

The Study of Children in Mark 10:13 - 16 from a Yoruba Perspective

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Abstract - *Jesus in his teachings in the Gospels expressly pointed out that, respecting a child, recognizing a child's individuality, nurturing children into usefulness by serving them, are as important as any other ministry. He gave attention to children brought to him and blessed them. Jesus' affection for children and his attitude towards them is at variance, in most cases, with the attitude of many adults in some cultures today where children are seen as mentally deficient, ignorant, capricious and foolish and thereby get little or no recognition. The Yoruba place a high premium on child-bearing, child-training and blessing of children because the children mirror the parents in the society and they are expected to carry on the legacy of the parents after their demise. The attitude of neglecting children, not giving them enough attention both at home and in the church today calls for concern. The 'world' is so encumbered with challenges and demands that many adults rarely have time for children; some don't even want to have children in order to avoid the responsibility of caring and nurturing. However, children are very central to the continuity of the human race and as such should be given necessary recognition, blessings and training that will enable them to become responsible adults. The paper attempts a historical - grammatical analysis of Mark10:13-16. The reception of children by Jesus is set against child neglect, child suffering and child abuse in Nigeria today. A study of Jesus' teaching and affection for children in the context of the Yoruba practices is done purposely to challenge contemporary conceptions about children and make readers to reflect on their own attitudes and behavior to children. We must learn from Jesus' teaching, to emulate child-like characteristics of lowliness, trust, powerlessness and absolute dependence on God, in order to have peace here on earth and enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus' acceptance of the children should be seen as a condemnation of the practice of turning children out of the home either through the actions of the parents or by their words.*

Keywords: *Children, St. Mark, Jesus teaching, Kingdom of God,*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a significant stage in human life. It is generally believed that children are the leaders of tomorrow. Children are boys and girls from birth to 12 years old. Children between this age group could be divided into three categories: infants; preschoolers and school age. Children are gifts from God. Children come into this world whole, innocent, and pure. The Psalmist wrote: "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hands of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that has his

quiver full of them"(Ps.127:3-5). The child may be little and helpless, but he is a complete person with all equipment of an adult. He has a mind capable of thinking, a brain capable of reasoning, capable of expressing strong feelings. He has powers of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. He is a full-blown little person, as distinct from everybody else in the world as one snowflake is from another[1]. They are unique individuals who can learn whenever they are being reached at their levels. They are source of joy in a home; they are cherished as costly pearls (Mk.9:42); they are referred to as models

or examples (Mk.9:35-37; 10:13-16); they deserved to be honoured (Matt.2:10-11); they have the mind of Christ(Matt.19:13-15).Children are to be loved, catered and cared for[2]. Indeed, early childhood development is considered to be the most important phase in life that determines the quality of health, well-being, learning and behavior across the life-span [3].

In most of the African cultures, the inability of a married couple to produce children is a stigma, a reproach and a disgrace to the marriage institution because such couples are usually regarded as failures in the society[4]. A high priority is placed on child bearing in marriage than any other purpose. Children are accorded a priceless worth in Africa since procreation is perceived to be the essence of marriage. Some names given to children among the Yoruba reflect the worth placed on children, names such as, *Omoboriowo*(child is superior to money), *Omolabake* (a child is worth caring for),*Omolola*(child is wealth),*Ibitayo*(having a child is a thing of joy), *Omolade*(child is a crown) etc. They equally placed high premium on child training. It is a common saying among the Yoruba that, *omo ti a o ko, ni yoo gbe ile ta ko ta*(a child not trained will waste a well built heritage), a well- trained child is the pride of parents (*omo to se e mu yagan*), *a kuku u bi sanse radarada* (better not to have a child than to have a child that is not trained/foolish). The Yoruba believe in the significance and efficacy of parental blessing as it goes a long way in ensuring the child's success in life. It is in the light of this that Jesus' teaching and affection for children becomes relevant to the Yoruba. Jesus' hug of the children in Mark 10:15 can be seen as an adoptive embrace, an assumption of a parental role. His subsequent blessing indicates that he has adopted the children in order to pass on an inheritance to them before he dies, and in this way save them [5]. Mark 10:13-16 is particularly significant in that it combines Jesus' teaching about little children and the kingdom of God and Jesus' ministry to children and shows the relationship between them. It shows that small children occupy a significant space in Jesus' public ministry and forms a motif in Mark's Gospel.

