

# The child in the Gospel of Mark

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## Sumario

Este estudio analiza la actitud de Jesús hacia los niños en el Evangelio de Marcos. Empleando el método histórico-crítico, se analizan los pasajes en los cuales Jesús acoge a los niños (Mc 9,33-37; 10,13-16), con el fin de reconstruir el nivel pre-marcano que se halle más cerca de las palabras reales de Jesús, conocer mejor la actitud que Jesús adopta respecto a los niños (Mc 5,21-43; 7,24-30; 9,14-29) y saber qué es lo que Marcos ha añadido a la tradición de Jesús.

**Palabras clave:** Niños, Jesús, Método Histórico-Crítico, Evangelio de Marcos, Nuevo Testamento, Reino de Dios, Discipulado.

## Abstract

### The child in the Gospel of Mark

This study seeks to isolate Jesus' attitude to the child and the way Mark preserves or changes Jesus' perspective to suit his community. Using the Historical-Critical Method, the pericopae where Jesus interacts with children (Mk 9:33-37; 10:13-16) are analyzed to reconstruct a possible pre-Markan stratum, which may be closer to the real words of Jesus. Doing this hopefully exposes Jesus' own attitude to children, which is also seen in his other interactions with children (Mk 5:21-43; 7:24-

30; 9:14-29), and a comparison can be made with the attitude behind Mark's additions to the Jesus tradition.

**Keywords:** Children, Jesus, Historical-Critical Method, Gospel of Mark, New Testament, Kingdom of God, Discipleship.

## Introduction

In the Synoptic Gospels, children are mentioned with a certain frequency, either denoting real children or a metaphorical use of the image to denote something else, or an attitude pertinent to real children. The vocabulary used reflects the way the evangelists portray children, and also the way Jesus himself values them.

In this paper, the occurrences where children are mentioned in these three Gospels shall be examined, highlighting the occasions where the reference is most relevant in helping to answer the first key question, namely, 'What was Jesus' attitude towards children?' To ask that question, it will be necessary to build up an understanding of what exactly it meant to be a 'child' in the world Jesus lived in.

In this earliest period, orality was the main mode of transmission of the Jesus tradition, and elements of orality need to be examined to help build up the picture of Jesus' attitudes and how they were transmitted and crystallised into the subsequent textual stage of the tradition. This involves sketching the setting in which, the two pericopes where Jesus interacts with the children are found, to show the context they are seen in, and the intent of the evangelist to show Jesus' motives and attitudes within his textual frame.

Subsequently, the texts where Jesus welcomes children (Mk 9:33-37, 10:13-16 par.) will be studied in greater detail. The aim of this is to get as close as possible to the attitude of Jesus to real children. Hopefully this will help to answer two key questions; firstly, 'what is Jesus' attitude to children?' and secondly, 'what does it mean to enter the Kingdom "like a child"?' Lastly, other passages in Mark where children are mentioned will be examined to assess the evaluation of children in these texts, and in particular to use these texts to gain a fuller picture of Jesus' attitude towards children.

## General Structure and Context of Mk 9:33-10:45

Both of Jesus' encounters with children appear when Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, after Peter's confession of faith, and between the second and third passion predictions (9:30-32; 10:32-34). We have to be aware of the difference in *Sitz-im-Leben* between the time of Jesus and the time Mark compiled the traditional material, adding his own emphasis to it. The apocalyptic elements, present in Mark's Gospel, especially on the way to Jerusalem, must not be overlooked. They represent not only Jesus' own journey to his passion and death, but also the perilous situation of the reader of Mark's Gospel in the face of persecution in 65-70 C.E.

In looking at the community of the reader of this Gospel, it will be necessary to look at 9:33-10:45 in the light of which issues Mark chooses to highlight and what they mean for the community he wrote for. Therefore, why does Mark write that Jesus admonished his disciples about greatness, using the child as an exemplar, unless the community (represented by the bickering disciples) was not being faithful to Jesus' command to accept the Kingdom 'as a child'? There was a clear conflict between personal honour (greatness) and the virtues extolled by Jesus. "The disciples see honour as identity, power as privilege, wealth as blessing, and security as salvation".<sup>1</sup> This is their point of departure, and they must rate their own status against Jesus' values, at the same time as not losing their honour.<sup>2</sup> They appear to fail in this attempt. We need to ask whether the disciples that are admonished should be seen as those with Jesus on his road to Jerusalem, or instead the leaders of the Markan community in 65-70 C.E. It is in this propensity for failure, but not irreconcilable failure, that marks out the disciples and allows them, despite their weakness and their inability to understand the purpose of Jesus, to continue to follow him.

In the section 9:33-10:45, Mark has related a series of Jesus' teachings about discipleship and relationships within the family. Mark has used both positive and negative elements: he exhorts the disciples to serve each other (9:35, 10:43-45) and to welcome Jesus and the Kingdom of God as a little child (9:36, 10:15), yet he warns the disciples about the consequences of scandalising the 'little ones' (9:42) and of not letting go of worldly possessions (10:23). These teachings are backed up by the curse for leading others astray (9:43-47) and the blessing of the child (10:16). We observe that, starting with 9:33-37, Jesus discusses

<sup>1</sup> D. M. RHOADS, J. DEWEY & D. MICHIE, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis 1999<sup>2</sup>), 126.

<sup>2</sup> B. J. MALINA, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in a Mediterranean Perspective*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis 2001), 134.

true greatness, (9:38-41), discipleship using the name of Jesus, and a salutary warning for failing to follow the way of Jesus (9:42-50).<sup>3</sup>

Mark used the traditions inherited about Jesus in his work, welding existing material into a coherent account with a theological perspective to suit his first readers. It is necessary to ask about the provenance of Mark's material, although this is very much at the hypothetical level. The pre-canonical Synoptic tradition<sup>4</sup> was primarily oral, while the Synoptic tradition after Mark became less and less so. To get from Mark to Jesus, we need to be aware of the dynamics of the oral transmission of Jesus' teaching. We must also be aware that "In lot only is it *not* possible to recover the pure or original oral form amidst the ebbing and flowing of oral tides, but the very concept of "original form" contradicts the facts of oral life."<sup>5</sup> Mark has been able to redirect the various currents of orality into one coherent story, with his own theological flavour.

