τέλειοι* should be distinguished from the division of the Corinthians into a lower and an

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<sup>226</sup> According to Schüssler Fiorenza’s reconstruction, it seems that the Corinthian audience decided to consult Paul and other missionaries concerning this matter of living a new life in Christ. They might have asked, “how [could and should] their new self-understanding expressed in the pre-Pauline baptismal formula in Gal. 3:28 be realized in the midst of a society rooted in the patriarchal status divisions between Greeks and Jews, slave and free, and men and wo/men, rich and poor, wise and uneducated” (*Rhetoric and Ethic*, 120)?

<sup>227</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 61.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* xv. Consider, for example, how the practice of eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13) may have offended the weak in the Corinthian community, for the lower-class people are concerned about protecting their bodies from pollution and disease. This construction of the body is contrasted with that of those who “possess knowledge,” as their ideology of the body seeks proper balance and unity.

upper class that the letter implies: The νήπιοι is an identity marker for *all* of the Corinthian addressees, who do not live up to the status of τέλειοι.<sup>229</sup>

The ways in which Paul taunts his audience with a set of images of young children lead us to think about the crux of a theological tension between Paul and the Corinthians. If we recall those passages in which either νήπιος or παιδίον appears, we see that Paul employs the immature and uncontrollable characters of infants (3:1–3) as he refutes the Corinthians’ false, human wisdom; Paul’s description of his infantile past (13:11–12) as well as his injunction against childish thinking (14:20) directly touches upon the issue of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) within the community. As suggested above, if Paul deployed the images of infants in 1 Corinthians not to merely represent a lower stage of philosophical or spiritual understanding but to carry a negative and derogatory connotation for the entire Corinthian audience, it is important to explore how he employs these “infants” as a way of broadly challenging the Corinthians’ adherence to human wisdom and their ecstatic practice (especially speaking in tongues).

#### 4.2 From *Logos*-less Infant to Rational Man

Paul’s νήπιοι/παιδία language throughout this epistle exhibits what Paul thinks that the Corinthians should know about themselves now. Noticeably, the three pericopae under discussion (1 Cor 3:1–4; 13:8–12; 14:18–25) appear either immediately after or in the middle of Paul’s remarks on speech, knowledge, and mind that largely participate in a

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<sup>229</sup> As Paul does not divide the ἐκκλησία into νήπιοι and τέλειοι according to the believers’ spiritual knowledge, Wilckens’ thesis is untenable. See n. 184 above.

certain theological understanding of wisdom and spirit.<sup>230</sup> According to Paul, the spirit received at the moment of baptism is the same as the pneumatic power that raised Christ, which in turn will raise those who belong to Christ at his coming (παρουσία, 15:23). God's wisdom and spirit should only be understood in relation to Jesus's death and resurrection (1 Cor 1:18–25; cf. 15:12–57). Accordingly, the identity of πνευματικοί, or being truly enspirited, is to be bestowed upon believers only with the resurrection.

However, “whereas pneumatic existence is an eschatological event for Paul, it is an ontological possibility for the Corinthians,” as Sterling aptly puts it.<sup>231</sup> The Corinthians believe that their spiritual experience has granted a new status or privilege to them in the present (4:8–13; cf. 15:12–19). Yet, to Paul's eye, it appears that his addressees only pursue “glory” (1 Cor 2:7), freedom, and spiritual gifts (especially γλῶσσα), for which the divine wisdom/spirit is believed to function as an empowering and enlivening principle. From the beginning of this letter (1:18–2:16), in which Paul draws a clear demarcation between God's wisdom and human wisdom, one can readily gain an impression of how much the nature of this Corinthian wisdom is characterized by speech (λόγος). Defending the word of the cross (ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ, 1:18), which reveals the true wisdom of God, Paul remarks (1 Cor 2:1–5):

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<sup>230</sup> Regarding the Pauline usage of spirit, wisdom, and mind, see Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971). Sterling also provides a useful insight into the Corinthians' anthropology, particularly comparing it to the exegetical traditions of Genesis 1–2 preserved in Philo (“Wisdom Among the Perfect,” 355–384). Cf. Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*, 8–38. Regarding how Paul's anthropology is cosmological and material, see idem, 102–105.

<sup>231</sup> Sterling, “Wisdom Among the Perfect,” 372.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty talk or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ... my speech and my message were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power (δυνάμει) of God.<sup>232</sup>

The way in which Paul speaks of the power of God in contrast to the wisdom of humans stands out as it conversely highlights that the Corinthians take persuasive words or “talk” (λόγος) to be manifestations of wisdom and spirit (cf. 4:20).

As recent Pauline scholarship has suggested, this notion of wisdom/spirit pervasive in the Corinthian *ekklesia* seems to have been influenced by the Jewish idea of the personified wisdom (σοφία; חכמה in Hebrew).<sup>233</sup> For example, in Philo’s works, wisdom (σοφία) is understood as “the mediator of creation, ... the substance of salvation, [and] the divine nourishment or knowledge.”<sup>234</sup> The Wisdom of Solomon<sup>235</sup> also presents

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<sup>232</sup> Κάγω ἐλθὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἰδέναι ἐν ὑμῖν εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον. κάγω ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, ἵνα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾖ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ.

<sup>233</sup> E.g., Prov 8:22–36. In addition, some scholars suggest that the Corinthian congregation as well as Paul may have known the Wisdom of Solomon. E.g., Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 25; R. Morales, “The Spirit, the Righteous Sufferer, and the Mysteries of God: Echoes of Wisdom in 1 Corinthians?” *BZ* 54.1 (2010): 54–72. However, this does not mean that Paul’s ‘opponents’ were Hellenistic Jewish teachers, as some scholars have suggested before (e.g., Wilckens, Pearson). As Koester points out in his critique of Wilckens, it is not the Corinthians but Paul who identifies Jesus Christ as God’s wisdom. This divine wisdom came to the human world for teaching but people rejected her. Paul’s focus is in on Jesus’s suffering and death in which the divine wisdom is manifested. See Helmut Koester, review of *Weisheit und Torheit* by Ulrich Wilckens, *Gn* 33 (1961): 590–95. Meanwhile, regarding the relationship between 1 Cor 2:6–16 and the Gospel of Thomas, see idem, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1990), 59–62.

<sup>234</sup> E.g., *Fug.* 177–202; *Som.* 1.47–51; *Fug.* 137–38; *Cong.* 172–74; *Quod. Deus.* 140–80. Horsley, 285–86.

<sup>235</sup> Its final form is dated between the first centuries BCE – CE.

a similar illustration of wisdom, in that the personified Sophia—and her spirit—appear so “intelligent, all-powerful ... and [glorious]” that not only can she “do and renew all things,” but she also “passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets” (Wis 7:22–28).<sup>236</sup> In this regard, it is possible to posit that the Corinthians believed this divine wisdom made them philosophically competent (1 Cor 4:8–12)<sup>237</sup> and spiritually powerful (12:1–11).<sup>238</sup>

This specific understanding of wisdom in the Corinthian *ekklēsia* particularly resonates with the Wisdom of Solomon 10:21, as it reads, “[W]isdom opened the mouth

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<sup>236</sup> Regarding the nature of wisdom, it is worth citing the Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–28: “There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, ... free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle. ... [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty ... Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom” (NRSV). As Engberg-Pedersen points out, this passage well represents the Wisdom of Solomon’s philosophical character as “an incipient combination of Stoicism and Platonism” (*Cosmology and Self*, 23–25). Cf. John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 196–209.

<sup>237</sup> As discussed above, it appears that the Corinthians thought of themselves as τέλειοι, the wise (οἱ σοφοί, another philosophical term for the perfect; cf. 3:18–20). However, these designations cannot be solely understood in a Stoic sense, for “the phenomenon of spirit possession” alienates this hypothesis of dominantly Stoic congregation (*contra* Brookins). See Christopher Mount, “1 Corinthians 11:3–16: Spirit Possession and Authority in a Non-Pauline Interpolation,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 317, 319.

<sup>238</sup> As Wire notes, there seems to be no distinction between those who seek wisdom and those who prophesy and speak in tongues: “There are definite links between Paul’s digression on wisdom (1:18–2:16) and his later argument on spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40). He charges [the audience] with immaturity three times [throughout the letter] ... Paul continues to attack the same verbal fluency and bold action. Therefore, it is probable that the women and men known for prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in chapters 11–14 are not different people from those who demand a leader speaking wisdom in the opening chapters” (Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 48). Cf. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 88–92. Unlike our usual assumption about speaking-in-tongues, Martin provides a set of ancient examples in which *glossolalia* is considered to be a high-status activity.

of those who were mute, and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.”<sup>239</sup> While “those who were mute” and “infants” are presented as those who cannot speak, Wisdom’s miraculous power is foregrounded as she makes their talk possible. If the Corinthians’ understanding of wisdom can be interpreted in this light, Paul’s critique of human wisdom and defense of his own speech and message (1 Cor 2:1–6) betray the Corinthians’ preoccupation with talk.<sup>240</sup> It can be inferred, then, that the Corinthians saw the eloquent skills of speech (2:4; 4:19; 12:8) and *glossolalia* (12:10; 14:13–23) as the true proof that they were spiritual (πνευματικοί) (cf. 14:12; 14:36–37).

Strikingly, Paul’s references to νήπιος and παιδίον are embedded within those passages noting the Corinthians’ engrossment in speech and talk (chs. 1–4, 12–14). This rhetorical arrangement brings to the fore the image of an infant who is unable to speak and think properly. As the etymology of νήπιος in Greek indicates “not-speaking,”<sup>241</sup> the infant’s inability to speak may have been one of the initial images that the Corinthian addressees would recall when Paul calls them “infants” (3:1). If the subsequent references to infants and children are read in this light, we can see how much Paul’s deployment of the infancy imagery might build on this issue of improper speech. In 1 Cor

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<sup>239</sup> ὅτι ἡ σοφία ἤνοιξε στόμα κωφῶν καὶ γλώσσας νηπίων ἔθηκε τρανάς. My own translation. For the Greek text of the Wisdom of Solomon, I use: Joseph Ziegler and Akademie Der Wissenschaften, *Sapientia Salomonis* (Göttingen: Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1931); Vol. XII. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

<sup>240</sup> The Corinthians would have demanded the same level of eloquence from Paul. See, Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 131–53.

<sup>241</sup> The combination of νη- (a form of negation or meaning “unknown”) and ἔπος (“word”) makes νήπιος literally mean “not yet speaking.” This is also the case with *in-fantes* in Latin, which is direct translated from Greek. The stage of infantia was literally the stage of not having the capacity for speech (Varro, *LL* 6. 52, cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 128). Cf. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 21; Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 15–16.

14:20, in which Paul critiques the excessive practice of *glossolalia*, he makes the following injunction: “Brothers and sisters, do not be young children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.”<sup>242</sup> This thought-less character of infants reminds the readers of Paul’s preceding remarks on his own childhood: “When I was an infant, I spoke like an infant, I thought like an infant, I reasoned like an infant; when I became a man, I put an end to childish ways” (1 Cor 13:11).<sup>243</sup> Here, the imperfect speech found in a young child is paired with infantile ways of thinking and reasoning, and Paul contrasts all these qualities with his current condition as an adult male (άνήρ).

From this observation, I argue that the fundamental idea that undergirds this connection between speaking, thinking, and reasoning is the common ancient understanding that the first stage of human life lacks λόγος, which denotes speech, reason, rationality, or intelligence. In fact, many historians have suggested that the standard human being in antiquity was a free male adult,<sup>244</sup> and for ancient philosophers, the primary criterion for distinguishing free male adults from children was *logos*. More than coincidentally, the characteristics of the infantile Corinthians correspond to the specific attributes that ancient thinkers associated with little children’s lack of *logos*. The

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<sup>242</sup> Ἀδελφοί, μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν, ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσίν τέλειοι γίνεσθε.

<sup>243</sup> ὅτε ἤμην νήπιος, ἐλάλουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐφρόνουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐλογιζόμην ὡς νήπιος: ὅτε γέγονα άνήρ, κατήργηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου.

<sup>244</sup> The ancient views of children cannot be anything but negative, in some sense; for through the lens of the ancient world’s adult- and male-centered norms in both biological and social dimensions (e.g. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1259a.35–1260a), children’s physical nature, intellectual capabilities, and social qualities would accordingly be comprehended as deficient. See Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 19.



inability to speak and reason (1 Cor 13:11–12; 14:20), irrational thought and behavior (3:1–4), and the ignorance of vice and virtue (14:20) all contribute to Paul’s rhetorical construction of his audience as infants. If Paul’s references to infants can be mapped back onto the general consensus in antiquity about *logos*, we can better understand the rhetorical function and theological ideas that the infancy imagery may carry.

A wide range of ancient authors, from Plato to Aristotle to Philo,<sup>245</sup> see the absence or inactivation of *logos* as a significant feature of infancy. Being without *logos* means one is unable to speak, think, judge, and behave properly.<sup>246</sup> Such a notion seems to have contributed critically to the characterizations of children in antiquity. It is on this philosophical ground that the images—often negative—of “children” are employed figuratively in order to mock adults. To name only a few who are almost contemporaneous with Paul, the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, first of all, likens the Egyptians to *νήπιοι/παιδία* when presenting his (or her) mockery of their animal worship. The imagery of infants and children is adopted to deride their lack of rationality and their foolish thinking:

For they [the Egyptians] went far astray on the paths of error, accepting as gods those animals that even their enemies despised; they were *deceived like foolish infants*. Therefore, as though to *children who cannot reason*, you [personified Wisdom] sent your judgment to mock them (Wis 12:24–25).<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Although their anthropological and philosophical presuppositions are complex and different in details.

<sup>246</sup> This makes one almost like an animal or whatever inferior to an adult male (Plato, *Leg.* 7.808d; Aristotle, *Pr.* 10.895a; Seneca, *Ep.* 118). See n. 117 above. Cf. Véronique Dasen, “‘All Children are Dwarfs’: Medical Discourse and Iconography of Children’s Bodies,” *OJA* 27 (2008): 49–62.

<sup>247</sup> Emphasis my own. In Greek, it reads: καὶ γὰρ τῶν πλάνης ὁδῶν μακρότερον ἐπλανήθησαν, θεοὺς ὑπολαμβάνοντες τὰ καὶ ἐν ζώοις τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἄτιμα, νηπίων δίκην ἀφρόνων ψευσθέντες. διὰ τοῦτο ὡς παισὶν ἀλογίστοις τὴν κρίσιν εἰς ἐμπαιγμὸν ἔπεμψας.

The phrase “children who cannot reason” (ὡς παισὶν ἀλογίστοις) presents the idea that children have no reason, just as the word ἀλογίστοις is opposite to the literal meaning of λογιστικός (“endowed with reason,” “rational”). The Egyptians’ inability to reason, together with their state of being “like foolish [lit. thought-less] infants” (νηπίων δίκην ἀφρόνων), reminds us of 1 Cor 13:11, where Paul recalls his childhood as the time when he “thought like an infant and reasoned like an infant” (ἐφρόνουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐλογιζόμεν ὡς νήπιος). Considering the usual age range (younger than three years old) that the word νήπιος denotes, Paul’s reference to being “like an infant” concerns the life stage in which one’s speech and reasoning are incomplete, if not utterly lacking.

Likewise, the ways in which ancient authors relate *logos* to the first stage of life illuminate our understanding of the Corinthians’ state that Paul depicts with the examples of infants. For example, Aetius, a Greek doxographer in the first century BCE, provides a specific explanation for the ways in which the Stoics perceived *logos* in a young human being:

When a man is born, the Stoics say, he has the commanding-part of his soul like a sheet of paper ready for writing upon.<sup>248</sup> On this he inscribes each one of his conceptions. ... Some conceptions arise naturally in the aforesaid ways and undesignedly, others through our own instruction and attention. The latter are called 'conceptions' only, the former are called 'preconceptions' as well. Reason (λόγος), for which we are called rational, is said to be completed from our preconceptions during our first seven years.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Note that in Stoicism this commanding part of the soul is expressed as the *hegemonikon* (ἡγεμονικόν) or more broadly, the *nous* (νοῦς/νόος).

<sup>249</sup> Aetius, 4.11.4. *SVF* 2.83; A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.238.

According to this Stoic thought, reason is naturally given to a human being, yet it remains incomplete until one is seven years old. Both νήπιοι and παῖδιά, terms that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians, fall within this age range of seven years, alluding to the first stage of human life that exists without reason. Since this early childhood is marked by limitations in speaking, reasoning, and thinking, infancy as the stage of “not speaking” also directly includes “not knowing.” It is noteworthy that over a long period of time, many ancient authors marked out the age of seven as the initial transition from the first stage of life to the second,<sup>250</sup> combining their observations of physical change with intellectual change during this time. They recognized that around age seven, children replace their milk teeth with permanent ones.<sup>251</sup> This physical change was thought to have an etymological relation with being “capable of knowing.” The second-century CE grammarian Julius Pollux, for instance, notes that the “[permanent] tooth [ὀδοῦς] was called γνῶμα (means of knowing), and the period itself γνωριστικός (capable of knowing).”<sup>252</sup> This emergence

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<sup>250</sup> Or 5–7 years old, but not older than 7. See Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 84; Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 21; Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 139–141. However, Rawson points out that even though seven was taken by the Romans as approximately the end of ‘infancy’ in a scientific sense, this age was not codified until late antiquity (Ibid., 139 n. 3).

<sup>251</sup> E.g., Solon, fr. 27W; Varro, *Ling.* 6, 52; Lucretius, *RN* 5, 672; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 11, 166; Seneca, *Ep.* 12, 3. This recognition is also reflected in the Romans’ burial practices: “Children who died before they had cut their first teeth [i.e. usually before age seven] were buried rather than cremated, as was the common practice with older children and adults.” Ray Laurence, “Childhood in the Roman Empire,” *HT* 55.10 (Oct. 2005): <https://www.historytoday.com/ray-laurence/childhood-roman-empire>.