Children in the Greco- Roman/Jewish Cultures

The modern understanding of a child and childhood as a special class of society with distinctive cultural worth and values is slightly different from the life and experience of children in the world of the

New Testament. In the Greco-Roman society children were seen as part of the kinship tradition who carried on the family name and business and who provided care for the elderly parents. Children gained their primary identity in relation to the households. Boys were trained to take over headship, and girls were trained to take on the domestic responsibilities. In religious contexts, children were regarded as innocent, chaste and naïve thus channels or intermediaries for the gods. Children were also valued as individuals. The home and family were the primary social structure where children gained their identity. The emphasis on sons and the role of the father reveals the patriarchy of the Jewish culture. First century Judaism was characterized by the assigning of a higher value to children than in the Greco-Roman world. From the perspective of the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition, all of life is the Creator's work and therefore to be valued and preserved[6]. Children were considered a prime blessing and gift from God. Children had a place in the religious life of Israel: they observed its religious rites and were taught its founding traditions and way of life Gen.17:10-14; Deut.4:9-10). Among the Jews, for centuries, education was based in the home and was centered around the religious tradition and passing on the family trade. A girl was prepared for marriage while for boys, education was primarily religious education centered on the study of Torah [7]. Much is not known about children in the first-century Mediterranean world. Existing literary documents (including the New Testament), nonetheless, do allow us to surmise some things about adult attitudes towards children and the actual circumstances of children's lives. Clearly both the Palestinian Jewish society and the larger Greco-Roman world were patriarchal, in which male offspring were valued more highly than female ones. Roman law did not prohibit the exposure of babies, especially females, as a means of ridding a father of an unwanted infant. In contrast to the contemporary idea of childhood, the number of years for childhood was few, with girls promised and given in marriage by mid-teens, boys only somewhat later. Crucially important to the father of the household was the marriageability of young daughters as a means of extending and improving the honor and financial security of his family. A father's son extended the family lineage and control over a trade or land that was owned. Peasant families with meager or no land holdings undoubtedly needed both young sons

and daughters to contribute quickly to the family work force. Some scholars have suggested that harsh economic disruptions (and possibly divorce) could create a need for a family's abandoning children or selling them into slavery[8]. There are so many similarities at the same time because in New Testament time, children continued to live within the cultural patriarchy and the general social structure of the household. A child was subject to the authority of his elders, not taken seriously except as a responsibility, one to be looked after, not one to be looked up to. Children were perceived as a blessing and insurance of the nation's perpetuity. Conversely a woman who was childless was considered barren and shamed and it was the obligation of the parents and the community to teach and pass on the faith to the children. Children constitute a source of joy and comfort to the parents and the entire society.

The New Testament material on children must be viewed within its historical and cultural setting. In Greco-Roman antiquity and Judaism, children were both appreciated in some aspects and viewed negatively in other aspects. Children had no rights of their own and were legally subject to their father, who had almost absolute power over them. Childhood was viewed largely as a state of immaturity to outgrow. On the one hand, parents loved and took pleasure in their children; they valued children as necessary to their economic survival and well-being and as heirs in whom they would live on after death. On the other hand, children were considered fundamentally deficient and not yet human in the full sense. They were physically small, underdeveloped, and vulnerable [9].

Children in The Gospels

There are five main ways in which the significance of children is underscored in Jesus' teaching and practice: He blesses the children brought to him and teaches that the reign of God belongs to them; He makes children models of entering the Kingdom of God (Mk.10:13-16; Matt.18:1-5); He calls his disciples to welcome little children as he does and turns the service of children into a sign of greatness in the Kingdom of God(Mk.9:33-37;Matt.18:1-2; Lk.9:46-48); He gives the service of children ultimate significance as a way of receiving himself and by implication the One who sent him. He is acclaimed by children as the 'Son of David'[10]. The inspiring and tender account of Jesus blessing the

children is found in three of the four gospels (see Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). The three accounts vary slightly. Matthew reports that Jesus "laid his hands on them" (Matt. 19:15). Luke does not record Him blessing them. Only in Mark's account is found this tender experience: "And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). Some Scholars have suggested that the Jewish custom of bringing children to the elders or scribes for blessing and prayer following the Day of Atonement lies behind this scene, although this is not attested to in the New Testament but only in the Talmudic tractate.