Birger Gerhardsson sees it as likely in the early Church that the λόγος κυρίου took the place of oral Torah, a tradition similar to the παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων of the Rabbis. In this way, even as early as Mark, the sayings and actions of Jesus were being transmitted as a type of oral *Haggadah*, which underlined the doctrine and authority of Jesus. He suggests that this is particularly notable in Mk 9:33-50, and 10:1-45, the section of his Gospel with the greatest concentration of teaching.<sup>6</sup> The authority of the *logoi* "rests on the assumption that the teacher is present in the word which he has spoken".<sup>7</sup> Mark has grouped together various teachings to make a coherent whole, focusing on elements that were important for the Early Church.

James Dunn highlights the oral tradition that undergirds this pericope. In all three parallels, the constants are the same; the disciples discuss greatness, Jesus rebukes them and uses the example of a

<sup>3</sup> Some authors, such as H. Fledderman and U. von Wahlde, suggest that Mk 9:33-50 is a later Markan construction, using traditional material found elsewhere, and linking them together with keywords, and is a clear indication of his own style; H. FLEDDERMANN, *The Discipleship Discourse* (Mark 9:33-50), *CBQ* 43 (1981), 57-75; U. C. VON WAHLDE, *Mark 9:33-50: Discipleship: the Authority that Serves*, *BZ* 29 (1985), 49-67.

<sup>4</sup> A caveat is necessary here: it may not be possible to talk of a tradition, rather of a variety of traditions. Due to the oral nature of Jesus' teaching, there is no reason to suppose that each saying was uttered only once by Jesus, and was remembered in the same way by his hearers. Therefore, each performance of the same basic teaching is equally original and valid, yet the form may well differ significantly. "This simultaneity of multiple original speech acts suggests a principle entirely different from, indeed contrary to the notion of the one, original *ipsissimum verbum*." W. H. KELBER, *The Generative Force of Memory: Early Christian Traditions as Process of Remembering*, *BTB* 36 (2006), 15-22, here 17.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. KELBER, *Mark as Oral Tradition: Semeia* 16 (1979), 7-55, here 33.

<sup>6</sup> B. GERHARDSSON, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, *ASNU* 22 (Uppsala 1961), 194 ff.

<sup>7</sup> H. KOESTER, *GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity*, in J. M. ROBINSON & H. KOESTER, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, Fortress Press (Philadelphia 1971), 114-157, here 138-139.



child to support his position, and there is a logion, which acts as the climax of the story. The logion is the best-preserved part of the story from the perspective of literary dependence. Yet the distinctiveness of the way Matthew and Luke portray this event is as telling as the amount they have copied from Mark, illustrating that “the degree of verbal interdependence tells against literary interdependence, whereas the mix of constancy and flexibility indicates an oral mode of performance”.<sup>8</sup> As such, it will be necessary to peel away the layers of Markan redaction and narrative constructs that would turn it into the readable story we have available to us in order to access more clearly the Jesus that speaks to us as much between the lines as in them.

To do this, we can use some of the criteria outlined by J. P. Meier: the criteria of embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple attestation and coherence.<sup>9</sup> They should not be used in isolation, but they complement each other and attempt to paint a picture of Jesus that is less likely to be the result of theologising or softening the impact of his words and actions. Of all of these, the criterion of discontinuity seems most useful for this passage, since it is the novelty and radical nature of Jesus’ teaching that is the most significant feature, and no author would likely have thought it up, since Jesus’ evaluation of children clearly cuts across the grain of the society he lived in. We can also apply one of Meier’s secondary criteria, that of the Palestinian environment (along with the *caveat* he points out),<sup>10</sup> since we are looking at a new social order, and the attitudes of Jesus hardly tie in well with the prevailing system.

Also, we can make use of the criteria set out in a recent reconstruction of the pre-Markan Passion Narrative. In it, Santiago Guijarro sets out five criteria for separating the traditional material from the Markan redactional layer. Four of these will be useful here: 1) vocabulary and style proper to Mark; 2) theological themes proper to Mark; 3) internal tensions or incoherencies; and 4) units with insufficient connection with the context.<sup>11</sup>

Do these children represent real children or the poor and humble, the weakest members of the Christian community, or Christian missionaries at the time of the composition of Mark’s Gospel? Certainly, the evaluation of children was considered to be relatively low in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity, and the study of these attitudes will hopefully lead us towards real children, rather

<sup>8</sup> J. D. G. DUNN, *Jesus in Oral Memory: the Initial Stages of the Jesus Tradition*, in D. DONNELLY (ED.), *Jesus: A Colloquium in the Holy Land*, Continuum International (New York 2001), 84-145, here 104.

<sup>9</sup> J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, I: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, ABRL, Doubleday (New York 1991), 168-177.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> S. GUIJARRO OPORTO, *El Relato Pre-marciano de la Pasión y la Historia del cristianismo Naciente*, *Salmant.* 50 (2003), 345-388, here 356-7.

than any metaphorical interpretation. Ernest Best argues that the use of the verb ἐναγκαλίζομαι (9:36, 10:16) has a more physical intent, and therefore that it does indeed refer to real children.<sup>12</sup> The child, whilst representing a real child, does not appear to be the true focal point of Jesus' teaching; rather it is used to highlight the true and radical attitude to discipleship, and true greatness, for the instruction and edification of the disciples. The *paidion* symbol is brought in to exemplify this revolution.<sup>13</sup> Heinrich Zimmerman suggests that this is a type of parabolic gesture: a type of *Mashal*, where Jesus deliberately uses an image or an event to make a comparison. He uses children in this role to compare them with the disciples.<sup>14</sup>

The pericope where Jesus welcomes the children (9:36-37) comes after that of the healing of the epileptic boy, (9:14-29), with the second prediction of his Passion, (9:30-32), and the question as to, which of the apostles was the greatest (9:33-35). This presents us with a dynamism leading to our text, since Jesus has just had dealings with a child, and then had had significant problems with his disciples. In the larger context, the passion predictions do not just lead the reader towards Jerusalem and a greater tension in the text, but this is where the stakes become increasingly higher, not only for Jesus, but also for his disciples.