<sup>252</sup> *Onom.* 1.182. Greek original from Julius Pollux of Naucratis, *Onomasticon*, ed. Wilhelm Dindorf (Leipzig: Kuehn 1824), 52. According to Laes, “the lexicographer Aristophanes of Byzantium mentions the word *gnoma*, a kind of incisor tooth by which one could recognize a young child” (fr. 137a; ed. Slater) (*Children in the Roman Empire*, 84).

of intelligence comes also with the improvement of “a child’s verbal ability,” thereby signaling the beginning of school education as well.<sup>253</sup>

Furthermore, for ancient philosophers, *logos* (or *rationalis* in Latin) is crucial for learning philosophy and self-mastery to banish all passions (Seneca, *Ep.* 38). Infants’ lack of control, closely associated with the inability to speak or understand, reveals their state without *logos* (cf. ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις in 1 Cor 3:3; Aristotle, *Pr.* 11.902b).<sup>254</sup> When reason emerges, the first stage of human life ends, which fundamentally changes a child’s quality. As the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca puts it:

A person, once a child [*infans*], becomes a youth [*pubes*]; his peculiar quality is transformed, for the child could not reason [*inrationalis*], but the youth possesses reason [*rationalis*] (*Ep.* 118 [Gummere, LCL]).

As he continues to explain, the transition from childhood to youth particularly suggests that the child’s “peculiar quality” based on nature changes from “being neither good nor bad” to “that which is good” (*Ep.* 118). Entering youth thus can be regarded as the critical moment when the child finally has a positive value because of his or her possession of reason (cf. Plato, *Leg.* 2.653a–653c; Aristotle, *Pol.* 7.1336a–1336b). The absence or inactivation of *logos* in the earliest stage of human development does not just affect one’s speech or intelligence; it also indicates that an infant has no moral competence to judge

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid. Cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 128. Quintilian (95 CE) also states that “some have thought that boys [*minores*], as long as they are under seven years of age, should not be set to learn, because that is the earliest age that can understand what is taught, and endure the labor of learning” (*Institutes of Oratory*, 1.1.15). *Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory; or, Education of an Orator. In Twelve Books*, trans. and ed. John Selby Watson (London: G. Bell and sons, 1895). <http://rhetoric.eserver.org/quintilian/1/chapter1.html#15>.

<sup>254</sup> Here Aristotle associates little children’s inability to speak with their “lack of control” and “want of power.”

what is good or evil.<sup>255</sup> Philo, though not a Stoic, also sees that “the soul of an infant ... is without part in either good or evil” (Philo, *Leg. All.* 2.53). To him, the first seven years of life are a period when the mind is still fluid. On one occasion, he even associates infants’ immaturity with Adam’s and Eve’s nakedness, which he allegorizes as “the mind [*nous*] that is clothed neither in vice nor in virtue, but absolutely stripped of either.”<sup>256</sup> When understood in line with this thought, Paul’s injunction that the Corinthians be like infants in evil (τῆ κακία νηπιάζετε, 1 Cor 14:20) seems inseparable from the ancient perception of early childhood that is deeply rooted in the notion of blank mind and the absence of reason.<sup>257</sup>

As these examples have shown, the lack of *logos* does not merely denote the inability to speak but also encapsulates all the characteristics of infants that ancient authors found in their physical, intellectual, and moral condition. Since infancy or early childhood in general was regarded as the most vulnerable, irrational, and uncontrollable time in a human life, the end of this first stage involved a set of physical, intellectual, and social transitions that brought the child one step closer to the perfect and mature state of adulthood. Therefore, once we locate 1 Corinthians within a culture in which the

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<sup>255</sup> Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 24.

<sup>256</sup> Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 174–5.

<sup>257</sup> If “be like infants in evil” is based on the idea that they have no *logos* (i.e., the notion that the child’s mind is not capable of reasoning), accepting this injunction means that the Corinthians would confirm their lack of reason. This phrase, while seemingly positive regarding the attribute of infants, still functions to deride the Corinthians in conjunction with the overall negative cast of Paul’s childhood language. Note additionally that νηπιάζω is a rare term that appears in the extant literary record only 5 times before Paul. Its literal meaning is ‘to be very young,’ thus often connoting ‘childish.’ See “νηπιάζω” in LSJ.

perception of *logos*-lacking infants positioned them very low in the social hierarchy,<sup>258</sup> we can see that the impact of childhood language on Paul’s adult audience might have been tremendous, especially considering that the Corinthians may have accepted one another as τέλειοι (1 Cor 2:6; cf. 14:20).<sup>259</sup>

### 4.3 Infants in Christ, Not Children of God

Just as speech, wisdom, and knowledge are often used to characterize adults (τέλειοι) in philosophical discourse, 1 Corinthians reveals how much speech (λόγος), as well as wisdom (σοφία) and knowledge (γνώσις), constitutes the Corinthians’ collective identity as mature (τέλειοι).<sup>260</sup> While speech, both eloquent and charismatic, occupies the center of the Corinthians’ claim to possess wisdom and knowledge, for Paul, it is their very adherence to powerful speech that has caused all sorts of problems within the *ekklēsia*.<sup>261</sup> Paul asserts that the Corinthians’ speech “lacks a real power.”<sup>262</sup> From the beginning of

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<sup>258</sup> They were often considered to be something equivalent to animals (e.g., “wild beasts” in Aristotle, *Pr.* 10.895a).

<sup>259</sup> See section 4.1 above.

<sup>260</sup> It seems that for the Corinthians, speech is often synonymous with wisdom and knowledge or speech functions as the marker for wisdom and knowledge. With regard to the prominence of these words (speech, wisdom and knowledge) in the Corinthian correspondence, see Anna C. Miller, “Not with Eloquent Wisdom: Democratic *Ekklēsia* Discourse in 1 Corinthians 1–4,” *JSNT* 35 (2013): 335.

<sup>261</sup> Stanley Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 22.

<sup>262</sup> Castelli translates λόγος as “discourse.” She notes that this equation of the *logos* of the cross with power functions to “[authorize Paul’s] own speech and wisdom over against ‘all discourse and all knowledge’ of his audience.” Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Interpretations of Power in 1

his argument against human wisdom (1:18–4:21), he contrasts the Corinthians’ *logos* with “the *logos* of the cross” that has the power of God (1:18). This theme of *logos* and power reappears at the end of this section, in which Paul scorns the talk of “those arrogant people” and casts doubt on their power (4:18–19). Above all, Paul ends this proof section by stating that “the reign of God is not in talk (λόγος) but in power” (4:20). The talk to which the Corinthians are attached is nothing but a proof of foolish human wisdom (cf. 1:20). In order to refute the Corinthians’ *logos* and show how it lacks God’s wisdom and power,<sup>263</sup> Paul deploys the imagery of infants who lack *logos*. God’s reign is not found in human wisdom like the Corinthians’ talk, which the imagery of the *logos*-less infancy ridicules.

Interestingly, the notion of *logos*-lacking infancy establishes the common ground between the Corinthians’ present state and Paul’s past. By stating that he, now a male adult (ἄνθρωπος), put away the infantile ways of speaking, thinking, and reasoning, Paul dismisses the ways in which his infantile audience speaks, thinks, and reasons and, at the same time, asks them to “grow” into adulthood by following his path (13:11; cf. 4:16; 11:1). This idea of immaturity and growth corresponds to Paul’s nursing mother imagery

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Corinthians,” in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience*, eds. James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 26-28.

<sup>263</sup> Placed after the section about God’s wisdom, the phrase “infants in Christ” indicates that the Corinthians do not possess the correct knowledge of God’s wisdom and spirit (2:6–16). They cannot be addressed as spiritual people (3:1) who “comprehend the thoughts of God” through the spirit and “judge all things” (2:11, 15). The exposition of God’s wisdom and spirit includes Paul’s description of who “we” are. Maintaining the first person plural forms of verbs and pronouns (ἡμεῖς, ἡμῶν, ἡμῖν), Paul depicts both his audience and himself as those who speak wisdom (2:6), “who have received ... the Spirit that is from God” (2:11), and who “have the mind [*nous*] of Christ” (2:16).

as well;<sup>264</sup> the necessity of feeding the Corinthians with milk, not solid foods, stresses their current inability to fully grasp his message (cf. 1:18; 2:4)<sup>265</sup> while anticipating their future status as the mature.

Building on this intellectual aspect of the infant, Paul further amplifies the cultural trope of the νήπιος versus τέλειος analogy (3:1–3; 14:20). He draws a parallel between this antithetical pair and the other pair of σάρκιννοι and πνευματικοί, in which νήπιοι and σάρκιννοι are considered the same.<sup>266</sup> The expression “people of the flesh” thus articulates the infantile Corinthians’ lack of control. Given that ancient philosophers considered λόγος to be central to self-mastery and the attainment of virtue (Seneca, *Ep.* 38), the fleshly attributes of the *logos*-lacking infants are underscored in order to portray the Corinthians as those who live irrational and non-virtuous lives. For instance, Paul’s injunction “stop thinking like infants” (14:20) is found when Paul strives to contain the Corinthian enthusiasm for *glossolalia*. Just as “mindless” and “thoughtless” infants are stereotypical in ancient thought,<sup>267</sup> the Corinthians’ γλῶσσα becomes the icon of

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<sup>264</sup> See Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*.

<sup>265</sup> I assume that Paul, when first establishing this *ekklesia*, taught the Corinthian ‘converts’ about some elementary form of this message presented in 1:18-2:16. This section on God’s wisdom and the crucified Jesus might be Paul’s attempt to re-elaborate his theological message, which Paul’s audience has yet to fully digest.

<sup>266</sup> Regarding the possible nuances of σαρκικοί/σάρκιννοι, commentators have suggested: “those living an ordinary, natural human life,” “those who are moved by entirely human drives,” or “those of human self-sufficiency.” See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 288–91. Cf. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 1.223–46. My own judgment is inclined towards the second option, an obviously negative meaning.

<sup>267</sup> E.g., Wis 12:24-25 (“thoughtless infants”) as seen above. Of course, this sort of perception of infants is also found in an earlier time period, just as Aristotle’s contemporary, Hyperides, uses the phrase “mindless children” (*Epit.* 29). See Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 6.



“mindless” speech. Paul thus notes, “if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind (νοῦς) is unfruitful ... In the *ekklēsia*, I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (14:14–15, 19). By reducing the Corinthians’ charismatic speech to something like baby talk, Paul explicitly cautions against the unintelligible and irrational character of speaking in tongues (14:9, 23).

Above all, Paul foregrounds this irrationality and the lack of control found in infancy and incorporates these notions into his theological term “people of the flesh” (σάρκινοι). The infantile Corinthians’ jealousy and strife are taken as evidence that they are of the flesh (σαρκικοί) and “walk according to the human way” (3:3). Notably, the wording Paul uses in 1 Cor 3:1–3 and 6:9–10 strikingly resembles his vocabulary in Gal 5:16–26, in which he contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruits of the spirit. Not only does he include jealousy (ζῆλος) and strife (ἔρις) in the catalogue of vices (Gal 5:19–21), but he also explicitly opposes the ideal way of life (walking by the spirit) to the fleshly life. In addition, Paul emphatically adds a line that those who do the works of the flesh “shall not inherit the reign of God” (Gal 5:21). This whole theological reasoning corresponds to Paul’s description of “the unrighteous” in 1 Cor 6:9–10; the list of their vices shows a clear similarity to Gal 5:19–21, and Paul affirms that these unrighteous people will not inherit God’s reign. This comparison of Galatians and 1 Corinthians clarifies the fleshly character of the Corinthians, who act as if they have not received the spirit (1 Cor 6:11; cf. 10:1–5).<sup>268</sup> This state of σάρκινοι is worse than being “natural”

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<sup>268</sup> In a similar vein, Paul alerts the Corinthians to “our ancestors” who failed to live as the spiritual people and became struck down in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1–5).

people (ψυχικοί),<sup>269</sup> as the latter applies to the general human condition before “receiving the gifts of God’s spirit” (2:12). The meaning of “people of the flesh,” combined with the imagery of infants as irrational and uncontrollable, clearly highlights the discrepancy between the Corinthians’ supposed status—as those who are called into Christ through baptism and have received God’s wisdom and spirit (1:24, 26; 2:6, 12; cf. 6:11)—and their non-virtuous life, which is manifested in strife, jealousy, dissension, and lawsuits (3:2–3; 6:1–11). In this context, the Corinthians’ eligibility to inherit the reign of God is jeopardized, which indicates that there is a relationship between the Corinthians’ present behavior and their place (or lack thereof) in the future reign of God.<sup>270</sup>

The close connection between infantile qualities and fleshly attributes allows us to ponder how the deployment of the infant might elaborate on the ideal self that Paul envisions. If we consider πνευματικοί an eschatological gift that is promised to believers to be fully realized at the resurrection, the infancy imagery provides a precise counter-example for spiritual transformation that the Corinthians should bear in mind. The parallel between infants and fleshly people does not merely indicate their antithetical relations to adults and spiritual people, respectively, but establishes an analogy between human development and spiritual transformation. We can then recall what ancient thinkers have long postulated: a lack of *logos* brings about immaturity, intellectual

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<sup>269</sup> See 1 Cor 15:44. The psychic body seems closer to a Stoic sense. While this psychic body’s flesh and blood is dying away (atrophying), one’s pneumatic condition (as promised at baptism) is in the process of being completed, and this goal is to be achieved at the *eschaton*. The resurrected body, turning from the psychic body, becomes a pneumatic body. Cf. Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 26–31, 67–70.

<sup>270</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 93. Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1987), 192.

incapacity, and therefore the complete absence of virtue. Consequently, human growth and maturation into adulthood are dependent upon the emergence and development of *logos*, which enables one to participate fully in civil society.<sup>271</sup> This idea may penetrate Paul’s rhetoric of childhood in 1 Corinthians, for it appears that just as the *logos*-less infant cannot qualify for full citizenship (πολιτεία), “flesh and blood cannot inherit the reign of God” (15:50). The Corinthians, being likened to infants in such a way, are asked to cultivate the perfect self that a full-grown adult (τέλειος) exemplifies. They should “outgrow” all infantile and fleshly attributes (13:11–12; 14:20) and strive to attain the true *logos*—the correct understanding and embodiment of God’s resurrecting power (cf. 15:34)—so that they can be changed into the mature and spiritual state worthy of inheriting the reign of God.

In this sense, both the antithetical and progressive relationships between childhood and adulthood seem to cohere with Paul’s eschatological understanding of the reign of God. As his frequent use of θεοῦ βασιλεία reveals (1 Cor 4:20; 6:9–10; 15:24, 50), God’s reign is always a future entity that believers shall inherit (κληρονομέω).<sup>272</sup> As the actual event of inheriting a father’s property takes place in an heir’s adulthood when he develops full verbal ability to understand legal agreements,<sup>273</sup> the imagery of the

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<sup>271</sup> E.g., Seneca, *Ep.* 38; Philo, *Congr.* 4.19; *Agr.* 2.9 as seen above. Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1260a: ἐπεὶ δ’ ὁ παῖς ἀτελής, δῆλον ὅτι τούτου μὲν καὶ [32] ἡ ἀρετὴ οὐκ αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸν ἡγούμενον (“Since the child is incomplete [i.e., not fully developed], it is clear that his virtue also is not personal to himself, but to the complete being, the one leading the way”); 1260b: ἐκ δὲ τῶν παίδων οἱ κοινωνοὶ γίνονται τῆς πολιτείας (“the children grow up to be the partners in the government of the state.”). My own translation.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Seth Turner, “The Interim, Earthly Messianic Kingdom in Paul,” *JSNT* 25 (2003): 323–42; Michael Peppard, “Brother against Brother: *Controversiae* about Inheritance Disputes and 1 Corinthians 6:1–11,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 179–92.

<sup>273</sup> Concerning the inheritance law, Roman society considered guardianship to be very important because of an immature child’s vulnerability (esp. its inability to defend itself in its own right)

*logos*-less infant in 1 Corinthians might invoke the minor's immaturity in both intellectual and social senses (cf. Gal 4:1), reasserting that the reign of God is an inheritance that only a rational and mature adult can receive. This observation is telling, particularly when we consider the Corinthians' self-knowledge as τέλειοι, those who equally participate in the *ekklēsia* and practice free and fluid forms of speech.<sup>274</sup> Given that the Corinthians' speech is empowered by their belief in the personified Sophia, it is possible to imagine their theological conviction that this divine wisdom has already led them to the reign (βασιλεία), in which they can reign forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα βασιλεύσητε, Wis 6:20–21).<sup>275</sup> If this is the case, Paul's bitter statement, "Without us you have reigned! And how I wish that you did reign, so that we might reign with you!" (1 Cor 4:8), may not be coincidental. Against the self-understanding of the Corinthians, who claim to be not only full members of the *ekklēsia* but also mature adults (τέλειοι) who deserve the reign, Paul thus downgrades his audience as infants whose imperfect speech makes them unprepared for the Father's inheritance (cf. 15:24).

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(Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 71–2). Rawson further notes that "[i]n Augustus' legislation on marriage and inheritance ... the ages at which citizens were expected to be parents in order to have full inheritance rights were 20-50 for women and 25-60 for men. ... The legislation took account of infant mortality by an elaborate calculation of how many children surviving to what age could count for eligibility for inheritance" (Ibid. 96–97).