Mark 10:13-16 cannot be read in isolation from its larger literary context (8:22-10:52) and especially 9:33-37. Mark 8:22-10:52, most contemporary interpreters now agree, highlights Jesus' exchanges with his disciples regarding his own forthcoming suffering and what is involved in following him[11]. In Mk 10:13 - 16, Mark adds a tender story of Jesus' loving concern for little children. This is the other side of his stern words about the sanctity of marriage in the preceding verses. Children after all, are the greatest sufferers from divorce[12]. First marriage, then children; the sequence is logical. Unlike many "moderns" today, the Jews of that day looked on children as a blessing and not a burden, a rich treasure from God and not a liability (Ps 127-128). To be without children brought a couple both sorrow and disgrace. It was customary for parents to bring their children to the rabbis for a blessing, and so it was reasonable that they would bring the little ones to Jesus. Some were infants in arms (Luke 18:15), while others were young children able to walk, and he welcomed them all. Although they are treated as distinct and separate incidents in the three Gospels, there is some overlap in the teaching of Jesus between the event where he places a child in the midst (Matt.18:1-14;Mark8:33-37;Luke9:46-48) and the time when people bring children to Jesus (Matt.19:13-15;Mark10:13-16;Luke18:15-17). Jesus freely and deliberately chooses a little child as a way of challenging and illuminating the disciples' theological 'discussion' about the kingdom.

Mark 10:13-16

13 And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children

come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. **15** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." **16** And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them (RSV)

A pronouncement story, which in the course of tradition has lost all details of time and place [13]. Its connection with the preceding section is probably topical – a story of Jesus blessing children seemed to follow suitably on a section concerned with marriage. *προσέφερον* is an indefinite plural. The verb *προσφέρειν* can mean ‘bring’ without any idea of carrying. Though usually it denotes a young child. The Luke parallel has *βρέφη*, means ‘infants’. *ἵνα αὐτῶν ἀψηται* Jesus is often described as touching the sick or being touched by them. Here the idea of those who bring the children is that Jesus should bless them. *ἐπετίμησαν* possibly means the disciples wanted to save Jesus from being troubled.

The variant *τοῖς προσφέρουσιν* is clearly due to the desire to get rid of the ambiguity of *αὐτοῖς* which grammatically could refer to the children themselves. The masculine *αὐτοῖς* suggests that Mark did not think of those who brought the children as being necessarily the mothers. In both Matthew and Luke, the reference to Jesus’ indignation, *ἠγανάκτησεν*, is omitted. Mark’s use of asyndeton before *μὴ κωλύετε* has the effect of suggesting Jesus’ impatience. *Τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία του Θεου* – the genitive here is possessive, the meaning being that the kingdom ‘belongs to such’ not that it ‘consists of such’. The Kingdom of God belongs to little children – and to other weak and insignificant ones – not because of any merit of theirs, but because God has willed to give it to them. The reason why the Kingdom of God belongs to children is to be found in the fact that they are weak and helpless and unimportant, and in the fact that God has chosen ‘the weak things of the world’ (1Cor.1:26ff). The reference in *τοῖς παιδίων* again is not to the receptiveness or humility or imaginativeness or trustfulness or unselfconsciousness of children, but to their objective littleness and helplessness. The emphasis is on the status not on the qualities. To receive the Kingdom as a little child is to allow oneself to be given it, because one knows one cannot claim it as one’s right or attempt to earn it. *Κατευλόγει* as in *καταγελαν* (verse 40) the force of *κατά* seems to

be intensive – he blessed them fervently, in no perfunctory way.

Mark 9:33-37

33 And they came to Caper’na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" **34** But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. **35** And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." **36** And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (RSV)

The paradox “whoever wants to be first shall be last of all and servant of all” is significant when Jesus’ places a child “in their midst” and then takes the child into his embrace. Jesus’ poignant action introduces the child as the “least one” in family and society who needs to be “received,” all intended as a pointed answer to the self-aggrandizing thoughts of the disciples. This demonstrative action finds its astonishing interpretation in Jesus’ final saying, which makes some sense of Jesus’ paradoxical saying in 9:35. “The paradox of 9:35 is interpreted metaphorically in 9:36-37, especially in 9:37 (a ‘child’ figures ‘Jesus,’ who in turn figures the one who ‘sent’ him). Or to quote him again, “According to this shocking new standard, embracing a child is like embracing God (9:37) [14].