It is into this milieu that the child is introduced, as the opposite to the disciples, and as the antidote to their fear and divisiveness. This pericope also appears to be the climax of a section; as in 9:38 the text seems to start a new theme after a natural pause. Mark appears to highlight the incident with the child as a central point of the message of Jesus, showing that the correct attitude to welcome Jesus, and through Him the Father, is in the way a child would. Mark does not explicitly outline the behaviour of the child, nor does he call him by name, nor does he give him any personal status, yet he is presented as an example to emulate. He is the opposite of the one who is frightened, argumentative, taciturn and divisive, as the disciples have just been seen to be. This is the 'attitude' that makes him great in the Kingdom of God.

<sup>12</sup> E. BEST, *Following Jesus*, Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, JSNT Sup 4, JSOT Press (Sheffield 1981), 79. See also p81-2, where Best argues for the Markan authorship of 9:38-41, noting the connection between welcoming a child and causing it to stumble. If both had been metaphorical rather than real children why would the child in v36 be παιδίον, and that of v42 μικρός? Can we assume that the former is a real child and the latter is a more general Christian?

<sup>13</sup> J. I. H. McDONALD, *Mark 9:33-50. Catechetics in Mark's Gospel*, JSNT 2 (1978), 171-177, here 172.

<sup>14</sup> H. ZIMMERMANN, *Los Métodos Histórico-Críticos en el Nuevo Testamento*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (Madrid 1969), 155-157

## Mark 9:33-37

With the amount of redactional activity, a pre-Markan level of this text will be very difficult to reconstruct. Joachim Gnilka believes this to be a duplication of 10:13-16, and therefore redactional. He says that Mark has stitched together two independent logia and made this composite apothegm.<sup>15</sup> There are enough Markan structures<sup>16</sup> and 'key-words'<sup>17</sup> to think that this may be a redaction, probably of the apothegm in 10:13-16, the other time when Jesus blesses the children. "There are clear signs of his hand in vv.33f: the reference to Capernaum is part of his artificial geography of the journey to Jerusalem, the house motif is Markan, 'on the way' develops his journey motif"<sup>18</sup> and *διαλογίζομαι* is typically a Markan vocabulary.<sup>19</sup> Mark sets the scene in Capernaum, in an introductory narrative chreia, he situates Jesus and the disciples (He calls them 'δώδεκα', another of Mark's favourites) in a house<sup>20</sup> and manages to locate a child (seemingly out of thin air). If this passage is a conglomerate, containing a form of Mark 10:15, then it is that passage and its consequences which reflect the attitude of Jesus more than 9:33-37, which also do so, but through a thicker Markan lens. Notably, much of this Markan reworking is in the narrative framing at the beginning and end of the pericope. It is much more difficult to detect his hand further into the body of the apothegm itself, since here there is a mix of traditional and Markan material. J. D. Crossan warns that some apothegms that contain an apparent chreia at their core may never have existed as the bare chreia, and that it is unwise to jump to unpeeling the apothegm too hastily.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> J. GNILKA, *El Evangelio Segun San Marcos*, II, Mc 8,27-16,20, Sigueme (Salamanca 1997<sup>3</sup>), 63-4.

<sup>16</sup> The situation, *Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς Καφαρναούμ. καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ γενόμενος* is very Markan in style, as is the description of the disciples as the 'twelve', and allusions to 10:43-44, when the sons of Zebedee ask about greatness. The verbs, *ἐπρωτάως* and *σιωπῶ* are typically Markan. Even the question and response style looks like a Markan addition.

<sup>17</sup> The presence of 'key-words' to tie together phrases or which betray a particular author is important in reconstructing the text and identifying the constituent parts. Neirynck cites many examples of 'key-words' in Mk 9:33-50 par. F. NEIRYNCK, *La Tradición de los Dichos de Jesús: Estudio Basado en Marcos 9,33-50. Concilium* 20 (1966), 420-433, here 433. Best also suggests that Mark uses certain 'catch-words' such as *ὄνομα* (9:37,38,39,41), *δέχομαι* (9:36,37), *παιδίον*, *μικρός* (9:36,37,42) which hold the section together. Best, *Following Jesus*, 75, 90 n2. See also R. BULTMANN, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Blackwell (Oxford 1963), 149.

<sup>18</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 76, also J. GNILKA, *Marcos II*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Sterling suggests that *διαλογίζομαι* is also Marcan, basing it on similar use in 2:6-8; 8:16-17. G. E. STERLING, *Jesus as Exorcist: an analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a. CBQ* 55 (1993), 467-93, here 481-482.

<sup>20</sup> Mark frequently depicts Jesus retiring indoors with his disciples to teach them: see also 7:17, 9:28, 10:10.

<sup>21</sup> J. D. CROSSAN, *Kingdom and Children: A Study in the Aphoristic Tradition, Semeia* 29 (1983), 75-95, here 81; See also R. BULTMANN, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Blackwell (Oxford 1963), 47.

David Wenham argues that the idea behind the dispute about greatness and Jesus' saying in 9:33-37 is much more likely to be Pre-Markan material than a Markan addition, since minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark omit Mk 9:35, both omit Mark's ἐναγκαλισάμενος αὐτό, and they both tidy up ὅς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται of Mk 9:37 making their versions more similar to each other than either is to Mark.<sup>22</sup>

Lou Silberman sees this as a conglomerate of three similar chreiae, 9:33-35, 36-37, 38-42. In the first, the Sage overhears a dispute among his disciples and uses this as an opportunity to teach them about 'leastness'. In the second, the Sage places a child among them and uses this to propose 'leastness' as the true way of recognising greatness. In the third, the Sage sees his disciples admonishing an outsider, and he admonishes them for excluding one who has no status, i.e., one who is another of the 'least'. "When one attends to these three units in their setting in the text, one recognises how they have 'achieved narrative unity'... Once they are juxtaposed, they, like the dots of colour in a pointillist painting, borrow meaning from each other, and a new unit, admonishing a Christian community about social pretensions, distinctions and exclusions emerges."<sup>23</sup> Silberman thinks that the first chreia is 'embedded' here, (because of the narrative in 9:30-32?) and that vv. 36-37 have been drawn here by the contrast of greatness and 'leastness' in the community.