<sup>274</sup> See Miller, "Not with Eloquent Wisdom," regarding the Corinthians' understanding of *ekklēsia*, in which speech is a key to their identity formation. Adding to Miller's thesis, I would argue that Paul's rhetoric of *logos*-less infants also illuminates the potential tension between the Corinthians' *ekklēsia* discourse and Paul's household discourse (esp. via Aristotle).

<sup>275</sup> Wis 6:20–21: ἐπιθυμία ἄρα σοφίας ἀνάγει ἐπὶ βασιλείαν. εἰ οὖν ἤδεσθε ἐπὶ θρόνοις καὶ σκήπτροις τύραννοι λαῶν τιμήσατε σοφίαν ἵνα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα βασιλεύσητε. "So the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom. Therefore if you delight in thrones and scepters, O monarchs over the peoples, honor wisdom, so that you may reign forever" (NRSV).

Though still in the future, the reign of God is coming near (1:8; cf. 1 Thess 4:15; 5:2), and within this time frame, the urgent necessity to grow up on the Corinthians' part clearly comes to the fore. From ignorance to knowledge, from folly to wisdom, from flesh to spirit, the Corinthian audience's ideal religious self is to be matured at the end (cf. 13:10). Might this be why the Corinthians are only "infants in Christ" but not yet children of God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ)? This typical designation for believers, which denotes the affectionate, kinship relation between them and God, is entirely absent from 1 Corinthians.<sup>276</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

While striving to persuade the Corinthians of the correct self-knowledge, Paul interestingly does not refer to himself as τέλειος. While he is portrayed as a father-like figure for the Corinthians (4:14, 21) as well as an adult man (ἄνθρωπος) who has already put away all childish ways (13:11), he makes it clear that his knowledge is still partial and that "the perfect" has yet to come (13:10, 12). Perhaps this is because τέλειοι as the mature and perfect (cf. 2:6) constitutes the identity that both the Corinthians and Paul himself should aspire to achieve.<sup>277</sup> Even though πνευματικοί and τέλειοι are identity

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<sup>276</sup> See υἱοὶ θεοῦ or κληρονόμοι θεοῦ in Gal 3:26; 4:6–7; Phil 2:15; Rom 8:14, 17, 19, 21; 9:8, 26. Cf. υἱοὶ φωτός, υἱοὶ ἡμέρας in 1 Thess 5:5. In 1 Corinthians Paul portrays the Corinthians only as his children (τέκνα μου, 4:14) who need his instruction and guidance.

<sup>277</sup> Considering the purpose of this letter (1:10: "you [pl.] may be united in the same mind and in the same purpose"), the theological meaning of τέλειοι may reflect the Septuagintal usage of τέλειος. In LXX τέλειος (cf. מְלֵץ, מִמְּה) often occurs with καρδία, in which τέλειοι refers to those whose heart "is 'undivided' [to the Lord] ... in exclusive worship, without idolatry, and wholly obedient to God's will." Often, this word also means "without bodily defect" (Exod 12:5; Cant 5:2; 6:9) or "members of the group" or something related to the Qumran concept of "purity" (DSS). See Delling, *TDNT* 8:72–73. Therefore, along with the infant imagery, the goal of

markers that define believers in Christ, this ideal status cannot become complete until the *eschaton* arrives. Embedded in this theological time frame, then, the rich imagery of infants intersects with the question of who and what cannot inherit the reign of God. Drawing on the widespread notion that the infant has no *logos*, Paul compares the Corinthians' eloquent speech, self-knowledge, and ecstatic practice of speaking in tongues to the infant's imperfect speech, ignorance, and irrationality. Furthermore, Paul's rhetoric of childhood corresponds to the ancient notion of human development in which the full attainment of *logos*, i.e., the transition from childhood to adulthood, allows for full participation in civil society. In this light, the Corinthians' *logos*-lacking condition fits in well with the label of fleshly people, and their non-virtuous character positions them in contrast to mature adults (τέλειοι) who can inherit the imminent reign of God.

What might Paul's injunction to stop being like infants and its fundamental logic have meant to the Corinthian audience? How might the Corinthian community have responded to Paul's rhetoric? Paul's description of childhood seems to authorize the patriarchal and adult-centered ideology by which full membership in civil society is confined to free adult males. The infancy imagery that Paul uses may have been perceived as problematic if the Corinthians believed that they had already reached the transformed status of τέλειοι and strived to achieve every member's equal and full footing in the reign of God, regardless of their gender, race, and status (cf. Gal 3:28). While these questions invite further study, the imagery of the infant in 1 Corinthians

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becoming τέλειοι necessitates the Corinthians' transformation, in that this collective identity is marked by their undivided mind as well as their flawless spiritual bodies.

allows us to see two interesting and contested ideas about the perfect self and the reign of God in the first century CE.

## Chapter IV

### Entering the Kingdom as a Baby: Age, Gender, and Spiritual Transformation in the Gospel of Thomas

#### 1. TEXT AND INTRODUCTION

4 Jesus said, “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a baby seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many of the first will be last, and will become a single one.”

22 Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, “These nursing babies are like those who enter the kingdom.” They asked him, “Shall we enter the kingdom as babies?” Jesus said to them, “When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the upper like the lower, and when you make the male and the female a single one, so that the male will not be male, nor the female be female, and you make eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the kingdom].”

37 His disciples said, “When will you appear to us and when shall we see you?” Jesus said, “When you undress without being ashamed (and) take your clothes and put them under your feet like babies (and) trample on them, then [you] will see the son of the Living One, and you will not be afraid.”

46 Jesus said, “From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women, no one is so much greater than John the Baptist that his gaze should not be lowered. But I have said that whoever among you becomes like a baby will know the kingdom and will become greater than John.”<sup>278</sup>

4 ΠΕΧΕ ΤC̄ QΝΑΧΝΔΥ ΔΝ ΝΒΙΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΛΛΟ ΖΝ ΝΕΦΖΟΥ ΕΧΝΕ ΟΥΚΟΥΕΙ ΝΨΗΡΕ ΨΗΜ ΕΦΕΝ  
CΑΨΓ̄ΝΖΟΥ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΤΟΠΟC̄ ΠΠΩΝΖ ΔΥΩ QΝΔΩΝΖ ΔΥΩ QΝΔΩΝΖ ΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΖΔΖ ΝΨΟΡΠ ΝΔΡ̄  
ΖΔΕ ΔΥΩ ΝCΕΨΩΠΕ ΟΥΑ ΟΥΩΤ

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<sup>278</sup> For this gospel’s Coptic text, I use Bentley Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Together with XIII, 2, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. OXY. 1, 654, 655, NHS 20* (Leiden: Brill, 1989). Cf. John S. Kloppenborg et al., “Text and Translation,” in *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990), 129–55. Unless otherwise indicated, in this chapter I provide my own translation of excerpts from the Gospel of Thomas.



22 ⲁⲧⲥ ⲛⲁϥ ⲁⲃⲛⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ ⲉϥϭⲓ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉ ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲛⲉϥⲙⲁⲑⲉⲛⲧⲏⲥ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲉⲉⲓⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ ⲉⲧϭⲓ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉ  
 ⲉϥⲧⲛⲧⲱⲛ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲃⲏⲕ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲛ ⲁⲧⲙⲛⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲁϥ ⲁⲉ ⲉⲉⲓⲉⲛⲟ ⲛⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ ⲧⲛⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲛ  
 ⲉⲧⲙⲛⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲡⲉϭⲉ ⲓⲏⲥ ⲛⲁϥ ⲁⲉ ⲃⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛϥⲁⲣⲥ ⲡⲥⲛⲁϥ ⲟϥⲁ ⲁϥϱ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛϥⲁⲣⲥ ⲡⲥⲁ ⲛⲃⲟϥⲛ  
 ⲛⲑⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲁ ⲛⲃⲟⲕ ⲁϥϱ ⲡⲥⲁ ⲛⲃⲟⲕ ⲛⲑⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲁ ⲛⲃⲟϥⲛ ⲁϥϱ ⲡⲥⲁ ⲛⲧⲡⲉ ⲛⲑⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲁ ⲙⲡⲓⲧⲛ ⲁϥϱ  
 ϥⲱⲛⲁ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲙⲑⲣⲟⲟϥⲧ ⲙⲛⲧ ⲧⲥⲟⲓⲙⲉ ⲙⲡⲓⲟϥⲁ ⲟϥϱⲧ ⲁⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲛⲉ ⲑⲣⲟⲟϥⲧ ⲣⲃⲟⲟϥⲧ ⲛⲧⲉ  
 ⲧⲥⲟⲓⲙⲉ ⲣⲥⲟⲓⲙⲉ ⲃⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛϥⲁⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛⲃⲛⲃⲁⲕ ⲉⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲟϥⲃⲁⲕ ⲁϥϱ ⲟϥσⲓⲁ ⲉⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲛⲟϥσⲓⲁ  
 ⲁϥϱ ⲟϥⲉⲣⲏⲧⲉ ⲉⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲟϥⲉⲣⲏⲧⲉ ⲟϥσⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲉⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲟϥσⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲛ  
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37 ⲡⲉϭⲉ ⲛⲉϥⲙⲁⲑⲉⲛⲧⲏⲥ ⲁⲉ ⲁϥ ⲛⲃⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲕⲛⲁⲟϥϱⲱⲛⲃ ⲉⲃⲟⲕ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲁϥϱ ⲁϥ ⲛⲃⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲁϥ  
 ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲡⲉϭⲉ ⲧⲥⲁ ⲁⲉ ⲃⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛϥⲁⲕⲉⲕ ⲧⲏϥⲧⲛⲧ ⲉⲃⲏϥ ⲙⲡⲉⲧⲛϥⲓⲡⲉ ⲁϥϱ ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲛϥⲓ  
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 ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲟⲡⲁⲣⲥ ⲙⲙⲟⲟϥ ⲧⲟⲧⲉ [ⲧⲉⲧ]ⲛⲁⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲡϥⲏⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲧⲟⲛⲃ ⲁϥϱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲣⲥ ⲃⲟⲧⲉ ⲁⲛ

46 ⲥⲓⲛ ⲁⲁⲁⲙ ϥⲁⲓϱⲃⲁⲛⲏⲏⲥ ⲡⲃⲁⲡⲓⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲛⲧⲛⲁⲣⲟ ⲛⲛⲃⲓⲟⲙⲉ ⲙⲛⲧ ⲡⲉⲧϭⲟⲥⲉ ⲁⲓϱⲃⲁⲛⲏⲏⲥ  
 ⲡⲃⲁⲡⲓⲧⲏⲥ ϥⲱⲛⲁ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲟϥϱⲃⲡ ⲛⲃⲓ ⲛⲉϥⲃⲁⲕ ⲁⲉⲓϭⲟⲥ ⲁⲉ ⲁⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁϥϱⲡⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲏⲧⲏ ⲉϥⲟ  
 ⲛⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ ϥⲛⲁⲥⲟϥϱⲱⲛ ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲁϥϱ ϥⲛⲁⲥⲓⲥⲉ ⲁⲓϱⲃⲁⲛⲏⲏⲥ

In the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, there are several references to little children (ⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ, ⲕⲟϥⲉⲓ ⲛϥⲏⲣⲉ ϥⲏⲙ), yet this gospel’s childhood imagery is strikingly different from that of 1 Corinthians.<sup>279</sup> Whereas Paul figuratively uses the infant in a derogatory sense and

<sup>279</sup> Scholars have agreed that the *Gospel of Thomas* was first written in Greek and then translated later into Coptic. This claim is supported by the existence of Greek fragments such as *P. Oxy.* 654, 1, 655 and their parallels with the Coptic version, as these Greek manuscripts are dated earlier (ca. 200 CE) than the Coptic one (ca. 350–400 CE). However, there has been a long debate about the date of its original composition, ranging from as early as 50 CE to the late second century CE. For the view that places this gospel sometime in the second half of the first century CE and thereby considers it to be independent of the synoptic Gospels, see Helmut Koester, “The Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 124–26; Kloppenborg et al., *Q-Thomas Reader*, 80–90; Stephen J. Patterson et al., *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 40–45. Most American scholars have accepted this earlier dating. See Stevan Davies, “Christology and Protology of the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 663; Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place*, 163 n. 68. However, Mark Goodacre (*Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012]) and Simon Gathercole (*The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influence* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012]) have recently argued that at least the final version of the Gospel of Thomas is a second-century text drawing on the synoptic gospels. For details of the recent debate over the Gospel of Thomas’s dependence upon the synoptic tradition,

thus depicts the perfect spiritual self as a full-grown adult (τέλειος), the Gospel of Thomas sees in a young child an exemplar of “entering” and “knowing” the kingdom/reign (logia 22, 46) and “seeing” Jesus (37). Even a seven-day-old baby knows “the place of life,” and “the man old in days” should seek the life’s place from the baby in order to live (4). This elevated image of the infant runs counter to the broader ancient discourse of infancy as a state of “not knowing” or as characterized by a “lack of *logos*,” as I have discussed in Chapter III.<sup>280</sup> In particular, given that an old man was often treated as synonymous with a wise person in antiquity,<sup>281</sup> the Gospel of Thomas’s use of the image of the baby raises curiosity about how such a young child could serve as the locus of knowledge in imagining an ideal self for the reign of God.

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi corpus, the Gospel of Thomas’s references to children have been discussed mainly in terms of their literary form and source relations, particularly centering on the development of the “kingdom and children aphorism” in logion 22.<sup>282</sup> In addition, a set of scholars has identified echoes of the first creation account in Gen 1:27 in the Gospel of Thomas 22 (cf. 4), which is in turn compared to the phrase “no longer male and female” in the pre-Pauline baptismal

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see the March 2014 edition (vol. 36) of *JSNT*, in which Nicola Denzey Lewis (pp. 240–50) applauds these two scholars for their source-critical analysis, while Kloppenborg (pp. 199–239) and Patterson (pp. 251–61) disagree with their conclusions.

<sup>280</sup> The etymology of νήπιος in Greek and of *infans* in Latin reflects this notion as both νήπιος and *infans* indicate “not speaking.” See chap. III.

<sup>281</sup> E.g., Philo, *Opif.* 35.104; Cicero, *Sen.* 33.

<sup>282</sup> E.g., James M. Robinson, “The Formal Structure of Jesus’ Message,” in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, eds. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder (New York: Harper, 1962), 91–110; John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); Robbins, “Pronouncement Stories and Jesus’ Blessing of the Children,” 43–74.

formula (Gal 3:27).<sup>283</sup> Accordingly, it is the general scholarly consensus that this gospel finds in the child's sexual purity the ideal state of being neither male nor female for the reign. However, this insight has been rarely discussed in terms of what kinds of ideas and practices ancient people associated with a young child's body and sexuality. As this gospel seems to make a strong tie between the ideal self in the reign and the physical characteristics of an infant, I suggest that we understand the meaning of the infant-like condition within the broader context of antiquity rather than simply assuming that the child was "considered asexual or presexual or nonsexual"<sup>284</sup> or "innocent"<sup>285</sup> in antiquity.

This chapter shows how the Gospel of Thomas deploys a set of images of infants that may have been culturally recognizable and religiously appealing to its ancient readers. First, I clarify this text's Coptic terminology, focusing on the subtle differences among the words used for child. Next, I briefly discuss ancient cultural tropes of extraordinary children and ask whether this gospel's imagery of the child engages in them. The next section articulates the meaning of the child imagery within its religious

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<sup>283</sup> E.g., Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960); J. Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *HR* 5 (1966): 217-238. Also available in idem, *Map Is Not Territory*, 1-24; Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *HR* 13 (1974): 165-208; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

<sup>284</sup> Crossan explains "why an infant is chosen as metaphor for those entering the Kingdom. The child is considered asexual or presexual or nonsexual in any operational manner and is therefore an appropriate image for the ideal Christian in the Gospel of Thomas" (*Historical Jesus*, 267). Meanwhile, Moxnes quotes Crossan's statement when articulating the symbolic world of the Jesus movement, whose ascetic identity is characterized by eunuchs, children, barren women, and angels in the kingdom (*Putting Jesus in his Place*, 92). Cf. Marvin Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (1985): 554-70.

<sup>285</sup> Howard C. Kee, "'Becoming a Child' in the Gospel of Thomas," *JBL* 82 (1963): 309-11; Francis, *Adults as Children*, 116-17.

context, especially building upon the work of J. Z. Smith and Wayne Meeks, who have investigated the connection between the ritual paradigm of baptism and the nudity of infants.<sup>286</sup> The chapter then explores the ancient cultural setting in which this gospel's assumptions about the child's body and sexuality can be better understood. The Gospel of Thomas presents the child as a model of "a single one" (ⲟⲮⲁ ⲟⲮⲱⲧ, cf. ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ in 49, 75), that is, the ideal human being who achieves spiritual transformation by sexual renunciation (4, 23, 49, 75).<sup>287</sup> While examining the theological ideas and ideals the childlike condition signifies for the reign, I explore the rhetorical power that this idealized infant might carry for a broader audience.

## 2. CHILDREN IN THE COPTIC LANGUAGE

What specific terms does the Gospel of Thomas use for the child and how might they differ semantically? This section focuses on this gospel's Coptic words that indicate children in order to understand whether these terms have distinctive connotations or refer to specific age ranges. Paying special attention to the Coptic attributive construction and other words used in those logia about children (e.g., 4, 21–2, 37, 46) helps clarify this gospel's terminological use of "child."

In the Gospel of Thomas, at least five sayings mention "little child(ren)," which we can distinguish from this gospel's use of kinship language. Each of these five sayings uses either ⲕⲟⲮⲉⲓ (22, 46), ⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲱⲛⲙ (21) or the attributive phrase, ⲕⲟⲮⲉⲓ ⲛⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲱⲛⲙ

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<sup>286</sup> Smith, "The Garments of Shame," 217–38; Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," 165–208.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. A. F. J. Klijn, "The 'Single One' in the Gospel of Thomas," *JBL* 81 (1962): 271–78.