In the Lukan rendering of this story, the disciples’ argument is out in the open and does not need to be uncovered by Jesus’ question. Jesus’ action involves his taking a child and placing the child alongside himself—a demonstration of his solidarity with the little child. Jesus’ culminating pronouncement is provided a rationale, allowing Luke to begin and end the story with the issue of greatness. The disciples’ argument about greatness, which initiates the story, is settled by Jesus’ offering a new definition of greatest. The least one among them, embodied in the little child at Jesus’ side, is the greatest. The second episode is narrated in Luke 18:15-17 and resembles closely the Markan story. Yet in the Lukan narrative this second story loses its close association with the earlier

episode in Luke 9:46-48 because of the extended journey section that intervenes. Moreover, the Lukan version differs from Mark 10:13-16 in three striking ways: First, it includes in the opening verse a Greek word *βρέφη*, that means “infants” rather than the word *παιδίον* that designates children older than infants yet below the age of puberty. Second, the Lukan story does not mention Jesus’ indignation in reaction to the disciples’ rebuke of those bringing the infants. Third, Luke 18:15-17 concludes with Jesus’ double saying, containing no description of Jesus’ compassionate action of taking the children into his arms and blessing them.

Matt 18:1-5 “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This question, undoubtedly posed with the Matthean community in mind, prompts Jesus’ action described in Matt. 18:2a (“He called a child, whom he put among them...”) and then his extended speech beginning in Matt. 18:3-5 “Truly I say to you, if you do not turn and become as the little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever will humble him/herself as this child, this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And who receives one such child in my name, receives me”. Matthew also includes the second Markan story (Mark 10:13-16) in 19:13-15 but there he omits Mark 10:15 (“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it”) because he has inserted an altered version of that saying of Jesus in Matt. 18:3 [15]. Whereas the Markan version focused on the receiving and embracing of a little child in Jesus’ name and thus the embrace of Jesus himself and even God (Mark 9:37) and God’s kingdom (Mark 10:15), the Matthean rendering in Matt. 18:3 accentuates the need to repent (literally, “turn”) and become like the little children as the way to enter the kingdom. Matt 18:4 further clarifies that greatness in the kingdom is equated with “humbling” oneself like a little child. Concerned with the destructive effect of arrogance and pride in the church, Matthew orders the material in Matt. 18:1-14 to warn his community of any action that scandalizes or any attitude that displays contempt for “the little ones”—probably a designation for the members whose faith was probably fragile or whose status in society demanded no respect (Matt. 18:6, 10, 14). In his editing of Jesus’ sayings, Matthew is communicating what the apostle Paul exhorts in Rom 12:16 (“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly”).

The Matthean presentation shapes its version of Mark 10:15 to concentrate on the personal conversion and the childlike posture of humility needed in disciples. The Lukan version of Mark 10:13-16, given its placement directly after Luke 18:14, also interprets Jesus’ saying about receiving the kingdom “like a child” as tantamount to humbling oneself before God. In the words of Bailey [16], this accent on humility before God as the “childlike” characteristic needed for entrance into God’s kingdom has invariably been imported into our reading of Mark 10:13-16. As a result, we have failed to hear the kingdom saying in Mark 10:15 as Jesus’ challenging invitation into solidarity with “the little child,” the epitome of vulnerability, as a way to experience God’s kingdom. At first glance the Matthean version of Jesus’ kingdom saying in Matt 18:3-5 seems to convey a message contrary to Mark 10:15. Whereas in Matthew Jesus’ saying focuses on the disciples and the childlike qualities they are to assume, such as humility, in Mark it finds its locus in the vulnerable little child with whom the disciples are to be in solidarity. Yet if the use of the verb “to humble” in both Matt 18:5 and Luke 18:14 is interpreted to mean “to make oneself small” (or “low” or “weak” or “vulnerable”), then in Matthew and Luke the stress is on the disciple’s conscious action of assuming the posture of the small, weak, poor, and even exploited (like the vulnerable position of little children) in the eyes of others and before God. This invitation to humility is a call to recognize one’s place, not to a type of psychological self-flagellation in some modern sense. The call to humility, particularly for the sake of identifying with the “little” or “weak ones” in the Christian community (so Matt 18:1-14), is in continuity with Mark 10:13-16, especially if a contemporary and naive notion of childhood is not super-imposed on the biblical texts.