There is a central core, which would perhaps correspond to Silberman's second chreia, but what complicates a reconstruction is that all the evangelists add something different. Vernon Robbins tries to reconstruct a condensed chreia,<sup>24</sup> but he has the disciples asking Jesus about greatness, to which Jesus responds by taking a child by his side. The problem there is that only in Matthew did the disciples ask Jesus; in Mark they were silent, and Jesus asked them what they were discussing. This is emblematic of this text; there is so much diversity. Omitting the reference to the name of Jesus as a Markan catchword,<sup>25</sup> and any introductions, settings, and the Markan embrace, we are left with a very hypothetical skeleton of a mixed action/verbal chreia about greatness, and about receiving Jesus:

<sup>22</sup> D. WENHAM, *A Note on Mark 9:33-42/Matt. 18:1-6/Luke 9:46-50*, JSNT 14 (1982), 113-118, here 113. Also, F. NEYRINCK, *The Minor Agreements in a Horizontal-line Synopsis*, Leuven University Press (Leuven 1991), 56.

<sup>23</sup> L. H. SILBERMAN, *Schoolboys and Storytellers: Some Comments on Aphorisms and Chreiae*, *Semeia* 29 (1983), 109-115, here 112.

<sup>24</sup> V. K. ROBBINS, *Pronouncement Stories and Jesus' Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach*, *Semeia* 29 (1983), 43-74, here 63.

<sup>25</sup> S. LÉGASSE, *Jésus et L'enfant : Enfants, Petits, et Simples dans la Tradition Synoptique*, Lecoffre (Paris 1969), 18.

<sup>36</sup>καὶ λαβὼν παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς <sup>37</sup>ὅς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται, ἐμὲ δέχεται.<sup>26</sup>

Although, strictly speaking, the passage about the children does not occupy all these verses, the introduction to the scene is very important in assessing Jesus' attitudes to children, to greatness, and to his disciples. As certain authors have indicated, Mark 9:33-37 looks like a redaction of earlier sayings, joined together to show just what constitutes the correct way of following Jesus. There are certain traits that betray the redactional nature of this passage. Bultmann suggests that one marker of the secondary sayings is if Jesus himself provides the initiative.<sup>27</sup> We can see here that Jesus calls the disciples and teaches them. In 10:13 it is the people who, bringing the children to Jesus, initiate the action, prompting a response from Jesus.

There is an antithesis between the attitudes of the disciples and that of the child: the disciples are frightened by Jesus telling them a second time that he is going to suffer, (and therefore it is not something they can just brush aside as if they had misheard it first time round (8:31-32)), but the child is not described as showing any emotion in his moment in the limelight; the disciples are secretive, keeping silent, οἱ δὲ ἐσιώπων, whereas this is not said about the child, and it is the opposite attitude to that of Jesus himself, who spoke plainly, παρρησίᾳ about his passion the first time (8:32). There is a vicious circle of fear and lack of understanding; each feeds off the other.<sup>28</sup> They are fearful because of the Passion prediction, which preceded this saying, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι (9:32) and of Jesus, in case he rebuked them again, but in contrast the child shows no fear. He becomes a unifying focal point with Jesus at the centre of the group.

Jesus sat down, assuming the posture of the teacher,<sup>29</sup> and called his disciples to him. παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ is taken by both Matthew and Luke (and Luke also uses the verb λαμβάνω, which he gets from Mark). Ἐναγκαλιζάμενος is a verb only Mark uses, leading some commentators to conjecture that Mark composed the whole of v.36, the impulse to do so coming from 10:13-16. The sudden appearance of the child, unprepared for in v.35 and the clumsiness of ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων (9:37) may confirm this.<sup>30</sup> "Matthew and Luke modify the phrase to remove its clumsiness. Whatever the phrase means it does not mean 'an adult

<sup>26</sup> The words in bold are the same in all three gospels, the underlined words are shared between Mark and Matthew, and those in italics are shared by Mark and Luke. Those in normal script are based only on Mark.

<sup>27</sup> BULTMANN, 66.

<sup>28</sup> "Their fear for their well-being prevents them from understanding, and their inability to understand leaves them frightened". RHOADS ET ALII, 125.

<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, Jesus is described as sitting down to teach, as the preferred posture of the Rabbi (cf 4:1), but this is not a universal practice in Mark (he teaches without sitting down in 2:13, 6:34, 8:31, 10:1).

<sup>30</sup> BEST, *Following Jesus*, 78.

who is like a child'; it is children themselves who are intended".<sup>31</sup> However, following on directly from Jesus' command that the greatest should be the servant of all, Matthew Black notes that the Aramaic ܡܠܝܬܐ, could signify either 'child' or 'servant'. This not only outlines the attitude of Jesus towards children (9:37), but also towards the disciples, as servants of all (9:35).<sup>32</sup> ܡܠܝܬܐ can also have this double meaning, and is sometimes rendered in the LXX as δίακονος, (cf. Esth 2:2; 6:3, 5).<sup>33</sup> Thus the attitude of the disciples towards service lends itself to the childlike attitude.

If we agree with Neirynck, we would see that this passage is composed of units linked by keywords, such that "the editorial history of this 'discourse' cannot go further back than Mark, who collated a certain number of isolated sayings of Jesus".<sup>34</sup> As an example, we can see the theme of the name of Jesus running through 9:37-41, with the fourfold use of this term, in v37, ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, v38, ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, v39, ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, and v41, culminating in ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἔστε. The link between ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξεται and οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσῃ τὸν μισθὸν αὐτοῦ links the reception of children with the reward that Jesus is able to give. Thus, four sayings about doing things 'in the name of' Jesus could be linked, even if they were originally independent, either by Mark, or in the pre-Markan stage.