(4, 37). In Coptic,  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  is a genderless common noun and can be actualized to mean “small person,” “young person,” or “little one.” It is either male or female depending upon the article. This word ( $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$ ) attributes the quality of being “small,” “few,” or “young” to its referent.<sup>288</sup> In the case of  $\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$ , the attributive construction that consists of  $\psi\eta\eta\epsilon$  (child or son) and  $\psi\eta\eta\mu$  (small person) denotes a “baby,” “little child,” or “youth.” Crum lists examples of its application to a variety of ages.<sup>289</sup> Thus, the age groups which  $\rho\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$ ,  $\rho\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$ , and  $\rho\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\nu}\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$  describe are not precise. Yet in two cases in the Gospel of Thomas, the circumstantial clauses modifying  $\omicron\upsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\nu}\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$  (4) and  $\epsilon\bar{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  (22), and possibly also the Greek fragment of logion 4, allow us to identify approximate age categories.

First, within the literary context of the Gospel of Thomas, both  $\omicron\upsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\nu}\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$  (“a little small child”) and  $\omicron\upsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  (“a little one”) appear to denote the very first stage of human life. In the  $\omicron\upsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\nu}\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$  of logion 4, we note the descriptive repetition of “smallness” ( $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  and  $\psi\eta\eta\mu$ ) and the phrase is followed by its circumstantial clause  $\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\ \varsigma\alpha\psi\upsilon\ \bar{\nu}\eta\bar{\theta}\omicron\omicron\upsilon$ , which defines the small child’s age as seven days old. In logion 22,  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  is described by nursing imagery (22,  $\epsilon\bar{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \epsilon\upsilon\chi\iota\ \epsilon\bar{\rho}\omega\tau\epsilon$ ; “some little ones who are taking milk”), thereby indicating “babies.” While these two logia (4, 22) are related to babies, the meaning of  $\epsilon\bar{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\nu}\psi\eta\eta\epsilon\ \psi\eta\eta\mu$  (37) and  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$

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<sup>288</sup> Crum attests that several Greek terms are translated into Coptic by the term  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  (092b–093a; e.g.,  $\nu\eta\pi\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ,  $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\iota\omicron\nu$ ,  $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$ ,  $\mu\iota\kappa\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ ,  $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\acute{\alpha}\sigma\sigma\omega\nu$ ,  $\nu\acute{\epsilon}\acute{\omega}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ ).

<sup>289</sup> Crum, 584b (cf. 563b).

(46)<sup>290</sup> as well as ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ in logion 21 may be inferred also to refer to babies or small children.<sup>291</sup>

Yet, at the same time, ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ should be differentiated from ⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ, because ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ in logion 21 is not an attributive construction with ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ, as in logia 4 and 37. It is noteworthy that one of the Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas, P.Oxy. 654, 21–27, contains the same saying as the Coptic logion 4 and the lacuna can be restored as πα[ιδίον], the diminutive of παῖς, although this restoration is not certain.<sup>292</sup> This observation thus makes it possible to posit that ⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ and ⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ in the Gospel of Thomas refer to earliest childhood and may be translations of terms related to the Greek παιδίον, at least in logion 4. In contrast, ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ probably denotes children older than ⲉⲛⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ and ⲉⲛⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ,

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<sup>290</sup> In logion 46, ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ appears in the circumstantial clause, ⲉϣⲟ ⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ; no article comes before this word but only the ⲛ- of incidental predication, which assigns a child-like quality to the antecedent of the circumstantial clause.

<sup>291</sup> While its usual translation is “small children,” Stephen Patterson reads ⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ as “servant,” assuming the original Greek underlying the translation ⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ to be παῖς. As he notes, “the usual (literal) translation of [ⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ] as “little children” makes little sense in this passage [logion 21]; the translation given here takes [ⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ] to be a rendering of *pais* (meaning *doulos*, cf. Matt. 14:2 and 2 Kings 11:24 LXX) in the Coptic translator’s Greek copy” (Patterson et al., *The Fifth Gospel*, 12nb). However, I believe that for this meaning, the Gospel of Thomas would likely have used ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ (‘servant,’ ‘slave’), which appears eight times in logia 47, 64, and 65. While ⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲩⲏⲙ means “young person” or “child” in a variety of extant Coptic writings, it has only one attestation as “servant,” in Eccl 10:16, where the majority translation from נַעַר (na‘ar) in Hebrew is still “child” or “boy.” Note that ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ and its varied forms like ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ are most common for “servant” or “slave” in the Sahidic, (Sub)Achemmic, and Fayyumic dialects of the Coptic language while ⲉⲛⲧⲩⲏⲣⲉ is highly preferred in Bohairic (Crum, 665a, cf. 5a).

<sup>292</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*The Oxyrhynchus ‘Logoi’ of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel According to Thomas*,” *TS* 20 (1959): 505–60.

because of the Coptic verb “dwell” (Ⲅⲉⲗⲓⲧ) in logion 21; babies do not dwell in the field and thus ⲉⲛⲗⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲱⲏⲙ may broadly mean “children.”

Finally, if we make a careful comparison between the Gospel of Thomas’s use of ⲉⲛⲗⲱⲏⲣⲉ and ⲉⲛⲗⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲱⲏⲙ, the meaning of the latter becomes clear. This gospel always puts the former in the places where Jesus calls his audience (disciples) “the children of humanity [or the living Father]” (3, 28, 50, 106). Both ⲉⲛⲗⲱⲏⲣⲉ and ⲉⲛⲗⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲱⲏⲙ thus may share many Greek equivalents when translated, yet the latter is never identified with τέκνον whereas the former has multiple witnesses to it (Crum 584a–585a). In the ancient world, including that of the New Testament, τέκνον is used not only as a form of address from elders to their juniors but also as an affectionate address between adults. It always means “child,” denoting “descendant” in a familial or spiritual relationship, but is never associated with a specific age. Therefore, in distinguishing ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲱⲏⲙ from ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲉ, the Gospel of Thomas uses ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲱⲏⲙ to imply a sense of young age, just as the genderless common noun ⲱⲏⲙ is actualized adjectivally in the attributive construction.

### 3. LITTLE CHILDREN AS AN EXEMPLAR IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

#### 3.1 Extraordinary Children in Antiquity

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the ancient estimation of the child was negative in general because of children’s physical and moral immaturity and intellectual limitations. In this sense, the contrast between the seven-day-old baby and the old man in

logion 4 may have been striking to ancient eyes. At least, from Greco-Roman philosophical perspectives, “the man old in days” without a doubt would know much more about life than would a baby.<sup>293</sup> Thus, scholars like Halvor Moxnes have called attention to “the reversal motif” in the Gospel of Thomas 4 as well as Matt 18:3 and Luke 10:21–22, in which infants appear as “examples of God’s reversal of status.”<sup>294</sup> My analysis of Matthew in Chapter II demonstrates that Jesus’s saying in Matt 18:3 does not imply the idealization of children, and the ways in which logion 4 in the Gospel of Thomas and Luke 10:21 speak of God’s reversal of status by using children should be carefully examined in each of their literary contexts.<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, we can at least ask whether and how the Gospel of Thomas engages in ancient cultural tropes that positively portray children. For, unlike those ancient philosophies that view children and childhood negatively, in other contemporaneous traditions, we encounter a series of child prodigies embroidering many mythical and cultic scenes.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> See, for example, Philo, *Opif.* 35.104 where he cites Solon.

<sup>294</sup> Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place*, 93. Luke 10:21–22 reads, Ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἠγαλλιάσατο [ἐν] τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ εἶπεν, Ἐξομολογοῦμαι σοι, πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἀπέκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις· ναί, ὁ πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου. Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ οὐδεὶς γινώσκει τίς ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ τίς ἐστιν ὁ πατήρ εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ὃ ἐὰν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

<sup>295</sup> Moxnes observes that these gospels (esp. Thomas and Luke) portray infants as those who have secret knowledge that is not revealed to adults. By lifting up children who are socially inferior to adults, Jesus’s sayings highlight the reversal of the social order in the reign of God (*Putting Jesus in his Place*, 92–93).

<sup>296</sup> According to Iamblichus (*Vit. Pyth.*, 10.51.), for example, “[Pythagoras] observed that boys were most dear [θεοφιλέστατον] to divinity, and hence in times of great drought, they were sent by cities to implore rain from the Gods, in consequence of the persuasion that divinity is especially attentive to children; though such as are permitted to be continually conversant with sacred ceremonies, scarcely obtain purification in perfection.” *Iamblichus’ Life of Pythagoras or Pythagoric Life*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Watkins, 1818), 24. For more examples of this kind, see Oepke, “The Child in the Cultus,” *TDNT* 5:643–45.



First, since the Gospel of Thomas pictures the little child as an exemplar who knows the kingdom and sees Jesus, one can locate this child imagery within an ancient discourse in which children were considered to have “a privileged relationship with the gods” or were represented as vessels of prophecy.<sup>297</sup> We see this in divination practices from the first century BCE. According to Sarah Iles Johnson, who examines a series of magical papyri in the Roman and Byzantine periods,<sup>298</sup> adult diviners selected and used some children—regardless of their gender—as mediums for vision and prophecy.<sup>299</sup> In the process of explaining why children filled a prophetic or priestly role in such private rituals or mysteries, a few scholars have assumed that their sexual purity made them particularly valuable.<sup>300</sup> The Gospel of Thomas’s asexual and spiritual image of the child may look close to this “charming” child<sup>301</sup> who functions as a spiritual medium. Yet, the ancient trope of the spiritual prodigy differs in many ways from the Gospel of Thomas’s presentation. In ancient divination, for example, these children appear to be school-aged children who are able to speak quite well, which is required for their religious roles (e.g.,

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<sup>297</sup> Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 1–22, esp. 3: “children may also be regarded as so lacking in some adult qualities that they seem more closely to resemble another species altogether, or so free from others that they transcend the usual human limitations and enter into a privileged relationship with the gods.”

<sup>298</sup> Roughly between the second century BCE and the fifth century CE. Sarah Iles Johnston, “Charming Children: The Use of the Child in Ancient Divination,” *Arethusa* 34 (2001): 97–117. Cf. idem., *Ancient Greek Divination* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). For the English translation of magical papyri, Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Volume 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>299</sup> E.g., *PGM* VII.540–78. Concerning historical evidence that shows the almost equal use of the two genders for mediumship, see n. 2 of Johnston, “Charming Children.”

<sup>300</sup> Johnston, “Charming Children,” 106.

<sup>301</sup> “Charming” in Johnson’s words.

invoking godly spirits and relaying prophetic information to practitioners).<sup>302</sup> Not only do they differ in age from the Gospel of Thomas's seven-day-old baby or nursing infants (logia 4, 22), but their function in the text seems to be drawn from something other than their likely sexual purity. As Sarah Iles Johnston has aptly pointed out, we need to pay attention to two lesser-known aspects of these "mediumistic" children. First, their being selected according to certain qualifications (e.g., "sexually uncorrupted and pure") does not necessarily prove that all children were considered pure. Rather, almost the same degree of sexual purity or abstinence is required of whoever was involved in this private ritual, whether adult practitioners themselves or children. For this reason, "the child *per se* and purity *per se* must be kept separate ... [since] purity, including sexual purity, was apparently a state that was not automatically assumed to accompany childhood in antiquity."<sup>303</sup> Second, and more importantly, the real reason that the children served as mediums is grounded in their characteristics: they are franker than adults yet frequently gullible. In other words, they can see things clearly and say something without any pretense, but their interpretations of visions are highly susceptible to the accompanying adult's direction.<sup>304</sup> This particular understanding of children embedded in the divination practices therefore can hardly be a suitable context for the Gospel of Thomas's imagery

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<sup>302</sup> Similarly, children who sang at a festival and played a priestly role in mysteries were also older than infants. Cf. *TDNT* 5: 643.

<sup>303</sup> Johnston, "Charming Children," 106–7.

<sup>304</sup> As Johnston puts it, "I would suggest that the appeal of child mediums lies partly in the fact that they are *consciously* perceived as highly reliable and yet are more open to *unconsciously* applied forms of manipulation than adults, and thus are likelier to bring forth the message the practitioner hopes for" (*Ibid.*, 111).

of a seven-day-old baby or infants, who, according to the text, either have the knowledge of “the place of life” (4) or already deserve to enter the reign (22, 37).

Third, because the Gospel of Thomas makes little children the spiritual locus in which the wisdom and knowledge of true life are hidden, one may wonder if this portrayal corresponds to the widespread *puer senex* motif in antiquity.<sup>305</sup> For example, according to Suetonius, one morning, infant Augustus had disappeared from his cradle and later was found on a lofty tower with his face towards the rising sun (*Aug.* 94.6).<sup>306</sup> Luke’s depiction of Jesus’s youth (2:41–52) and the non-canonical *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* both present the *puer senex* motif in that the remarkable wisdom or power of young Jesus is at the core of these stories.<sup>307</sup> Whereas the baby in the Gospel of Thomas logion 4 may look like a *puer senex*, the ancient use of the *puer senex* motif highlights a widely accepted notion that “a powerful figure could not be shown to suffer from the

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<sup>305</sup> King, ““In Your Midst as a Child,”” 69. Cf. Christian Gnllka, *Aetas Spiritualis: Die Überwindung der natürlichen Altersstufen als Ideal frühchristlichen Lebens*, Theophaneia 24 (Köln-Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1972).

<sup>306</sup> Suetonius, *Aug.* 94.6 (Rolfe, LCL): “[Octavius] dreamt that his son appeared to him in a guise more majestic than that of mortal man, with the thunderbolt, sceptre, and insignia of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, wearing a crown begirt with rays and mounted upon a laurel-wreathed chariot drawn by twelve horses of surpassing whiteness. When Augustus was still an infant, as is recorded by the hand of Gaius Drusus, he was placed by his nurse at evening in his cradle on the ground floor and the next morning had disappeared; but after long search he was at last found on a lofty tower with his face towards the rising sun.” Cf. Vergil, *Ecl.*, 4, 26.

<sup>307</sup> In *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (trans. Willard R. Trask, with a new introduction by Colin Burrow [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013, c1953]), Ernst Robert Curtis briefly discusses the *puer senex* motif “which grew out of the psychological situation of late Antiquity” (98). Curtis cites the beginning of Gregory the Great’s *Life of St. Benedict*, “he was a man of venerable life ... even from his boyhood he had the understanding of an old man,” noting that this kind of *topos* becomes “a hagiographic cliché, whose influence continues into the thirteenth century” (100). Cf. Christopher A. Frilingos, *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Family Trouble in the Infancy Gospels* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

limitations of childhood.”<sup>308</sup> Whether referring to legendary heroes, emperors, or deceased family members, the *puer senex* motif functions to describe certain individuals’ auspicious and extraordinary childhoods. This motif reveals the nature of the ancient construction of honorable figures, who were supposed to show excellence in knowledge and power even during infancy. As Tony Burke has subtly observed, their idealized childhood therefore is none other than “adult-like” childhood, as it presents both maturity and wisdom that are far beyond children’s vulnerable qualities.<sup>309</sup>

On a macro level, it is not impossible to argue that the Gospel of Thomas belongs to the wide range of ancient literature that paints some children with exceptional power. Yet, the way in which the Gospel of Thomas deploys images of the child does not completely fit into any of the aforementioned cultural *topoi*. Despite the portrait of the baby in logion 4 who looks like an adult-like child, the Gospel of Thomas emphasizes the childlike condition *per se*, which encompasses a very young age (seven days old in 4), the image of nursing (22), and the presentation of the naked body (37). Above all, unlike other contemporaneous philosophical documents in which children function as negative

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<sup>308</sup> Tony Burke, “Social Viewing of Children in the Childhood Stories of Jesus,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, eds. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 37–8. Regarding the Roman iconographical presentation of the *puer senex* motif, see Janet Huskinson, “Iconography: Another Perspective,” in Rawson and Weaver, *The Roman Family in Italy*, 237.

<sup>309</sup> Like other scholars in this field, Burke also concludes that “[a]ll of these sources [about children], the literature, inscriptions, and reliefs, from both lower and upper levels of society, Christians and non-Christians, betray an uneasiness with childhood.” Even the *puer senex* motif, therefore, cannot be used as evidence of the actual positive evaluation of children and childhood in antiquity. Burke, “Social Viewing of Children in the Childhood Stories of Jesus,” 40. Cf. Teresa C. Carp, “‘Puer Senex’ in Roman and Medieval Thought,” *Latomus* 39 (1980): 736–39. As Carp notes, in the time of Seneca and Pliny the Younger (i.e., roughly contemporaneous to the Gospel of Thomas), the conventional viewpoint of childhood is that “infants and children are quite distinct from adults,” so that *puer senex* is rather “a narrower and less influential notion of childhood” (738–9).

examples for one's philosophical cultivation,<sup>310</sup> the Gospel of Thomas presents the child's body in a positive light and projects its vision of the ideal spiritual state into this childlike bodily condition. The significance of the child in this text thus seems to carry a different connotation than the divining child or the *puer senex* motif.

### 3.2 The "Androgynous" Human and Ritual Symbol

Marvin Meyer claims that "[t]hroughout antiquity, in Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian sources, children are commonly alluded to as representative of innocence, sinlessness, and sexual naïveté and purity. The Gnostic sources, too, wish to provide such a positive evaluation of children, and thus can describe Gnostic believers and even Gnostic saviours as children."<sup>311</sup> This generalizing statement should be taken with caution, as discussed in the preceding section. There are diverse and often contested perceptions of children even among Christian sources, and such notions as "innocence" and "sinlessness" were not as frequently associated with children as we might readily presume. How and why might some of the early Christ followers think that infants are paradigmatic of those entering the reign, as shown in the Gospel of Thomas?