The Gospels give account of the relationship of children and childlikeness to the Kingdom of God in Mark 10:13-16 cf Matt. 18:1-5; the relationship between serving children, being great in the Kingdom of God and welcoming Jesus (Mark 9:33-37), and Matt. 21:14-16 presents children and the knowledge of Jesus. The backdrop for this teaching and practice is Jesus’ rebuke of those who were bringing children to Jesus and the disciples’ attempt to hinder them and also the debate about who is the greatest. The indignation expressed by Jesus underscores the seriousness of excluding children from the blessings

of the Kingdom. Not only are children recipients of the Kingdom of God; they are also models of entering the Kingdom, as Jesus stated “whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a child will not enter it” (Mk.10:15) [17].

This is one of the very few occasions where Mark records that Jesus was indignant, and it is interesting to see the cause. One might have thought that other matters were more important than the spiritual welfare of children, but Jesus valued them and often uses children as examples. Why would the disciples rebuke the people and try to keep the children away from Jesus? They probably thought they were doing him a favor by helping him protect his time and conserve his strength. In other words, they did not consider the children to be important! Their attitude was strange, because Jesus had already taught them to receive the children in his name and to be careful not to cause any of them to stumble (Mark 9:36ff).

The Child in the Yoruba Context

The Yoruba place a high premium on child-bearing, child-training and blessing of children because the children mirror the parents in the society and they are expected to carry on the legacy of the parents after their demise – *omo ti eya ba bi, eya lo ma njo/ omo Akin ni i ya Akin, omo eniyan atata ki i siwa a hu* (a child takes after his/her parents not only facially but also in character) and *omo eni ni i seyin de ni* (your child represents you when you are no more). The training and discipline of children is an important issue among the Yoruba. They idealize and romanticize childhood to a great extent. Parents are expected to give their children both formal and informal training (*eko ile*). Training begins as early as possible, mostly from two years upward, *kekere ni a ti i pa eekan iroko nitori pe bi o ba dagba tan, ipa ko le kaa* (it is better to start training and pruning early). Women had the onerous duty of imparting good behavioural patterns to their children [18]. This was achieved more by example rather than by precept – *apejuwe l’agbede iro, omo ti ekun ba bi ekun ni yoo jo. Bi omo ko jo sokoto, yoo jo kijipa, baba eni la a jo. Owu ti iya ba sig bon ni omo yoo ran*. These are Yoruba sayings which show that the child in most cases is an extension of parents in character and lifestyle. The child is taught how to greet appropriately and cheerfully. Greetings is very important to the Yoruba, *ki a ri ni lokeere, ki a se ariya, o yo ni ju ounje lo* (greeting a person cheerfully

is more satisfactory than giving the person food). There are different forms of greetings for different time of the day, events and seasons. A child who does not know how to greet appropriately is not well trained. The child is trained to become an *omoluwabi* – a person with good character, contentment, patience, love, peaceful, god-fearing and not oppressive [19]. This is the concept of a good person among the Yoruba and it is the desire of parents that their children become *omoluwabi* in the society.