Mark 9:37 also displays significant similarities with Q10:16 (Ὁ δεχόμενος ἡμᾶς ἐμὲ δέχεται, ἰκαίῃ ὁ ἐμὲ δεχόμενος δέχεται τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με).<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps unlikely that Mark drew on Q, but an alternative suggestion is that they have both tapped into a common oral tradition, probably at different stages in the crystallisation of the tradition or from different localities or communities.<sup>36</sup>

Jesus' lifestyle is as important to us as his words in our appreciation of his attitudes, and this is as likely to have made an impression on his disciples as what he actually said. Jesus stood the child in the midst of them, to show him to them. He then takes the child in his arms,<sup>37</sup> the warmest way of welcoming the child, identifying himself with the child, a representative of the least important in society,<sup>38</sup> using a verb that only Mark employs, ἐναῖ

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, n25.

<sup>32</sup> M. BLACK, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, Clarendon Press (Oxford 1954<sup>2</sup>), 266-267. However, Le Déaut and other authors note that there is no observed example of this word-play, and that *ܡܠܝܬܐ* is not normally translated as δίακονος. See R. LE DÉAUT, *Le Substrat Araméen des Évangiles: Scolies en Marge de l'Aramaic Approach de Matthew Black*, *Bib.* 49 (1968) 388-399, here 393; and FLEDDERMANN, 64, n35.

<sup>33</sup> C. A. EVANS, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34B, Thomas Nelson (Nashville 2001), 61.

<sup>34</sup> "Y así la historia de la edición de este "discurso" no puede ir más lejos de Marcos, que reunió cierto número de dichos aislados de Jesús", NEIRYNCK, *Tradición*, 426.

<sup>35</sup> Fleddermann says that 'Mark has adapted the Q saying to the new context that he has created'. He is trying to show that the child is presented in Jesus' name. Reception of a child in Jesus' name is to receive Jesus in faith, and by extension, to receive the Father. This is contrasted with the status-seeking attitude of the disciples. FLEDDERMANN, 62-64.

<sup>36</sup> This also helps to explain why the parallel apothegm in Matthew is found, not with the children in 18:1-5, but at 10:40, in conjunction with another idea entirely, and far from where Mark places his older version of the same saying.

<sup>37</sup> For those that suggest that Jesus' reception of the child exemplifies what he has just said to the disciples about being last of all and servant of all, the hug takes us beyond and

καλίζομαι. Mark only uses this verb twice, the other time being in 10:16, in his other encounter with a child as an example to the apostles. Jesus has many opportunities to embrace people, but he does not.

In this pericope Mark uses the verb δέχομαι four times in 9:37, linking the children to him, and himself to the Father. He also uses this verb in 10:15. It becomes a strong mark of discipleship to welcome children. He does not just welcome this child, τοῦτο τὸ παιδίον, or ἐν παιδίον, rather ὃς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίον. His scope is wider than that; all children are exemplars, and all who receive the Kingdom like a child will enter it.<sup>39</sup> Of the six times Mark uses this verb, five are in connection with children. Therefore it is necessary to see what the verb really means. Effectively, it relates to hospitality, to receiving guests into the house. This was an important aspect of social living in the time of Jesus, and still should be today. Ethical Christian practice must have hospitality, especially to the needy, as one of its central pillars, and Jesus makes this clear, linking hospitality to acceptance of the Kingdom, and that welcoming Him constitutes welcoming the Father. Mark also links the welcoming with service.<sup>40</sup> Two verses previously Jesus has said, εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος (9:35), clearly putting διάκονος and δέχομαι in the same context. Disciples are to be both servants and hospitable people, especially to the least, ἔσχατος, in society. If they are so, the Father will reward them.

The idea of welcoming should perhaps be read in the light of Jesus as the agent of God. To quote a later rabbinic saying: “a man’s agent is like himself”.<sup>41</sup> “Such authorised representatives or proxies were to be received and treated like the person they represented”.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, both parts of v37 take this perspective. Those welcoming Jesus have to welcome his agent, namely the child; and those who wish to welcome God must welcome his agent, Jesus, and therefore, by extension, they too must welcome the child. When Jesus says this, he was drawing on this Semitic custom of hospitality.<sup>43</sup> In this attitude of welcoming, absent from all the healing miracles, the choosing of his companions and all the rest of Jesus’ activity, even when he has compassion on the crowd (6:34), this idea of physical contact is not present.

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away from that interpretation; he is making himself an example of being last of all and servant of all by receiving and hugging the child. The servant occupies the last position in society, behind even the child, and Jesus makes himself into a servant, and asks the disciples to do likewise. R. H. GUNDRY, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids 1993), 519.

<sup>38</sup> P. ACHTEMEIER, *An Exposition of Mark 9:37-50*, Int 30 (1976), 178-82, here 182.

<sup>39</sup> R. T. FRANCE, *The Gospel of Mark*: NIGTC, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids 2002), 374.

<sup>40</sup> D. O. VIA, *The Ethics of Mark’s Gospel in the Middle of Time*, Fortress Press (Philadelphia 1985), 83-88.

<sup>41</sup> b. Ket. 99b.

<sup>42</sup> W. A. STRANGE, *Children in the Early Church*: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church, Wipf & Stock (Eugene 2004<sup>2</sup>), 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.



When Jesus interacts with the rich man, he looks on him and loves him, ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτόν (10:21), but there is no hug: this is reserved for the children, not once but twice.