In the Gospel of Thomas 22, Jesus directly compares little children ("nursing babies") to those entering the reign. Despite its partial verbal similarities to the synoptic

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<sup>310</sup> E.g., Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.16; 3.24; see also chap. III.

<sup>311</sup> Meyer, "Making Mary Male," 558. Meyer does not immediately provide literary evidence to support this claim. Cf. Simon Gathercole, who sees a strong sense of the [sexual] innocence of children in the Gospel of Thomas's logia about children. *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, TENTS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 217, 310.

sayings,<sup>312</sup> logion 22 exclusively locates within the imagery of the child its theological vision, i.e., “making male and female a single one.” When Jesus’s disciples ask him, “Shall we enter the kingdom as babies?”, Jesus answers, “When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the upper like the lower, and *when you make the male and the female a single one* [ϠΙΝΑ ΕΤΕΤΝΑΕΙΡΕ ΜΦΟΟΥΤ ΜΝ ΤΣΙΜΕ ΜΠΙΟΥΑ ΟΥΩΤ], so that the male will not be male, nor the female be female, and you make eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the kingdom].”<sup>313</sup> As this puzzling saying abounds with many bodily images, it is important to think about their relationship to babies. In particular, careful attention should be paid to the link between “making male and female a single one” and “nursing babies,” since this phrase about unifying two genders seems to exemplify what it means to become like nursing “babies” (ΝΚΟΥΕΙ) for membership in the reign of God.

Even though the meaning of “making male and female a single one” may not be

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<sup>312</sup> Mark 9:33–37; 10:13–16; Matt 18:1–5; 19:13–15; Luke 9:46–48; 18:15–17. By means of form criticism, Crossan points out that Jesus’ words about little children (Mark 10:15; Matt 18:3) are aphoristic sayings that have a double negative (‘unless ... not’) while the Gospel of Thomas’s logion 22a (or 22:1-3 in Kloppenborg’s edition) is “a classical example of an *aphoristic story*.” In the Gospel of Thomas, the “children and kingdom aphorism” is developed into narrative (*aphoristic story*, 22a), and 22b (22.4-7) is “appended as interpretative commentary to a preceding aphorism” (Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus*, 324–25).

<sup>313</sup> With regard to the last line of this logion about eyes/hand/foot, F. F. Bruce notes that “[t]he replacement of physical eyes, hand and foot by corresponding spiritual members is probably a gloss on the saying in Mark 9:43-48 (cf. Matthew 5:29 f.; 18.8 f.), which similarly follows words about children.” However, this interpretation builds on the hypothesis that the Gospel of Thomas 22 is an “expansion of the canonical sayings” (Matt 18:3; Luke 18:17). See, F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974), 123–4. Meanwhile, Gathercole, while following Bruce’s view of Thomas’s relationship with the synoptic sayings, adds that “the references to eyes, hands, and feet are resurrection imagery, though with reference to a new spiritual nature than to physical resurrection” (*The Gospel of Thomas*, 308–312).

immediately clear, this “image of the androgyne” is not the Gospel of Thomas’s invention.<sup>314</sup> As many scholars have agreed, it is a version of the phrase “no longer male and female,” which stems from the baptismal formula found, for example, in Gal 3:28. Alluding to Gen 1:27, the negation of “male and female” points to the original creation of humanity as the image of God, in which condition the primordial human was not split into two beings (male and female). The first human God created according to his image can be understood to be both male and female, as if this person had two genders in one body, thereby being neither male nor female (cf. Col 3:10).<sup>315</sup> This phrase, however, serves “a variety of models of Christian existence” in different settings of early Christianity, as Wayne A. Meeks has extensively discussed.<sup>316</sup> In some early Christian writings, the mythical context of “neither male nor female” seems further reinforced, especially in the process of formulating the early Christ followers’ understandings of the

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<sup>314</sup> Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 165–208.

<sup>315</sup> In LXX, it reads, καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς (So God created humankind [ἄνθρωπος] in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them). Regarding the historical receptions of this baptismal proclamation, see Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. E. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 165–208; Dennis R. MacDonald, *There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Pauline Nigh Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female: Interpreting Galatians 3:28 in Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

<sup>316</sup> As he notes, these models vary, “from universal mission to radical sectarianism, from strong communal consciousness to subjective isolation.” Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 167. Mary Rose D’Angelo also illustrates three different “functions” of the phrase “male and female” (Gen 1:27) in Paul and the early Christian mission, namely, “inclusion of all humanity in Christ,” “proclamation of equality that abolishes a disadvantageous relation of female with male,” and “no sex and marriage.” All these functions are not mutually exclusive, but “neither need they all be invoked by every use of the phrase.” See Mary Rose D’Angelo, “Gender Refusers in the Early Christian Mission: Gal 3:28 as an Interpretation of Gen 1:27b,” in *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays on Interpretation in the Early Church*, eds. Charles A. Bobertz and David Brakke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 149–73. Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 205–41.

first human being.<sup>317</sup> The Gospel of Thomas is similar to these writings, yet the way in which this gospel incorporates the child metaphor into its reception of “neither male nor female” remains distinct.

With what kind of phenomenon in the late first and early second centuries CE might the Gospel of Thomas’s child imagery be connected?<sup>318</sup> In the last century, some scholars have suggested that in the background of the child metaphor lies the primitive form of nude baptism.<sup>319</sup> As we have already noted, logion 22 is reminiscent of the pre-Pauline baptismal formula, “no longer male and female.” Yet, a more explicit allusion to baptism is logion 37.<sup>320</sup> As J. Z. Smith suggests, “the four principle motifs within the logion [37]—the undressing of the disciples, their being naked and without shame, their

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<sup>317</sup> Cf. Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 183.

<sup>318</sup> It is certainly difficult to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Thomas due to scant historical information. Most New Testament scholars have considered either itinerant radicalism in Syria or monasticism (or asceticism) in Egypt as this gospel’s possible social setting. See, for example, Frederik Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 431–40; Patterson, Robinson, and Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel*, 46–48; Philip Sellew, “Thomas Christianity: Scholars in Quest of a Community” in *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven: Peeters, 2001): 11–35. Cf. Dom Aelred Baker, “Pseudo-Macarius and the Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 18 (1964): 215–25.

<sup>319</sup> To name a few, Smith (“The Garments of Shame”), Meeks, (“The Image of the Androgyne”), and Crossan (*In Fragments*). A similar saying to logia 22 and 37 is recorded in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, as Clement of Alexandria cites it in his *Stromateis*. Here Clement disputes the arguments of “Julius Cassian, the founder of docetism” (*Strom.* 3.13.91), who says “When Salome asked when she would know the answer to her question the Lord replied, ‘When you trample underfoot the integument of shame, and when the two become one and the male is one with the female, and there is no more male and female.’ First then, we do not find this saying in our four traditional Gospels, but in the Gospel according to the Egyptians” (*Strom.* 3.13.92-93). Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis: Books One to Three*, trans. John Ferguson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 314.

<sup>320</sup> In logion 37 Jesus says to his disciples, “When you undress without being ashamed (and) take your clothes and put them under your feet like babies (and) trample on them, then [you] will see the son of the Living One, and you will not be afraid’.”



treading upon the garments, and their being as little children—are to be found joined together only within baptismal rituals and homilies.”<sup>321</sup> The disrobing without shame in baptism employs “the attendant typology of Genesis 1–3” that points to Adam and Eve’s nakedness before the Fall (Gen 2:25; cf. 3:7, 21).<sup>322</sup> This seems to provide some ground upon which to consider the initiate as an infant, devoid of sexuality or lacking in self-consciousness regarding nudity.<sup>323</sup> Smith notes that “this metaphor [of the infant for the initiate] is present within the rites of Jewish proselyte ‘baptism,’ within the Hellenistic Mysteries, as well as in early Christian materials.”<sup>324</sup> In this sense, the Gospel of Thomas’s child metaphor may echo baptism’s meaning as new birth (or rebirth) and its typological foundation in the creation story.<sup>325</sup>

Still, Smith’s insight into the relationship between the childhood imagery and

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<sup>321</sup> Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” 237.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. See Gen 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed”; Gen 3:7: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves;” and Gen 3:21: “And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them” (NRSV). Cf. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” 271–78.

<sup>323</sup> Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 194; Kee, “Becoming a Child,” 310.

<sup>324</sup> Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” 233 (esp. n. 58). As he goes on to show, the metaphorization of the newly baptized as little children is found in a later period as well. Theodore of Mopsuestia (5<sup>th</sup> century CE) witnesses to the typical Syrian baptismal praxis: “A work of God, the baptized has been newly born: the newly baptized were called *infantes*, that is, babes” (*Catechetical Homily*, 14:14–15). François Bovon, “Baptism in the Ancient Church,” trans. Waring McCrady, *STRev* 42 (1999): 433; Robin M. Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 147–48.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 135–82. In particular, McGowan finds in John 3:3–6 the connection between baptism and infancy imagery. As he puts it, “[w]hile Paul had presented baptism as a rite of adulthood and responsibility, here it is a kind of new infancy, given from above (and/or “again”—the Greek word means both), and reminiscent of the Synoptic Gospels’ saying (Mark 10:15) where Jesus insists on the need to enter the reign of God as a child” (143).

baptismal praxis should be taken with caution. As Patterson critiques, Smith brings in mostly fourth- and fifth-century CE *comparanda* to understand the Gospel of Thomas within a baptismal context.<sup>326</sup> It is also worth recalling that nowhere in the Gospel of Thomas is a baptismal practice prescribed directly for its audience.<sup>327</sup> Indeed, the Gospel of Thomas never says anything like “clothing yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27) or “being baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13).<sup>328</sup> Instead, in order to emphasize the philosophical and spiritual moment at which one “enters the kingdom,” the Gospel of Thomas repositions the ritual symbol (infant) in a different realm of experience. To give an example from a different context, Justin Martyr understands “baptism as changing the believer’s capacity or insight”, as McGowan puts it; Justin notes that “this washing [i.e., baptism] is called ‘illumination,’ because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understanding” (*1 Apol.* 61. 12).<sup>329</sup>

If the Gospel of Thomas metaphorically uses baptismal language, we can see that the imagery of the infant in this gospel is a *symbolic remnant* of baptism, carrying forward only the metaphor of the infant for the initiate. This is precisely the reason I think that the liminality of the ritual initiate is connoted in this gospel’s characterization

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<sup>326</sup> Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>327</sup> Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 364. This is why April DeConick sees “vision mysticism” in the background of logion 37. “Stripped before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 45 (1991): 123–50.

<sup>328</sup> As Wayne Meeks puts it, “[any cultic acts] go unmentioned in the Gospel of Thomas. Baptism is presumably presupposed, but only as initiation, the beginning of the transformation by [knowledge]” (“The Image of the Androgyne,” 196).

<sup>329</sup> McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 149. Here McGowan notes that “baptism is not merely a sort of sacramental gene therapy; it was also referred to as ‘illumination’ in Justin’s community. This image of light, with its implication of growth in knowledge and understanding, suggests baptism not merely as removal of sin but as changing the believer’s capacity or insight.”

of infants. If we understand baptism as a “rite of passage,” to use Victor Turner’s terminology,<sup>330</sup> the infant as a signal of baptismal praxis may convey a variety of meanings,<sup>331</sup> contributing to articulating the process of spiritual illumination in this gospel. For instance, the act of stripping off the clothes (37), while alluding to the ritual separation, expresses the necessity of the reader’s detachment from the world in the Gospel of Thomas. Just as the initiate remains naked like a baby in baptism until she or he puts on a white full-length tunic (i.e., ritual consummation),<sup>332</sup> this nakedness in the Gospel of Thomas signifies a “between and betwixt” condition required of the reader who lives in this world and yet should remain a stranger to it.<sup>333</sup> By not putting on clothes again, the reader maintains permanent baby-like nudity, which in the Gospel of Thomas symbolizes the importance of maintaining the condition of being “neither male nor female.”<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub., 1969; repr. 2011). Cf. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1909).

<sup>331</sup> As Turner explains, “[a] single symbol, in fact, represents many things at the same time: it is multivocal, not univocal. Its referents are not all of the same logical order but are drawn from many domains of social experience and ethical evaluation. Finally, its referents tend to cluster around opposite semantic poles. At one pole the referents are to social and moral facts, at the other, to physiological facts. ... Symbols are both the resultants and the instigators of this process and encapsulate its properties” (*The Ritual Process*, 52–53).

<sup>332</sup> Cf. D’Angelo, “Gender Refusers in the Early Christian Mission,” 158.

<sup>333</sup> For Turner’s exposition of “liminality” and “communitas,” see Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94–130.

<sup>334</sup> It is interesting to note that Turner explains the open-ended, permanent liminality with an example of Christian monasticism: St. Benedict’s rule (*Ibid.*, 107); see n. 318 above. In the meantime, while translating the symbolic aspect of ritual experience into some of Jesus’s sayings, the Gospel of Thomas preserves only the liminal connotation of a baby-like initiate while rejecting the tie between the baby and birth imagery in baptism. Alongside its strong objection to procreation based on sexual differentiation, this gospel only makes use of birth imagery to point out negative aspects of sexuality (l. 15, 46, 79). As Davies puts it, “If in saying 15 ‘one who was not born of woman’ refers to the original creation of humanity, then people reborn in God’s

The peculiar imagery of the infant in the Gospel of Thomas seems to be created through the integration of a symbolic facet of ancient baptismal praxis into Jesus's injunction to become like little children. Within this setting, the author(s) of the Gospel of Thomas may have considered infants (4, 22, 37, 46) a fitting metaphor for "the single one" that refers to the primordial human in Gen 1:1–2:4.<sup>335</sup> As Jesus constantly declares that one should, through self-knowledge, restore one's original image of God (3, 22, 83–84, etc.),<sup>336</sup> Jesus's sayings about little children particularly function to reinforce the ideal condition of the first creation.<sup>337</sup> In this light, the Gospel of Thomas's infancy imagery seems to be evoking more than young children's lack of sexual desire, as other early Christian writings do.<sup>338</sup> Instead, this image builds on the Gospel of Thomas's particular deployment of the ancient understanding of a childlike body as sexually undeveloped.

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image will not have been of woman. They will exist in the condition of the image of God (saying 22) and in that sense may be considered images of their divine Father. They will not, of course, worship themselves but the divine Father whose image they are" ("Christology and Protology," 667–8).

<sup>335</sup> Klijn, "The 'Single One' in the Gospel of Thomas," 271–78. Cf. Kee, "'Becoming a Child' in the Gospel of Thomas," 308. Stevan Davies has also argued that "a person who has actualized the primordial light has become (is reborn as) an infant (saying 22) precisely seven days of age (saying 4), for he dwells in the seventh day of Genesis." ("Christology and Protology," 668).

<sup>336</sup> For example, in logion 49 Jesus said, "blessed are those who are alone (ΜΟΝΑΧΟΙ) and chosen, for you will find the kingdom. For you have come from it, and you will return there again." In logion 83, Jesus said, "Images are visible to people, but the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father's light. It will be disclosed, and his image is hidden by the light."

<sup>337</sup> The connection between the angelic nature of the first human and asexuality is found in Jewish interpretations of Genesis 1. As D'Angelo puts it, "[t]he compiler of *Genesis Rabbah* takes the conjunction of 'image of God' and 'male and female' in Gen 1:27 as describing the human being's double nature (angelic and bestial). A similar viewpoint emerges when ... Philo comments that the 'true image' is 'neither male nor female' [*Opif.* 134]" ("Gender Refusers in the Early Christian Mission," 163); Similarly, Davies points out that the Gospel of Thomas and Philo derive from the same milieu, i.e., "Hellenistic Judaism, which produced its vocabulary largely through allegorical exegesis, especially of Genesis 1 and 2" ("Christology and Protology," 665).

<sup>338</sup> E.g., Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 13.16, Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18; *De Monogamia* 8.

#### 4. A CHILDLIKE BODY AND NON-GENDERED IDENTITY

As we have seen, the infant's body and sexuality in the Gospel of Thomas are best read in the context of the first human being—made according to the image of God (Gen 1:27). Entering the kingdom like *nursing infants*, knowing the place of life like *a seven-day-old baby*, and seeing Jesus after becoming *a little one*—all these logia seem to emerge from the Gospel of Thomas's combination of the primordial human's ideal condition with the external, bodily characteristics of a little child. Logion 37 points to the naked body of an infant and logion 22 highlights the “androgynous” condition of a nursing baby as important qualifications for entering the kingdom.<sup>339</sup>

Bearing in mind the discursive and multifaceted nature of ancient discourses on gender and sexuality,<sup>340</sup> the following illustrates how the Gospel of Thomas's infancy imagery fits within a broader ancient understanding of the gender-neutral or pre-gendered

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<sup>339</sup> Following Meeks' discussion, I tentatively use this term “androgynous” here but the precise gender condition the infant denotes will be clarified below (“The Image of the Androgyne,” 167). Meanwhile, Kee notes that Gospel of Thomas 37 can be paralleled in Philo, *Leg. All.* 2.53, “where the child, since it has no share in good or evil, is bared and stripped of covering” (“‘Becoming a Child’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” 310 n. 12). Similar to Meeks, Kee, and Bruce, Gathercole also sees in the Gospel of Thomas the characteristics of children devoid of sexuality and shame and reads “the Adamic Unity” from logion 22. However, he does not clearly discuss how babies culturally signify “the androgyny of the true discipleship” that transcends gender distinctions (*The Gospel of Thomas*, 310–11).