Though sometimes economic hardship could force some parents in ancient times to give their children as *iwofa* (a form of slavery where a child works in the farm of someone in lieu of money borrowed by the father) in order to make ends meet and in recent times children could be trafficked with the permission of parents to serve as house-girls / maids, houseboys (domestic helps) in urban cities or outside the country to boost the financial status of the family. Many are involved in child labour of different form in order to complement family finances. Children are the “least” in familial and societal structures, they are easily dominated and exploited because of their vulnerability, dependent as they were on adults. Nonetheless, they occupied a central position in perpetuating the parents’ ideals. For the Yoruba, “*akukubi sanse radarada*” (it is better not to give birth to a child than to give birth to one who is not trained or modest). Also they believe that “*eko ile kii se ise obi omo nikan, ise gbogbo molebi ni, sugbon eleru ni i gbe e nibi ti o gbe wuwo*”. (The training of the child is not just the duty of the parents but a joint effort of the entire family, however, much is still expected from the parents). It is also said that, “*itiju ati egan ni fun obi omo ti a bi ti a ko to. Sugbon lara omo ti a ko ti ko gba ni abuku wa*” (shame and reproach is the portion of the parents who did not train their child, but rejection is the lot of a child who did not accept training). There is ‘*a bi i ko*’ (untrained child) and ‘*a ko o gba*’ (a child who refused to accept training).

At the same time, children are expected to respect their parents and honour them in all respects. They are to take good care of aged parents and give them befitting burial after their death. Honouring parents attracts great blessings and children with good character are always a source of pride to parents. Though the Yoruba do not respect the views of children in most cases (*oro omode o se tele*), they are quick to recognize a promising child (*omo to ba ma je asamu, kekere lo ti ma a jenu samusamu*), and they

make every attempt to protect such children both physically and spiritually and pay special attention to their upbringing. Parental blessing is a very significant practice among the Yoruba. Aged parents take time to pronounce blessings on children who take good care of them and behave well. This is done from time to time but sometime when it is obvious they are about dying like Jacob in the Bible. It is quite believed that parental blessing is very efficacious and goes a long way in making one successful.

Implication For The Church

Mark 10:13-16 must be seen in light of Mark 9:33-37 and both of these references to a child are built not primarily on assumed characteristics of children but rather on their social status in the first-century world. Children shared the social status of the poor, the hungry and the suffering, whom Jesus called “blessed” in the Beatitudes. Children’s vulnerability and powerlessness seem to lie at the heart of Jesus’ extension of the Kingdom of God to them. One distinctive of children is their universality; not every one is poor, a woman, or black, but every person either was or is a child [20]. The idea of ‘child’ is associated with growth and development, and therefore with hope. Jesus puts them forth as models of entering the Kingdom of God though there is nowhere in Jewish literature where children are put forward as models for adults. The key to entering the Kingdom of God is a matter of lowly status corresponding to the child’s. Throughout his ministry Jesus accepts a lowly status and deliberately acts with humility. Children are in a real sense God’ language in and through which he reveals his true nature and therefore the nature of his kingdom [21]. We enter God’s kingdom by faith, like little children helpless, unable to save ourselves, totally dependent on the mercy and grace of God. Jesus calls all to enter the sphere of the vulnerable child (the one often exploited by adults) and discover the Kingdom as an experience of God’s graciousness for the weak and vulnerable. Jesus’ speech and action in Mark 10:13-16 are especially challenging in light of the plight of many children today in our society and around the world; this often involves parental violence against a child within the secrecy of the family circle, patterns of domination that are maintained and psychically enforced, and exploitation of children because of their vulnerability and dependence on adults. The discovery of the child as a person, with certain inalienable rights,

has been a long, tragically slow process, and in many places has scarcely begun[22]. Jesus did not allow the less recognition given to children to overshadow his sense of judgement. He did not agree with his disciples that children should not have been brought to him in the open. All that the Evangelists have left us to grapple with is Jesus’ open invitation to his disciples and all those who aspire to be members of his kingdom to strive to be like these ‘little ones’ [23].

CONCLUSION

Christians are expected to emulate Christ in giving loving attention, affection and recognition to children. They should not be pushed aside as nonentities, rather they are to be treated as individuals with potentials. We are to embrace and bless them and live exemplary life that they can emulate. Parents should be examples of Christian life and conduct, caring more for the salvation of their children than other things. It is the responsibility of parents to give their children the upbringing that prepares them for lives pleasing to God[24]. Parents are to encourage as well as correct, punish only intentional wrong doing , instruct with patience and dedicate their lives in love to their children. Both formal and informal training must be given to children to empower and equip them to face the challenges of life. Adults must learn from Jesus’ teaching, to emulate child-like characteristics of lowliness, trust, powerlessness and absolute dependence on the favour of God, in order to have peace here on earth and to have a place in the Kingdom of God.

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