Mark uses negative terminology in his appraisal of welcoming. The negative style, “whoever does *not* welcome the Kingdom like a child will *not* enter it, demands the involvement of the addressee in a way the positive form of the paradigm cannot match”.<sup>44</sup> It is as much a warning on the conduct of the disciples as the punishments in 9:42 ff. will be. In 9:42 Mark points out the punishment for those who scandalise ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων, and it is a severe admonition indeed. It is unlikely that Jesus is still talking about real children any more, but he has moved on to the metaphorical level of those with a simple, childlike faith,<sup>45</sup> since he has already used the comparison, and here he does not use a word for children, but μικρός, which is more generic. This is the practical extension of the lesson Jesus was teaching the disciples when he welcomed the children, and an aid to knowing what aspect of childlikeness he was accentuating. The obverse of, those who cause one of these little ones to stumble, and do not welcome the children of the Kingdom, are that given a very severe punishment indeed, which illustrates very clearly the importance of this saying of Jesus. Their fate, *it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea*, (Mk 9:42) is not dissimilar in tone to the saying about Judas as the punishment for his betrayal: *It would have been better for that man if he had not been born* (Mk 14:21).

## Mark 10:13-16

Certain authors believe that this saying of Jesus closely reflects a pre-Markan saying, although how close to the original saying is open to question. Dibelius suggests that this paradigm is ‘in nearly its original authentic condition’<sup>46</sup> and Gnilya refers to this pericope as the ‘original’.<sup>47</sup> Bultmann suggests that the logion in v15 was originally an independent dominical saying around which the rest of the apothegm has been constructed.<sup>48</sup> This seems unlikely. It is more likely that there were two independent sayings, which Mark has joined. Certainly the

<sup>44</sup> D. PATTE, *Jesus’ Pronouncement about Entering the Kingdom Like a Child: A Structural Exegesis*, *Semeia* 29 (1983), 3-42, here 11.

<sup>45</sup> Keph. I 189, 6-19; 201, 30 interprets ‘the little ones who believe’ as catechumens, BAGD 521.

<sup>46</sup> M. DIBELIUS, *From Tradition to Gospel*, Ivor Nicholson & Watson (London 1934), 43.

<sup>47</sup> GNILKA, 92.

<sup>48</sup> BULTMANN, 32. Also, Bultmann suggests that there is no reason to suppose that this incident had to have taken place. As an example of a Rabbinic story, the focus is not so much on historical accuracy but on teaching by use of metaphorical representations of life. *Ibid.*, 57.



action of Jesus works well without v15 inserted, giving us a “straight-forward incident in which children are brought to Jesus so that he may touch them”.<sup>49</sup> Ulrich Luz agrees with this: “Mark 10:15 shows no evidence of editorial changes and it is possible that Mark found the logion in its present form and inserted it into his pericope about blessing the children”.<sup>50</sup>

The argument suggesting that 10:15 does not fit there can be supported by the switch from the plural to the singular *παιδίον*, and from the concrete flavour of the saying at the time of Jesus, which flows from v14 to v16, into a more theological statement about discipleship addressed to the disciples rather than about real children.<sup>51</sup> Also, Matthew has split the unit, putting his parallel for Mk 10:15 in his other pericope on children, at 18:3, rather than after 19:14 as we would expect if v15 was original.<sup>52</sup> Luke does not include 10:16 in his version because he already has 10:15; putting both would be superfluous.<sup>53</sup> What is more, the use of the theme of welcoming, *δέχομαι*, which appears in other parts of Mark’s Gospel, especially in 9:36-37, is a Markan catchword. This would leave Mk 10:13,14,16 as the earliest form:<sup>54</sup>

<sup>13</sup> προσέφερον αὐτῷ παιδιά ἵνα αὐτῶν ἅψηται· οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐπετίμησαν αὐτοῖς. <sup>14</sup> δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἄφετε τὰ παιδιά ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>16</sup> καὶ τιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ’ αὐτά·

However, wherever it belongs, we cannot doubt the genuineness of the saying in Mk 10:15, nor can we reasonably doubt Jesus’ actions.<sup>55</sup> Thus if the original pericope reflected Jesus’ attitude to children, this has almost disappeared through the additions made to it and the context with which it has been provided.<sup>56</sup> This begs the question: as early as Mark’s redaction of the traditional material, are we seeing a dilution of Jesus’ sayings, by the deliberate welding together of different apothegms and chreiae so as to change the flavour of the text?<sup>57</sup>

<sup>49</sup> BEST, *Following Jesus*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> U. LUZ, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia, Fortress Press (Minneapolis 2001), 426.

<sup>51</sup> Best suggests that Mk 10:15 is not only an insertion, but that it changes the flavour of the whole apothegm, becoming its climax, and taking the attention away from the real-life event of Jesus and a child. E. BEST, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark*, T&T Clark (Edinburgh 1986), 91.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> GUNDRY, 548.

<sup>54</sup> We may also be able to discard 14c from the original chreia, since it goes with v15, and if that is so, it is in itself a maxim, inserted later. “It is a typical Markan γάρ clause, probably the last piece of the apothegm”. BEST, *Following Jesus*, 106-7. However, it is in the plural, like the rest, whereas v15 is singular; and there are other reasons for rejecting v15, mentioned above, that do not apply to v14c. Therefore it has been left in. See LÉGASSE, 39.

<sup>55</sup> V. TAYLOR, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, MacMillan (London 1952), 424.

<sup>56</sup> BEST, *Disciples*, 94.

<sup>57</sup> The addition of v15 is what enables a segment of the story about Jesus, bringing children to him, to have a consequence that speaks to any situation, childlikeness as an image of discipleship. VIA, 128-9.

Robbins uses analysis informed by the rhetorical methods of the time,<sup>58</sup> which, unsurprisingly, reveals a very similar outcome to the analysis of the similarities and differences between the three Synoptists' texts. If this part of Mk 10:13,14,16 is isolated, not only does it yield significant similarity between the texts, but it also makes sense and fits into the rhetorical scheme of Robbins' own reconstruction.<sup>59</sup> He also notes the importance of knowing the significance of Jesus' actions in order to understand the development of the saying. Clearly the saying and the action go hand in hand, so the tradition behind the action is as important as the tradition behind the saying. "The only clue lies in the comment that the goal was for Jesus to lay his hands on them",<sup>60</sup> either for healing or for blessing.

It is worth noting that this pericope follows Jesus' instruction on divorce. By placing these two texts so close to each other, Mark emphasises the role of the family: he exalts the value of marriage and then he alludes to the blessing that children are, within the marriage. The blessing of children is the antidote to the scandal of divorce.