<sup>340</sup> For helpful discussions, see, *inter alia*, Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1–62; Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, eds., *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds., *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005); Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer, eds., *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); and James Robson, *Sex and Sexuality in Classical Athens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

human body in earliest childhood (remember  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  in 22, 46 and  $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota \overline{\nu\psi\eta\rho\epsilon} \psi\eta\mu$  in 4, 37 semantically point to newborns or infants).<sup>341</sup> While there is evidence that children's physical characteristics were understood as effeminate<sup>342</sup> or even that the biological formation and development of the fetus was differently described depending on sex,<sup>343</sup> we also have other written documents and archaeological findings that reveal a cultural view of infancy as less gender-specific or even completely non-gendered.

First of all, ancient writers considered the first years of human life to be a separate stage, though the ways of calculating infancy vary from author to author.<sup>344</sup> As they marked infancy with the child's inability to know or speak, this period also entailed the ignorance of sexual differences.<sup>345</sup> This understanding of infants' unawareness of sexuality as well as their sexual immaturity is prevalent in ancient philosophical thought. It is also reflected in child-rearing practices in the ancient Mediterranean, for until the end of infancy, no gender separation was rigidly practiced in daily life (e.g., play, home

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<sup>341</sup> These terms seem quite age-specific (compared to  $\psi\eta\rho\epsilon$ , i.e., 'children' in a more general and relational sense), and within the Gospel of Thomas's literary context, they are confined to a very early stage of life due to the specifications such as "7 days old," and "nursing." See 2. "Children in the Coptic Language" above.

<sup>342</sup> For example, Philo notes that moisture is "the corporeal essence of children," just as wetness is a "natural" quality of women who have "the flux of the catamenia" (Philo, *Opif.* 45.132). Cf. Galen, *Sanit.* 5.2; Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 5.3. See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 32–33.

<sup>343</sup> E.g., Hippocrates of Cos, *De Natura Fetus*, 7.500–506. This work is frequently mentioned by later medical authors, including Soranus (*Gyn.* I, 60), Caelius Aurelianus (*Gyn.* I, 82), and John of Alexandria (*In Hippocratis De natura pueri commentarium*).

<sup>344</sup> Depending on the author and his context, infancy ends at an age of 3, 5, 6 or 7, but many Greco-Roman authors marked the age of seven with particular significance and considered it as the beginning of a new phase of life.

<sup>345</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 140–2. Cf. Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 16–22. Regarding ancient Roman thought on the sexual purity of (freeborn) children, see Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 243.

education, chores).<sup>346</sup> Speaking of the significance of age seven in Roman society, Beryl Rawson notes that “[t]he fact that this age [i.e. seven] marked the beginning of public school-going for many children, and that this probably affected more boys than girls, makes this age a stage in gender separation.”<sup>347</sup> Many ancient Greek designations of early childhood might imply such a perception as well; unlike gender-specific terms such as *κόροι* (boys) and *παρθένοι* (girls) that usually applied to older and school-aged children,<sup>348</sup> a wide array of medical and philosophical literature uses *παιδίον*, *βρέφος*, and *νήπιος* to denote newborns and infants without distinguishing their gender.<sup>349</sup> In ancient pediatrics, the division between male and female infants was not clearly shown. While the same swaddling, feeding, and medical treatments were commonly applied to “infants,”<sup>350</sup> it was only when boys reached puberty, according to Galen, that the

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<sup>346</sup> This can be traced back into Plato’s time (*Leg.* 7.794c-d [Bury, LCL]): “After the age of six, each sex shall be kept separate, boys spending their time with boys, and likewise girls with girls; and when it is necessary for them to begin lessons, the boys must go to teachers of riding, archery, javelin-throwing and slinging, and the girls also, if they agree to it, must share in the lessons, and especially such as relate to the use of arms.”

<sup>347</sup> Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 141.

<sup>348</sup> See chap. III.2: “Children in 1 Corinthians: Terminology and Current Scholarship.” According to Laes’ study of Roman funerary inscriptions, whereas age differentiation was not indicated by the use of specific age vocabulary, the word, *infans*, is used for infants younger than 7 years and both *puer* and *puella* for older children and slaves. Christian Laes, “Inscriptions from Rome and the History of Childhood,” in *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire*, eds. Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *JRA Supplement 65* (Portsmouth, RI: JRA, 2007), 35–6.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. Susan Holman, “Molded as Wax,” 78. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.5.

<sup>350</sup> See Holman, “Molded as Wax,” 77–95; Abt, *History of Pediatrics*, 34–51. Just as Cicero labels infancy as *infirmitas* (*Sen.* 33.76), ancient medical writers saw the physical vulnerability and greatest health risk in the first stage of life (usually, up to seven years old). For example, it was commonly held that children were vulnerable to convulsions (Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 7.588a), especially up to the age of seven (Hippocrates, *Prognostics* 24; Littré II, 187); if children did not grow out of infantile diseases at puberty, these were likely to continue into adulthood (Celsus, *De Medicina*, 7.8).

“formation of the male body through exercise and massage” was to be taken seriously (*Sanit.* 2).<sup>351</sup>

Archeological evidence seems to further confirm this notion of infancy as a gender-neutral stage, even though the duration of infancy differs slightly depending on the source.<sup>352</sup> Recent studies on funerary practices and iconography in the ancient Greco-Roman world suggest that the gender profile of the growing child “was modified, and impacted, by the variables of age and social status,” yet the infant was “accorded a gender-neutral status.”<sup>353</sup> This idea is found as early as the classical period of ancient Greece. For instance, Houby-Nielsen’s archeological study of Kerameikos confirms this perception by pointing out “the lack of gender-specific offerings in the graves of children who died in early childhood.”<sup>354</sup> This view of infancy is supported by other ancient iconographical sources as well as funerary art,<sup>355</sup> in which we encounter the artistic

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<sup>351</sup> Regarding different trajectories of sexual maturity between male and female sexes in ancient Greece, see Ada Cohen, “Gendering the Age Gap: Boys, Girls, and Abduction in Ancient Greek Art” in *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, eds. Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter, *Hesperia* Supplement 41 (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2007), 257–78.

<sup>352</sup> But usually up to three years. See my discussion of Roman evidence below.

<sup>353</sup> Lesley A. Beaumont, “Shifting Gender: Age and Social Status as Modifiers of Childhood Gender in Ancient Athens” in *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, eds. Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 195; See also, idem, *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Janet Huskinson, *Roman Children's Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and Its Social Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>354</sup> “This phenomenon contrasts markedly with the graves of older children, ranging from around the third year of life to puberty, in which gender-specific objects such as weapons and athletic equipment for boys or wool-working equipment, mirrors, and cosmetics and their containers for girls appear in increasing numbers” (Beaumont, “Shifting Gender,” 198). Cf. S. H. Houby-Nielsen, “Burial Language in Archaic and Classical Kerameikos,” *Proceedings of the Danish Institute at Athens* 1 (1995): 151–66.



representation of naked newborns and infants (usually zero–two years old). Roughly “from the third year onward,” the depiction of the child’s body begins to have a gendered expression: whereas the male child continues to be presented “as a nude figure,” the female one tends to be covered with a dress or drapery.<sup>356</sup> In this respect, Mary D’Angelo’s point is worth considering: “[C]lothing [including the outer garments, headgear, and ornaments] was a central and highly effective means of distinguishing social rank ... [and] the main media of sexual and social distinctions.”<sup>357</sup> Compared to older children and adults, whose clothing and hair style directly signify their relevant gender and status, unclothed babies can be interpreted to convey no clear sexual distinctions themselves. Despite the temporal distance between ancient Greece and the Gospel of Thomas’s historical community, one can ask whether the nudity of babies (ΝΙΚΟΥΕΙ ΝΨΗΡΕ ΨΗΜ) in the Gospel of Thomas 37 as well as their association with “making male and female a single one” (22) might operate within this ancient categorization of non-gendered infancy.

Notably, this particular identity of infants also implies their “otherness” in society. In the Roman Empire, children who died before cutting their first teeth were inhumed rather than cremated; the latter method applied only to older children and

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<sup>355</sup> From ancient Athens to late antiquity.

<sup>356</sup> Yet, from the seventh year when male children’s formal education began, “they too frequently become more modestly attired in a *himation*” (Beaumont, *Childhood in Ancient Athens*, 32–4). A similar tendency is found in Hellenistic Greek art. See Neils and Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, 77. Cf. Greta Ham, “The Choes and Anthesteria Reconsidered: Male Maturation Rites and the Peloponnesian Wars,” *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece: Literature, Religion, Society*, ed. M. W. Padilla (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999): 201–18; Dasen, “All Children are Dwarfs,” 49.

<sup>357</sup> D’Angelo, “Gender Refusers in the Early Christian Mission,” 158.

adults.<sup>358</sup> If a child died in its first year (or before turning three years old), either formal mourning was prohibited or only a marginal form of mourning was prescribed (Plutarch, *Numa* 12; cf. Ulpian, *FIRA* 2:536).<sup>359</sup> Not only does this evidence explain why so many fewer infants (younger than one) were commemorated than those in other age groups despite their high mortality rate,<sup>360</sup> but it also points to the infant's lack of a full identity in society.

Treating infants in such a way—as if they were a different species—is not peculiar to Greek and Latin sources. A recent study conducted by Kristen H. Garroway examines child burial practices in ancient Israel, including the Second Temple period (especially 50 BCE–50 CE), offering an interpretation quite consistent with the cases of deceased infants in ancient Greece and Rome. In reassessing Peleg's analysis of 70 ossuaries found at the burial caves in Palestine,<sup>361</sup> Garroway highlights the near absence of infants from this mortuary context. Unlike older children (usually male, according to

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<sup>358</sup> Ray Laurence, "Childhood in the Roman Empire," *HT* 55.10 (Oct2005); Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 139; idem, "The Iconography of Roman Childhood," in *The Roman Family in Italy*, 229.

<sup>359</sup> Rawson (2003), 104; Laes, "Inscriptions from Rome," 33.

<sup>360</sup> Interestingly, in Roman funerary inscriptions, the sex ratio of boys to girls is suddenly high at age 2 (Laes, "Inscriptions from Rome," 33). Meanwhile, in her study of Roman funerary memorials (group reliefs on tombstone, funerary altars, sarcophagi), Huskinson concludes that "[e]ven with major social and cultural issues such as gender there are big differences in representation, [which shows the importance of contextualizing] every image within its particular genre: the group reliefs concentrated on boys, while the altars gave boys and girls equal attention (certainly when they were small). Sarcophagi show a more complicated picture . . . there are gender-specific iconographies, while some periods seem to have less interest in distinguishing between boys and girls." "Constructing Childhood on Roman Funerary Memorials," in *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, 338.

<sup>361</sup> Those caves are located at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Giv'at Shapira, North Talpiyot, Mt. Scopus, and Jericho (Tomb H).

the inscriptions) who were buried with their family members, infants (ages zero–two years old) seem to have been buried elsewhere, “a location unknown at this time.”<sup>362</sup> This different burial custom is evidence of the social understanding that the young child is the “other.” As a “non-gendered” or “pre-gendered” being, the infant is not a member of society or a full person; “the more one is engendered, the more one is considered a member of society. . . . In order for a person to be gendered, they need to be considered a person.”<sup>363</sup>

Therefore, far from puberty and farther still from the adult male norms of ancient society, early childhood seems to be often considered not only the period in which sexual maturity was absent but also a liminal phase in which the borderline between the two different genders was blurred. The Gospel of Thomas seems to have deployed this contemporaneous thought about the first stage of human life. From these cultural environments emerges the close connection that the Gospel of Thomas establishes between the ancient perception of the child’s gender and this gospel’s ascetic ideal. As long as logion 22 is read in this light, one can note that the elimination of the male and female genders is not just signified in the bodies of  $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota \epsilon\upsilon\chi\iota\epsilon\rho\omega\tau\epsilon$  (“nursing

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<sup>362</sup> Kristine Henriksen Garroway, “Gendered or Un-gendered? The Perception of Children in Ancient Israel,” *JNES* 71 (2012): 113. According to her, “[t]he Second Temple period ossuaries contained infants, but far fewer than expected based on the mortality rate at the time. It appears that most infants were buried in a different location than their family members—a location unknown at this time. In the MB II period, we see again that infants were absent from communal burial grounds but were found buried in separate locations—in jar burials.”

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. This phenomenon can be understood on a cross-cultural spectrum. As Thomas H. Eriksen points out, “children are often considered relatively sexless, and their socialization frequently aims at achieving a double end: to turn them into members of society, and to turn them into men and women.” “Gender and Age,” in *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; Sterling: Pluto Press, 1995), 136–37.

babies”) but radically expanded into the obliteration of bodily boundaries; that is, what is “the inside” becomes “like the outside,” “the outside” becomes “like the inside,” and “the upper” becomes “like the below.”<sup>364</sup> Perhaps this expansion of the gender-less state can be further explained within the ancient one-sex model, if we read this logion in light of Galen’s view that human genitals are basically the same between men and women:

Think first, please, of the man’s [external genitalia] turned in and extending inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying outside, next to it on either side. . . . Think too, please, of... the uterus turned outward and projecting. Would not the testes [ovaries] then necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the neck [the cervix and vagina], hitherto concealed inside the perineum but now pendant, be made into the male member?<sup>365</sup>

If the author(s) of the Gospel of Thomas had also believed this idea of no anatomical difference between male and female genitals, the condition of the baby, the sexual characteristics of which ancient society does not define, may have been the most suitable example for symbolizing the original oneness of the human body.

Jesus’s sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, then, engage deeply in this sort of representation of the child’s body and sexuality in antiquity and its socio-cultural implications. While not importing other qualities and characteristics typically attributed to young children, this gospel draws an insight from the absence of gender boundaries in babies and applies it to other boundaries. As the body of the young child is placed at the core of the Gospel of Thomas’s inner logic in which the sexual differences are

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<sup>364</sup> Gathercole understands that this “outside, inside, above, below language merely emphasizes more strongly the language of making the two one.” *The Gospel of Thomas*, 310.

<sup>365</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 25–26.

repudiated, this liminal being, whose identity was obscure, if not absent from society, becomes a paradigm for the kingdom that Jesus's adult disciples ought to emulate. Contrary to the ancient notion that sexual maturation corresponds to full membership in society, not only does this non-gendered infant represent the primordial human condition in the reign of God, but it may challenge the boundaries of this world in a radical manner as well. This is why we should pay more attention to the symbolic power of non-gendered infancy, which points to something beyond sexual purity or the androgynous state.

## 5. INFANT IN THE KINGDOM: SUBVERSION AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Logia 3 and 113 indicate that the reign (of God) is not a future realm to come but a hidden present reality that one can find through self-knowledge. It is also understood as the place not only from which Jesus's disciples have come but also to which they will return again (49). This theme that one should return to the beginning by means of spiritual awakening<sup>366</sup> constitutes the Gospel of Thomas's protological understanding of the reign,<sup>367</sup> which is elaborated by the infants of logia 4, 22, 37, and 46. As a symbolic remnant of baptism, the infant models the way in which to recover the original image at the "beginning," for its state of being neither male nor female (22) exemplifies the primordial human condition in Gen 1:27 and complements the symbol of nakedness (37).

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<sup>366</sup> Metaphorically speaking, it is equivalent to recovering the primordial light in oneself that is given at the creation.

<sup>367</sup> Davies, "Christology and Protology," 663–82.

For this reason, the infant as an exemplar of knowing the kingdom appears superior to anyone in the history of humanity, ranging from the time of Adam to John the Baptist (46). The “infant” who resides in the “beginning” (Gen 1:27) is different from the Adam in the second creation account (Gen 2:4–3:24). Even John the Baptist, who seems closest to the ideal human being, cannot be compared with “whoever becomes a little one” (46).<sup>368</sup> Figuratively speaking, the infant who occupies the reign belongs to a different category of existence. While it is this otherness of infants that grounds the general ancient depreciation of early childhood, in the domain of religious imagination that the Gospel of Thomas constructs, the infant’s otherness seems to create a provocative insight into the new identity that the Gospel of Thomas’s audience should pursue. How might this idealized imagery of the infant put forward an array of countermoves against the ancient assumptions about infancy? What sorts of religious and social implications may the subversive character of the infant have evoked for its contemporary readers?

With these questions in mind, we can revisit this gospel’s logia about babies from a fresh perspective. As is pointed out earlier, the Gospel of Thomas offers the striking image of a seemingly intelligent seven-day-old baby in contrast with the man old in days (4). Unlike this innovative image, the seven-day-old in reality has a significant cultural connotation that points to the most vulnerable moment of human life. In Roman society, a seven-day-old baby was considered socially and legally nonexistent, as *dies lustricus* (“day of purification”), the wide-spread purification rite in the Roman Empire, attests. This ceremony marked the social birth of a newborn.<sup>369</sup> Celebrated on the eighth (female

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<sup>368</sup> While the first part of logion 46 runs parallel with Q 7:28, the latter part about a baby (or a little one) is unique. Cf. John 3:3, 5. See also, Kee, “Becoming a Child,” 309.

babies) or ninth (male) day after birth, this family ritual included naming the baby, who had survived to this point.<sup>370</sup> Such survival led to the father's formal acceptance of him or her into the family. Following the name-giving ritual, the child was officially registered and obtained "the status of a juridical person."<sup>371</sup> After all, "as far as [elite literary evidence] was concerned, the child did not exist prior to the *dies lustricus*,"<sup>372</sup> and thus Plutarch once depicted a newborn in this period as "more like a plant (φυτόν)" than an animal (*Quaes. Rom.* 102).<sup>373</sup>

From this social viewpoint, the seven-day-old baby in logion 4 at first may evoke the image of a nameless and precarious life. However, this liminal being who exists at the juncture of no-life and life turns into a powerful symbol within the literary context of the Gospel of Thomas. Jesus's saying completely transposes the social positions of the old man and the baby. This is not the only instance in which the Gospel of Thomas connects

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<sup>369</sup> This rite can be comparable to Jewish circumcision (Gen 17:12; Phil 3:5). Whereas "the ancient Hebrews followed the more primitive custom of undergoing circumcision at the age of puberty," after the Israelites settled in Palestine, the rite of circumcision was "transferred to the eighth day after birth." See Cyrus Adler et al., "Circumcision," in *Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, vol. 4 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1901–06), 93–102. In ancient Athens, we find a similar family ritual to *dies lustricus*, called *amphidromia* (Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 23).

<sup>370</sup> Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 29–30. According to Rawson (*Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 110–3), this one-day difference between female and male infants "presumably reflects the slightly better chances of survival for female infants" (110 n. 34).

<sup>371</sup> "The *paterfamilias* had the legal right to decide the life and death of the other members of the family, thereby deciding whether a child is accepted or exposed." The social and legal meaning of *dies lustricus* thus makes it possible to assume that *expositio* takes place within the first seven days after birth (Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 29).

<sup>372</sup> Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 66.

<sup>373</sup> Plutarch, *Quaes. Rom.* 102 (Babbitt, LCL): "[T]he seventh is dangerous for newly-born children in various ways and in the matter of the umbilical cord; for in most cases this comes away on the seventh day; but until it comes off, the child is more like a plant than an animal."

a baby with “knowing.” Just like the baby (ΚΟΥΕΙ ΝΨΗΡΕ ΨΗΜ) who knows “the place of life” (4), “whoever becomes a baby [ΚΟΥΕΙ] will know the kingdom” (46; cf. 3). This imagery thus directs the readers’ attention to what the baby might represent, enabling readers to recognize the baby as an exemplar of those people who have realized the kingdom or discovered the primordial “light” of creation within them (cf. 3, 24, etc.).<sup>374</sup> As a result, the locus of knowledge and wisdom radically shifts from the old man to the baby.<sup>375</sup> In a conventional sense, the one who was thought to know nothing turns out to know the best,<sup>376</sup> and it is likely that the Gospel of Thomas’s readers detected this paradoxical nature of this baby image.

Furthermore, the Gospel of Thomas’s logic surrounding the imagery of the infant opposes the dominant philosophical ideas in antiquity: Children’s reason gradually blossoms alongside their sexual maturity,<sup>377</sup> and their physical and intellectual development also parallels their progressive integration into society.<sup>378</sup> In particular, a

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<sup>374</sup> As Stevan Davies puts it, “according to saying 24 people may actualize the light within them and thus see the world and themselves in terms of the light of creation. They will see the world in reference to its beginning perfection, stand at the beginning (saying 18), and need no future attainment. They will know themselves to be sons of the living Father (saying 3)—that is, the image of God, no longer male or female and, having made the male and female into a single one, they will enter the kingdom of heaven (saying 22)” (“Christology and Protology,” 667).

<sup>375</sup> Note also that in the Gospel of Thomas Jesus is also “incarnate wisdom” (28) and the light (77). As with Philo, the Gospel of Thomas too seems to interpret allegorically God’s wisdom as the light of the first creation (and the *logos*) (Davies, “Christology and Protology,” 665–66, 678).

<sup>376</sup> It is perhaps with no coincidence that logion 4 continues, “For many of the first will be last, and will become a single one.” While I would agree with Gathercole’s interpretation of the baby in logion 4 as the example of true discipleship, his suggestion that the baby and the old man become a single one would be convincing only if the text had mentioned, “the last will be first, and the first will be last.” See Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 219.

<sup>377</sup> Cf. Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 19.



close reading of logia 21 and 22 affirms such a sharp contrast between infancy and adulthood, as these sayings seem to reverse the hierarchical rankings of maturity and immaturity and of development and regression.

First of all, if one pays attention to the two questions at the beginning of logia 21 and 22, it is notable that they each address the current state of Jesus’s disciples (“What are your disciples like?” in 21) and the condition required of them in the future (“Then shall we enter the kingdom as babies?” in 22). Here, the Gospel of Thomas discloses its subtle word choice, since the first question’s  $\epsilon\bar{\nu}\psi\eta\rho\epsilon\ \psi\eta\mu$  (children) is different from the second’s  $\bar{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  (babies). In logion 21,  $\epsilon\bar{\nu}\psi\eta\rho\epsilon\ \psi\eta\mu$ —older children than  $\bar{\nu}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota$ —is deftly employed to explain the disciples’ present condition. The metaphor that “they are like children living in a field [ $\zeta\omega\psi\epsilon$ ] that is not theirs” indicates that they have not discovered the divine image of God within them.<sup>379</sup> Reading logion 21 together with logia 78 and 37 also makes this meaning clear, for logion 78 says that the field ( $\zeta\omega\psi\epsilon$ ) is the place where the powerful rulers are “dressed in soft clothing” and “they cannot understand truth.” Until the little children, who take off their clothes and return the field to its owners (21, 37), they are the same as those who cannot understand truth. The act of taking off their clothes and giving the field back to the owners, therefore, can be compared to their awakening to truth, just as the babies in logion 37, who are naked but unashamed, symbolize the disciples’ future condition in which they will see Jesus (cf. “the primordial light” in 77). If one equates the “owners” in logion 21 with “your rulers

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<sup>378</sup> Rawson, “Ages and Stages” and “Education,” in *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 134–209.

<sup>379</sup> Klíjn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” 275.

and your powerful ones” in logion 78, the field belonging to them can mean either the world that is not yet correctly apprehended and thereby exists apart from the original world of the creation in Genesis 1:1–2:4 or in an ascetical sense, this world in which gender boundaries still exist and bodily desire has not been overcome.<sup>380</sup>

By contrast, logion 22 compares children younger than ε̅νω̅η̅ρε̅ ψ̅η̅μ̅ to the disciples’ future condition in which they will enter the kingdom.<sup>381</sup> Jesus’s disciples, being like “babies” (̅νω̅γει, cf. ̅νω̅γει̅ ̅νω̅η̅ρε̅̅ ψ̅η̅μ̅ in 37), will have nullified all the bodily differences and will be restored to the “wholeness” of the primordial human who presents no sexual differences.<sup>382</sup> Positively delineating the regression from ε̅νω̅η̅ρε̅

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<sup>380</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting J. Z. Smith’s insight into the nude symbolism in logia 21 and 37: “[The symbolism’s] background, I would suggest, is a pun between the Greek κόσμος meaning ‘the world’ and κόσμος meaning “ornament” (i.e., to take off one’s ornaments, one’s dress, is to take off the world); and between the Coptic κωκαλ, ‘to leave the world,’ and κωκαλη, ‘to be nude.’” Smith, “Garments of Shame,” 235. Following Smith, and noting also the parallel between logia 21 and 78, I thus disagree with Davies’ remark that the contexts of logion 37 and the beginning of logion 21 are opposite. Even though I agree with Davies’ interpretation of the Gospel of Thomas in general, I still think that logia 21 and 37 can symbolize the same theme by means of the act of disrobing (“Christology and Protology,” 678 n. 28).

<sup>381</sup> We do not know for sure whether the nursing babies (ε̅νω̅γει̅ ε̅γ̅χι̅ ε̅ρω̅τε̅) in logion 22 are the same age as the seven-day-old baby in logion 4. Nevertheless, we can consider this nursing image together with ancient medical documents, and conjecture that the assumption might be that these babies are younger than 2 years old. This is also what Soranus recommends as a weaning age (*Gyn.* 2.46–48).

<sup>382</sup> Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” 193. As he states, “logion 21 is admittedly difficult to interpret” (194 n. 131), but I would argue that a literal translation of part of logion 21 will help understand the connection between logia 21 and 22. My translation is: “As for you [pl.], however, keep watch from the beginning of the world. Bind yourselves onto your loins in a great power (cf. “Gird yourselves with great strength” in *Q-Thomas Reader*), so that the thieves may not all on a road to come unto you, because they will fall upon the help which you look out for. Let there be among you a person of understanding.” I would argue that Jesus’s teaching here makes an allusion to Gen 2:18–25 where Eve was created out of Adam’s ribs. “The beginning of the world” refers to Gen 1:26–27a, when the primordial human was not divided into male and female. Binding one’s loins with great strength thus is a preemptive action to avoid the separation of male (Adam) and female (Eve). “The help” (feminine singular) that the thieves intend to attack may

ϣΗΜ (21) to ἄγκοϋει (22), therefore, the Gospel of Thomas subverts the social norms of maturity and progression and idealizes sexual immaturity and the absence of gender distinction. The asexual and non-gendered body is characteristic of ἄγκοϋει, yet this attribute has already begun to disappear in εἰς ἄγκοϋει ϣΗΜ.

This subversive character of infants in the Gospel of Thomas, if we borrow Turner's notion of liminality, can be seen to present the "powers of the weak" in religious imagination.<sup>383</sup> As Turner notes, those marginal, weak beings in society who have a low status or lack political power and who do not fit in a normative social structure are often considered to have sacred powers or spiritual capacities. The images of babies in the Gospel of Thomas carry such sacred attributes, undergirded by cultural ideas and ritual undertone. On the one hand, drawing upon the ancient perception of the infant's non-gendered body and its liminal character and on the other hand, inheriting the portrait of the baby as a baptismal symbol, the Gospel of Thomas idealizes its imagery of infants and offers them as a paradigm for the reign. From the amalgamation of such cultural and ritual notions emerges a set of subversive images of infants that are alien to the social stereotypes of children. While a seven-day-old baby is the most vulnerable and a "between" or non-existent being who may not be easily classified into a fixed category

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refer to Eve, who is "Adam's helper" (Gen 2:18). Cautioning against the thieves, therefore, reveals the Gospel of Thomas's strong resistance to those "dividers" or powers that attempt to make the one into two (cf. logia 11, 22, 72). Note that Jesus gives this teaching not only to Mary, but his addressee is the plural "you" (ἡμῶν). Reminding the audience of the creation story of Genesis, the Gospel of Thomas urges them to "understand" this truth, which is linked with the following teaching, "make the two into one, ... make male and female into a single one..." in logion 22.

<sup>383</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 109.

within the Greco-Roman social “structure,”<sup>384</sup> it turns into a “mythic type” in the world of meaning that the Gospel of Thomas creates, and its liminal role effectively manifests sacred powers by symbolizing the first human being created according to the image of God.<sup>385</sup> In this gospel’s accounts of infants entering the reign, we encounter “the structurally inferior as the morally and ritually superior, and secular weakness as sacred power.”<sup>386</sup>

Consequently, this liminal and subversive character of the infant embodies the Gospel of Thomas’s ultimate religious and existential goal, in which the way that one attains a perfect spiritual self is expressed in his or her transformation into the childlike condition. Therefore, the “permanently sacred attributes” that the child metaphor enshrines seem to incite the audience “to action as well as to thought”<sup>387</sup> and perhaps to ascetic and celibate practices as well as to the reflection on the non-gendered state of the primordial human.

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<sup>384</sup> Turner states that in nearly every society, a person in a liminal phase is “structurally if not physically invisible in terms of his culture’s standard definitions and classifications.” *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 232.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 108, 110.

<sup>386</sup> This quote comes from Turner’s observation of the Ashanti society, “where matriliney is the dominant articulating principle, the male-to-male link of descent is regarded as almost totally auspicious and connected with the Sky God and the great river gods, who preside over fertility, health, strength, and all the life values shared by everyone” (Ibid., 125). With respect to gender transformation in “rituals of status reversal,” see Turner, “Humility and Hierarchy,” in *The Ritual Process*, 166–203, esp. 183–85.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 109, 129.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The unavoidable mutations of the body, as well as the development of intellectual and moral capacities that time brings to human life, seem to provide ample space for early Christ followers in which to articulate one of their primary philosophical or theological goals, namely, cultivating a perfect self to enter the kingdom of God. Yet, from the first few centuries CE we encounter two drastically different responses to the question of what form we should look like and be like when we become perfect before God. As Stevan Davies notes, the Gospel of Thomas may “[offer] a view of Christian transformation not terribly different from the Pauline view,” since both Paul and the Gospel of Thomas stress “the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4) “as the goal of [a person’s] renewal.”<sup>388</sup> However, while both engage in this question of spiritual transformation, the Gospel of Thomas and 1 Corinthians draw on diverse and discursive ancient discourses on children and childhood, deploying them in clearly different modes. For instance, Paul positively takes up the theme of human development and progress towards maturity, thereby translating childhood into the immature and foolish spiritual condition that one should grow out of. In this sense, the ideal spiritual self that 1 Corinthians envisions through the portrayal of Christ is characterized by the perfect adult male. Not only that, this imagination of spiritual growth also functions to reinforce Paul’s eschatological belief, in which his theological vision of perfection is realized only in the future resurrection (1 Cor 13:13; cf. 15:12–58).

On the contrary, the Gospel of Thomas, which metaphorizes the ideal spiritual state that one must realize, seems to have turned its eye to the bodily characteristics of

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<sup>388</sup> Davies, “Christology and Protology,” 668.

infancy that could best serve its protology. This gospel's theological vision directs our attention to the beginning of the world, that is, the time before any male and female distinction or other earthly boundaries were drawn. The portrait of a seven-day-old baby thus serves to persuade the audience to reflect on the image of God, according to which the first human being was created. Yet, this rhetoric of the child may have culturally and religiously evoked the young child's asexual and non-gendered condition that one must restore and actualize in this world.

Of course, it is difficult to reconstruct the historical impact that this imagery of the infant might have had on the Gospel of Thomas's immediate readers.<sup>389</sup> However, for them, the meaning of becoming like infants would evoke a set of religious ideas and practices, since this imagery's subversive character underscores the transcendence of bodily boundaries or earthly ties (11, 22, 61, 72, 80, 87, 105, 112), and its symbolism of making two into one also correlates with the text's insistence on the "subjective isolation"<sup>390</sup> in this world (e.g., ΜΟΝΑΧΟC in 49, 75; ΟΥΑ ΟΥΩΤ in 4, 22, 23). In this way, the text's sayings about young children seem to carry a number of potential theological implications. The whole imagery of infants, as I argue, invites the reader into a transformative experience in which gender boundaries are annihilated and hierarchies of age are turned upside down. In social reality, children had to wait until adulthood in order to formally enter ancient civil society. Yet, in the realm of the Gospel of Thomas's religious imagination, adults should become like little children in order to enter the reign

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<sup>389</sup> Cf. Karen L. King, "Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 3 (1987): 48–97; Risto Uro, "Asceticism and Anti-Familial Language in the *Gospel of Thomas*," in *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 216–34.

<sup>390</sup> Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne," 167.

of God. Therefore, not only does the child metaphor convey this gospel's vision of nullifying gender boundaries, but it may also harbor a resounding challenge to adult-centered and patriarchal social norms.

*Excursus: Little Children in Paradise: The Gospel of Thomas and 2<sup>nd</sup>-Century Christian Thought*

As far as the little child is concerned, the Gospel of Thomas may be seen to share some ideas with Irenaeus, for the latter describes Adam and Eve as “infants” in Eden and mentions their “lack of sexual relationship and procreation in Paradise” (*AH* 3.22.4; *Epid.* 14).<sup>391</sup> This picture of the first human beings, however, has nothing to do with the agenda of reunifying the different genders.<sup>392</sup> Rather, Irenaeus’s point lies in “a developmental anthropology of salvation,” wherein “Adam, as the type of every human person, has grown from boy to man,” which is the full image of the creation. Likewise, Clement of Alexandria may be seen to have much in common with the Gospel of Thomas. He states that the first human being in paradise “played like a child who was free,” and he ascribes to humanity’s original condition the absence of pleasure and desire (*Protr.* II). Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that sexual difference was not an overt topic in Clement’s discussion,<sup>393</sup> nor did he use the image of the child to refer specifically to the first human’s asexual condition. Rather, his child metaphor was meant to depict the first human’s simplicity before the Fall, whereas the phrase “neither male nor female” was used for “a new human being” who is freed from the bondage of sin through Christ’s redemptive work. The Gospel of Thomas’s references to the infant, therefore, differ from Irenaeus’s use of infancy or Clement’s mention of childlike freedom.

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<sup>391</sup> M. C. Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as “infants” in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *J ECS* 12 (2004): 8.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9, 22. Steenberg here notes that at the heart of this understanding lies Irenaeus’ strong resistance to “Gnostic allegorization and mythologization of the creation account.”

<sup>393</sup> “Clement’s primary concern here is the first human and that human’s correlation with the Lord.” Benjamin H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 56.



## Chapter V

### Conclusion

In the fifth century CE, by which time the feast of Holy Innocents (Matt 2:16–18) had been established as part of the church tradition, we see many Christian authors cautioning against idealizing childhood by associating it with innate purity or the virtue of innocence. Leo the Great, when speaking of the Holy Innocents in “his seventh sermon for Epiphany [year 452], ... cites Matthew 18:3”<sup>394</sup> and notes:

Christ loved infancy, master of humility, rule of innocence, model of gentleness. Christ loved infancy, to which he directed the behavior of their elders, to which he humbled the age of the old and to which example he urged them, in order to sublimate them to the eternal kingdom.<sup>395</sup>

While Leo the Great affirms that “Christ loved infancy,” the reason that Jesus did so is understood to show the elders an example for entering the eternal kingdom. In particular, as Hayward notes, “Leo reduces the scope of this imperative to imitation of an *image* displayed by children. He cites 1 Corinthians 14.20 (‘Brethren, do not become children in sense; but in malice be children, and in sense be perfect’),<sup>396</sup> and defines the aspects of

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<sup>394</sup> Paul A. Hayward, “Suffering and Innocence in Latin Sermons for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, c. 400–800,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood, SCH 31 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 76.