Contrasting Mk 10:13-16 with 9:36-37, we see προσέφερον αὐτῷ παιδίᾱ ἵνα αὐτῶν ἄψηται. In 9:36, Jesus manages to pick a child that was already there; here people seek out Jesus. John Carroll suggests that this is significant inasmuch as Jesus has earned a reputation as one who is able to heal children (after all, reading Mark as a unit we have already encountered three healings involving children, Mk 5:21-24, 35-43; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). When Mark lays such emphasis on Jesus' reputation and identity, it would be entirely reasonable that the people see him as a 'friend of children'.<sup>61</sup> They see him as a healer, and they trust him to give their children a special touch. Thus, the use of the conative προσέφερον 'they were trying to bring' is the most likely (especially as the disciples then refused them). Yet Jesus takes this opportunity to go further, using them as exemplars of the Kingdom. He does not just touch them; rather, he embraces them and blesses them.

Looking now at the Markan redaction, what does it mean to receive the Kingdom of God ὡς παιδίον? With Schilling, we could attach the child to the concept of Kingdom, suggesting that the Kingdom is like a child. Therefore, the disciples are to receive the Kingdom as Jesus receives the child, in a spontaneous way and with instinctive love.<sup>62</sup> However, if the Kingdom is like a child, we must recognise the low sta-

<sup>58</sup> Robbins uses Theon's *Progymnasmata* to isolate the putative original chreia underlying Mark's text in 10:13-16. Using the same rules of rhetoric Theon used with his students, Robbins reconstructs a possible original situation and saying of Jesus. ROBBINS, 48-53.

<sup>59</sup> Robbins' reconstruction is a bit looser, in a different form, but the essential attributes of a chreia are present both in his and here: both contain the presence of a key person, and the key statement and the basics of a setting. *Ibid.*, 49, 51-2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> J. T. CARROLL, *Children in the Bible*, Int. 55 (2001), 121-134, 127-8.

<sup>62</sup> F. A. SCHILLING, *What Means the Saying about Receiving the Kingdom as a Little Child* (τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον)? ET 77 (1965), 56-58, here 57.

tus of the child in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity. This would not be consonant of the way the Kingdom should be received.<sup>63</sup>

Does it mean that the follower of Jesus should receive the Kingdom 'as one would receive a child'? In support of this view, it should be recalled that *δέχομαι* means not only to receive, but to welcome, and is reflected in this way in 9:37. However, it depends on the original unity of vv14 and 15, which is in doubt.<sup>64</sup> The traditional characteristics of the child in the Mediterranean world are discussed elsewhere in this study, and Jesus will have been well aware of them. So which attributes is he pointing to?

Maybe we should ask this question another way, such as "How would a child receive the Kingdom of God?" This gives a different insight, and asks us to put ourselves in the child's shoes and see the attitude the child might have.<sup>65</sup> A child would probably approach the question without a predefined answer.<sup>66</sup> This openness allows the child to accept the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom is, and not with its own ideas of what the Kingdom should be for him or her. The Kingdom is transcendental and eschatological by nature, and comes freely, as pure gift from God, and to receive it as a child, it must be accepted as it is given.<sup>67</sup> That is a challenging proposal; if the adult wishes to be *ὡς παιδίον*, then he or she must abandon the present in order to take part in the future. He cannot do this without detaching himself from his current status. This is what Jesus requires of the disciple.<sup>68</sup>

Mark 10:15's theme of 'welcoming the Kingdom of Heaven' is a way of teaching that children must be valued as the pious Jew would value the Shema, placing it at the centre of his religious and ethical existence. "As soon as a boy could speak, his father would teach him the Shema, Torah and the sacred tongue. Otherwise it would be better if he had not come into the world".<sup>69</sup> The child receives the Kingdom in a similar way to how he learns the Torah from his father, dutifully, obe-

<sup>63</sup> BEST, *Disciples*, 95.

<sup>64</sup> J. I. H. McDONALD, *Receiving and Entering the Kingdom: A Study of Mk 10:15*. *Studia Evangelica* 6, Akademie-Verlag (Berlin 1973), 328-332, here 329.

<sup>65</sup> A list of possible traits of the child as found in earlier comments been drawn up by Dan Via. "Is it any or all of the following: humble and receptive, simple and natural; no subjective qualities, but objective littleness and helplessness which allows itself to be given a gift; obscure, trivial and unimportant; unromanticised trusting; neither knowing nor creating status; the practice of play and pleasure with some aggressiveness but no relations of dominance?", VIA, 129. To these traits of the child we could add from more recent works; "to forgo status and accept the lowest place, to be a little one", FRANCE, 374; "naturally dependent on others for food, clothing and other necessities", J. R. DONAHUE, & D. J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville 2002), 300.

<sup>66</sup> "The emphasis in this brief story falls on the children themselves, than on their virtues, real or imagined. The latter remain unidentified." J. R. EDWARDS, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids 2002), 307.

<sup>67</sup> DONAHUE, & HARRINGTON, 301.

<sup>68</sup> VIA, 130.

<sup>69</sup> Tosefta Hagigah 1.2.

diently and wholeheartedly.<sup>70</sup> Jesus puts the metaphor of the child in place of the practice of reciting the Shema.<sup>71</sup>

Children are clearly presented as models for entry into the Kingdom of God, which inverts the perception of children in the Ancient world. The idea is bold, since nowhere else do we see children as exemplars or models for adults. Certainly, some of their more endearing characteristics have been commented on by various classical authors, but never as models for adults to follow. A typical Jewish requirement would be to adhere to the works of the Law to be seen as upright in the eyes of the Lord, but how can children be models since they were not even expected to follow the Law, much less did they actually fulfil it.<sup>72</sup> It has been suggested that the children represent the presence of God in the midst of the people. Légasse mentions that the presence of God was still in Jerusalem after the exile to Babylon until the children were taken from the city.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the disciples can welcome the child and in so doing, welcome the presence of God among them, accepting that the child represents not just the earthly Jesus, but also the divine presence.