<sup>395</sup> Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 37 (ed. *CChr. SL*. 138, pp. 200–204), cited in Hayward, “Suffering and Innocence in Latin Sermons for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, c. 400–800,” 76.

<sup>396</sup> My translation of 1 Cor 14:20 reads, “Brothers and sisters, stop being like little children but be infants in evil and be adults in thinking.”

childhood to which Christ was referring with a list of [an] ‘outward’ and largely negative virtues, such as the facility for the immediate return to an *attitude* of peacefulness after a commotion, for never remembering an offence, and so on.”<sup>397</sup> In many early Christian writings, we can encounter this tendency to circumscribe the meaning of innocent children, reflecting “Augustine’s view that children are ‘innocent’ only in so far as bodily incapacity prevents them from sinning.”<sup>398</sup> In order to hear in the history of Christianity the overt connection between young children and innocence as their innate quality, we should wait until the medieval period.

As Leo the Great’s example implies, early Christian view(s) of children should be carefully approached and “more hesitantly” reconstructed, “especially concerning the first two centuries.”<sup>399</sup> Prior to drawing out a religious perspective on children and childhood that is unique to early Christianity, we should understand the historical situatedness and rhetorical position associated with each text’s deployment of children and childhood. My dissertation explores imagery of the child used in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas and demonstrates the various cultural contexts in which these ancient texts’ images of children are engaged. In turn, I highlight that each text offers a significantly different meaning of what it is to be like a child. For Matthew, the little child in Jesus’s sayings represents the lowliest of the low under the Roman Empire, functioning to urge the readers to abandon their political and economic

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<sup>397</sup> Hayward, “Suffering and Innocence,” 76.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>399</sup> Levine, “Theological Education, the Bible, and History,” 332.

privilege. For Paul, the infant is a term of invective against the Corinthians, whose lack of proper speech marks their unpreparedness for God's reign. For the Gospel of Thomas, the child functions as an exemplar of primordial humanity in Gen 1:27 who existed before sexual shame and as someone who partakes in the kingdom, that is spread out on earth.

What does this analysis reveal, then? Apparently, there was no one understanding of children among documents like the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas. Their images of children instead reveal the diverse ideals available when religious phenomena later labeled "Christianity" began to take shape. Depending on the text and its historical-rhetorical situation, particular aspects of what it is to be a child are underscored, while others go completely unmentioned. These three ancient texts engage actively yet selectively with the cultural ideas and social practices attached to children and thereby proffer different definitions of childlikeness for those who aspire to the reign of God.

This dissertation began with an emphasis on the socio-cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean, within which images of young children in earliest Christian materials should be situated. It avoided the presumption that from its inception, early Christianity created a separate historical and cultural sphere from its surrounding environments. At the same time, in order to search for clues that evoke specific notions of the child, this research has directed the reader's attention to the selected writings' historical and literary details. As a result, I have suggested that the Gospel of Matthew foregrounds the differences between the disenfranchised child of the kingdom of heaven and the children of vassal kings under the Roman Empire, 1 Corinthians utilizes the contemporaneous philosophical discourse on the infant's immaturity and intellectual

incapabilities, and the Gospel of Thomas draws on the ancient cultural perception of the baby's non-gendered state in order to use childlikeness as an example of those able to receive God's reign. While all three texts link young children and the reign of God, the ways in which childlikeness is understood in each of these texts differ, corresponding to their formulation of theological ideas on the ideal human condition. The childlikeness that each of the three texts constructs seems to present a distinct answer to the question of what kind of virtue a person should cultivate in order to make him/herself fit for God's reign. After all, these three texts invite us to see the multiplicity of identities that early Christ followers craft through childhood imagery. What perceptions of children or childhood experiences do these documents evoke? Through these images of children, what theological ideals arise that help conceptualize a perfect self? How does that self fit within a broader community and furthermore, within a broader political context of injustice?

*Entering the Kingdom, but Not Like the Sons of Earthly Kings* (Chapter II) explores the childlikeness described in Jesus's sayings in the Gospel of Matthew. Bringing redaction-critical insights into my textual analysis, I highlighted Matthew's distinctive juxtaposition of the sons of the kings of the earth and little children in the kingdom of heaven. In order to understand these two different groups of children, I have explored how the economic and political language in the temple tax pericope (Matt 17:24–27) affects the ways in which the story of children and the kingdom (18:1–5) can be contextualized. Terms such as two drachma (δίδραχμον), tribute (κῆνσος), sons of the kings (βασιλεύς) of the earth, and foreigners (ἀλλοτριῶι) all resonate with the political reality that Matthew's largely Jewish audience faces under Roman imperial rule. This

observation led me to read the temple tax pericope in light of Josephus's account of the Herodian dynasty, which is directly relevant to Matthew's literary and historical settings, and the *Ara Pacis*, which features foreign royal children as a symbol of Rome's power and benefaction. I thus suggest that the sons of the earthly kings who are exempted from the taxes likely refer to Herodian princes such as Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa II.<sup>400</sup>

Unlike these sons of vassal kings who were educated in Rome and lived like the Romans, the little child Jesus calls and puts in the midst of his disciples represents the lowliest of the low in the social context of Matthew, as his (or her) age, Galilean origin, and possible orphanhood imply. Matthew's immediate audience would likely have seen the sharp contrast between the marginalized condition of this child in a Roman client kingdom and the privileged childhoods of the Herodian kings. Consider Herod Agrippa II, who ruled Galilee in Matthew's time and who maintained a strong Roman-Jewish political symbiosis during and after the Jewish war. Reflecting the audience's historical memory and social reality, Jesus's injunction to turn and become like little children thus means *not* living like those Herodian princes. Instead, Matthew's gospel asks its hearers, who are already living on the social margin of the Empire, to turn to those who are even lowlier than they are. The disenfranchised Galilean child in Matthew thus serves as a paradigm for the hearers, as a community, to seek a social transformation as they envision themselves entering the kingdom of heaven. This gospel emphatically tells its hearers that greatness in the kingdom is achieved when they receive one such child (ἐν

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<sup>400</sup> The former appears in Matthew's narrative and the latter was incumbent when Matthew was composed.

παιδίον τοιοῦτο), one of those little ones (μικρά), and one of the “others” (ἄλλοτριοῖ) in their own communities.<sup>401</sup>

The childlikeness presented in 1 Corinthians differs drastically from that of the Gospel of Matthew. At the outset, the audience is told not to be like young children. In order to inherit God’s reign, they should put away all the fleshly attributes that infants possess. Chapter III on 1 Corinthians (*Infants in Christ, Not Children of God*) demonstrates how infants serve as an anti-paradigm for those who will inherit God’s reign. In this letter, imagery of the infant coincides with Paul’s concern about the Corinthians’ religious practices related to speech. This observation has enabled me to examine Paul’s references to infants in comparison with a set of contemporaneous writings that describe infancy as an absence of *logos* (speech, reason, rationality). I demonstrate how this idea of the *logos*-less infant permeates Paul’s construction of the audience as infants: While the Corinthians claim that they speak eloquently, their factionalism proves that they are the opposite of those who have wisdom and *logos*. They are immature and lack self-mastery and virtues (1 Cor 3:1–4; cf. 6:9–11). Their preoccupation with speaking in tongues is not so much the proof of their spiritual power as it resembles infants’ thoughtless gibberish, unintelligible to outsiders (14:13–23).

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<sup>401</sup> This is why we see in Matthew no pericope about the unknown exorcist (Mark 9:38–41; Luke 9:49–50) after this story of children. By means of redaction, Matthew’s gospel makes a thematic transition and expansion from v. 5 to v. 6. As Jesus’s teaching in v. 4 is further articulated by the following saying in v. 5, “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,” this pericope shows that lowering oneself like the little child in Capernaum is none other than receiving and taking care of those marginalized in Matthew’s community. Consider v. 6: “whoever gives offense to one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” The teaching of receiving one like this Galilean child thus expands into that of offending none of those little ones, which lends greater weight to the social responsibility of Jesus’s disciples.

As the historical-rhetorical context of 1 Corinthians indicates, the Corinthians may have thought that their Wisdom and *glossolalia* manifested their status as τέλειοι, namely, those people who are spiritually mature and perfect. However, Paul demeans the Corinthians' speech, wisdom, and knowledge by presenting them as immature, imperfect, and fleshly, possessing *logos*-less infants' intellectual incapacities. As the *logos*-less state places the young child as both antithetical and in a progressive relationship to adulthood, the infantile Corinthians should cultivate and transform themselves into having the status of τέλειοι.<sup>402</sup> The child or infant in 1 Corinthians functions as a rhetorical invective against the Corinthian *ekklesia*, underscoring their unpreparedness to inherit the Father's reign. Since full membership in civil society is confined to free adult males who have the complete *logos*, the imagery of the *logos*-less infant implicitly authorizes the patriarchal and adult-centered ideology for the sake of God's reign.

Chapter IV (*Entering God's Kingdom as a Baby*) analyzes the Gospel of Thomas, which offers a seven-day-old baby (ογκογει) and nursing infants (ε̅ν̅κογει εγχι ερωτε) as models for seeing Jesus and entering the reign. In order to demonstrate how this imagery of infants relates to the ideal status of "a single one" (Gos. Thom. 3, 22, 83–84) and of being "neither male nor female" (22), I paid attention to the extant scholarship that locates these logia within the context of ancient nude baptism, in which the initiate was portrayed as a baby. Yet, in the literary and theological context of Thomas, this imagery

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<sup>402</sup> Considering Paul's rhetoric, the *teleoi* seem to be those who speak God's wisdom, possess perfect knowledge, and embody the message (*logos*) of the cross. Here we see an irony lurking behind Paul's logic of *logos*. The *logos* that the Corinthians claim to possess is not true, as it merely manifests human wisdom. The Corinthians should understand that they are given God's *logos*, which is the *logos* of the cross. While this *logos* of the cross can only be understood within the spiritual domain of Christ's resurrection, Paul utilizes the ancient conception of *logos* to criticize the Corinthians as being irrational and mindless.

of the baby appears to take on more symbolic implications, representing the primordial being in Gen 1:27.

I have thus examined how this gospel finds an affinity between the infant and the first human being, who is neither male nor female. Paying special attention to Jewish and Roman burial practices regarding infants, I suggest that these practices concretize the ancient idea of the infant's liminality and non-gendered state. Recovering the original, ideal self present at the beginning of this world is compared to becoming like a baby, whose bodily condition symbolizes the transcendence of boundaries, such as sexual differences, age, and social rank.

As these three chapters show, the depictions of childlikeness that each of the texts presents to its audience are not identical but are crafted through discursive engagement with and employment of particular experiences and perceptions associated with childhood. The literary context in which each text deploys imagery of the child contributes to circumscribing the connotations of childlikeness; the ways in which the childlikeness articulates an ideal self are also contingent upon the author's (and the audience's) historical setting, literary strategies, and theological and rhetorical interests.<sup>403</sup> For example, the Gospel of Matthew neither draws attention to an innate quality of the child nor promotes an individualized ethical humility. Raising the question of how to define greatness in the kingdom of heaven vis-à-vis the sons of the great kings

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<sup>403</sup> Throughout this dissertation I sought to emphasize a methodological intervention: Understanding childlikeness in NT/EC literature involves several different methods. Each text's child imagery has a rhetorical force in both ancient and modern contexts, yet it cannot be clearly articulated unless we integrate "the historical, the literary, and the theological" modes of interpretation. More historically contextualized, more literarily scrutinized, more theologically reflective analysis would be welcome. Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 26–27.



on earth, the little child serves to urge its audience to effect social transformation within their communities. The Gospel of Thomas, speaking affirmatively of childlikeness and linking it to God's reign like Matthew does, accentuates an individual's spiritual transformation by foregrounding the liminal and non-gendered status of the infant. In turn, this spiritual transformation informed by the infant imagery is quite distinct from what 1 Corinthians does with the infancy imagery. The only infant qualities recognized throughout the letter are immaturity and the inability to speak. Paul urges the infantile Corinthians to cease improper speech and progress toward the final stage of spiritual growth, depicting the reign of God as the inheritance that only the fully mature can obtain at the eschaton.

These documents' references to children hardly serve as historical evidence that early Christianity prepared the way for a real valuation of children in history. Because of the selective, situational, and rhetorical nature of these texts' uses of children, we cannot measure the degree to which they reflect the religious practices prescribed for early Christ followers in their treatment of real children. Instead, regarding the beginnings of Christianity, these texts indicate that early Christ followers cast children as theological imaginary for expressing different conceptions of a self that is worthy of God's reign. Just as the scope of meaning that images of children can encompass is rich and diverse, childlikeness in a religious sense can emphasize various aspects of children, such as socioeconomic status, intellectual ability, age, and bodily form. By exploring a broad swath of historical, literary, and legal material that attests to ancient views of children and their experiences and by simultaneously investigating the individual texts' theological

and rhetorical positions, this dissertation highlights the variety of religious values or ideal human qualities that early Christ followers attempted to inculcate in themselves.

This research has also provided room to critically evaluate current New Testament scholarship on children and childhood. As is observed in the Introduction, some modern scholars have transferred the theological affirmation of Jesus's valorization of children to an objective historical statement or projected our modern assumptions about the positive qualities of the child onto early Christian literature. Interestingly, this exegetical tendency stands in stark contrast with how early Christian writers interpret or allude to biblical passages about children. For example, consider the notion of innocence in such early Christian interpretation. Unlike what some modern minds wish to see, innocence was rarely associated with infants in the cultural context of the first century CE, and thus it is not historically accurate to draw a presumption of innocence from the positive portrayals of children in the gospels.<sup>404</sup>

From this insight, further research avenues open up. For example, we can trace the ramifications of Jesus's and Paul's injunctions on childlikeness in late antiquity, investigating in what ways and in what historical-rhetorical contexts these sayings are received and reinterpreted. We can ask if any of these references to children are re-cited in order to further reinforce the Christian author's understanding of God's reign or an

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<sup>404</sup> Cf. Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 85; Huskinson, *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, 236. Hayward also notes "[b]elief in the sanctity of the infants seems to have arisen by the end of the second century [e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.16.4; Cyprian of Carthage *Ep.* 58.6; note their "belief is a premise in rhetorical arguments"], but the decisive contribution to medieval interpretations of its significance came in the later patristic period" (Hayward, "Suffering and Innocence," 80).

ideal self. What religious ideas do later Christian documents emphasize, negotiate, or challenge by citing these references to children?

In addition, let me point to two future directions of work that might emerge from this dissertation, one historical and the other theological. One avenue through which to explore childhood imagery in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas is a historical-critical inquiry. If we can presuppose that the “kingdom and children aphorism” was originally part of the Jesus tradition before any of these three writings reached its final form,<sup>405</sup> considering the 1 Corinthians references to children and the reign of God may help us see a more complicated picture of the source relations between the three writings. For instance, while I reject the “pre-Gnostic” hypothesis regarding Paul’s “opponents” in 1 Corinthians, comparing my analysis of 1 Corinthians to the Gospel of Thomas may lead to a suggestion that the Corinthians received the reign and children aphorism in a similar manner to how the author(s) of the Gospel of Thomas received it, leaning towards the egalitarian ethos and the existence of the reign of God in the present time, as the imagery of the infant signifies.<sup>406</sup> In the meantime, one may delve into the relationship between the Gospel of Thomas 22 and the Gospel of Matthew 18:1–

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<sup>405</sup> James M. Robinson, “The Formal Structure of Jesus’ Message,” in Klassen and Snyder, *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, 91–110; Crossan, *In Fragments*; Vernon K. Robbins, “Pronouncement Stories and Jesus’ Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach,” *Semeia* 29 (1983): 43–74. Cf. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 120.

<sup>406</sup> The Corinthian community and the historical community behind the Gospel of Thomas may not engage in the same sort of practices regarding sex and marriage. However, it is interesting to note that in many ways the ideal religious self that Paul portrays is completely the opposite of the infant-like characteristics of “a single one” in Thomas. For instance, for Paul the reign of God is guaranteed for a person becoming like a mature, adult man—consider what Christ, the last Adam, exemplifies. By contrast, in the Gospel of Thomas, the seven-day-old infant is depicted as having wisdom and knowing the place of life. The reign of God is to be realized in the present by those who become like infants.

9 and 19:10–15, in which we found an overlap between childhood imagery and allusion to ascetic practice and references to eyes, hands, and feet.<sup>407</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we can further consider this research's implications for modern readers, Christian and non-Christian alike. The images of the child in these three writings have shed light on the variety of ways of thinking about an ideal self among Christ followers in the first- and second-centuries CE. So, from our social location, what does it mean to enter God's reign (not) like a child? Regardless of our individual religious backgrounds, how might the portrayals of children in Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and Thomas help us foster an ethically and spiritually ideal self in our time? In this culturally diverse, religiously pluralistic, and politically polarized world, what values might these images of children help us envision in a clearer and more concrete manner? Should we now lower ourselves like those little ones so that not a single person, no matter how insignificant or small in our society, is turned away but always welcomed to our communities? Should we strive to restore the baby-like condition of the original human being who lives without shame and who realizes what it means to be part of the kingdom now? Or, should we not be blinded by our own intelligence or eloquence but make spiritual progress in our everyday lives until the day we fully understand and speak God's wisdom? Whether early Christ followers were told to be or not be like young children, the symbolic power of the child concerning moral, spiritual, and social transformation might be greater than we think. Just as these portrayals reveal diverse and creative ways to aspire to God's reign, we are also invited to engage philosophically and spiritually in the thought experiment of being (un)like little children. They may help us

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<sup>407</sup> Cf. Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, 92–93.

imagine, hope for, and work toward an ideal world in which we find ourselves perfect and in which we all can meaningfully dwell.

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