We see that Jesus had time for the children, in contrast with the disciples and the prevailing attitudes of the time. Mark 10:1-22 answers the question of the relationships of people within the church (marriage, children and possessions in that order), and provides a significant challenge to the prevailing ranking structure of society.

Jesus shows the other side of his feelings towards the disciples, after the disciples tried to prevent the people from bringing their children to Jesus. We see the verb ἐπιτιμάω quite often in Mark, Jesus rebuking unclean spirits, the disciples and even the wind, and people preventing Bartimaeus from approaching Jesus. However, Jesus' reaction to the disciples doing something wrong is not often as clear as it is here. True, he uses strong language to Peter when Peter took him aside to tell him off, ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ, (8:33). Yet here it is not just Jesus' words that are recorded, but also his reaction. Mark tells us that Jesus was indignant, ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἠγανάκτησεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς (10:14). Mark uses ἀγανακτέω on two other occasions, in 10:41 when the ten disciples became angry with James and John for requesting seats at His right and left, and in 14:4 when some people questioned the wisdom of wasting a jar of expensive ointment on Jesus. However, this is the only

<sup>70</sup> McDONALD, *Receiving*, 330.

<sup>71</sup> H. R. WEBER, *Jesus and the Children*: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching, John Knox Press (Atlanta 1979), 26.

<sup>72</sup> J. M. GUNDRY-VOLF, 'The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament,' in M. J. BUNGE, (ED.) *The Child in Christian Thought*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids 2001), 29-60, here 39.

<sup>73</sup> "Apprends combine les enfants sont chers à Dieu: le Sanhédrin est parti en exil, mais la *?ekinah* (Dieu présent) ne l'a pas accompagné; les classes sacerdotales sont parties en exil, mais la *?ekinah* ne les a pas suivis; mais lorsque les enfants ont pris le chemin d'exil, la *?ekinah* est partie avec eux" (cf. Midrash Lam. 1:6). LÉGASSE, 283.

time when this reaction of indignation is used about Jesus himself;<sup>74</sup> even when Jesus goes into the temple, drives out the merchants and overturns the moneychangers' tables (11:15), Mark does not record his anger, but just his words and actions.

Jesus does not just put his arms round the children, (ἐναγκαλισάμενος)<sup>75</sup> but he also touches them. All the other occasions in his Gospel where Mark uses the verb ἅπτω in the activity of Jesus it is with relation to a healing, that the power of Jesus can be transferred into the recipient with a touch. We see this in some of the healing stories involving children, but here Jesus' touch is not to heal; it is to bless. Van Aarde says that Jesus laying hands on the children echoes the gesture of the father in his action of welcoming a new child into the family, and symbolically affirms their status as welcome in the Christian community. He compares the practice of exposure (ἐκθέσις) with Jesus' acceptance of the child by putting out (ἐπιτίθημι) his hand to bless the child.<sup>76</sup>

The activity of blessing the children is given a special poignancy by the use of the verb κατευλόγω, which in the form with the prefix κατὰ is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament.<sup>77</sup> In the LXX we find this verb used only in the book of Tobit (10:14, where Tobit blesses Raguel, and 11:17 where he blesses Sara). The un-prefixed form is relatively common, although Mark uses it only five times, once in reference to blessing people as a quotation from the Psalms (11:9), once referring to the coming kingdom of David (11:10), and three times when blessing food (6:41, 8:7, 14:22). We can see that there is a greater intensity of blessing when Jesus blesses the children. Jesus does not bless anyone else in Mark's Gospel. He heals, he shows love and compassion, but nowhere else does the Markan Jesus put his hand out to bless people. Even in 1:41, when Jesus healed the leper, *moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him*. This is a healing, not a blessing, although Jesus is emotionally concerned with him.

<sup>74</sup> See GNILKA, 93; WEBER, 16.

<sup>75</sup> The variant form, προσκαλισάμενος in D, it, sy<sup>s</sup>, (he called them back to himself), would indicate older children that were able to approach Jesus themselves, rather than being brought by others for him to take into his arms. The children are old enough to respond to Jesus. This fits in well with the situation of the children having been rejected [by the disciples], but it weakens the reaction of Jesus', GNILKA, 94, n336.

<sup>76</sup> A. VAN AARDE, *The Evangelium Infantium, the Abandonment of Children, and the Infancy Narrative in Matthew 1 and 2 from a Social Scientific Perspective*: SBLSP, Scholars Press (Atlanta 1992), 435-453, here 442.

<sup>77</sup> There are some notable variants for this verse, including ἐτιθεὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ' αὐτὰ καὶ εὐλόγει αὐτὰ (D), and τιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ' αὐτὰ εὐλόγει (A, K, W and others). Many variants remove the special prefixed form of the verbs, of both εὐλόγω and τίθημι as well as reordering the phrase. Bas van Iersel suggests that this is a deliberate contraposition between κακολογέω in 9:39 and κατευλόγω here, using rare words that have a similar sound patterns, but whose meaning is the opposite. B. M. F. VAN IERSEL, *Mark: a Reader-Response Commentary*, JSNT Sup 164, Sheffield Academic Press (Sheffield 1998), 321.

In the Patriarchal narratives, the blessing was seen as a transferral of divine power, from the person doing the blessing, to the person blessed; and not just power, but life force. The power is exhausted in the act, and the blessing can neither be revoked nor repeated (cf. Gen 27).<sup>78</sup> Here, however, there is both the continuation of the Jewish concept of blessing, as the continuing relationship between God and His people, and at the same time, something radical and new. According to Derrett, there is a clear echo of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48). He says: "Any blessing of children would be equated mentally with this classical blessing-formula, and any Jewish hearer of the gospel-passage would have been aware of it".<sup>79</sup> Here, God is doing the blessing in the person of his Son. All God's bestowal of blessing becomes connected with God's work in Christ.<sup>80</sup>

It was normal for children to be taken to the Rabbi for him to lay his hands on them on the Day of Atonement. In the Talmud, there is a saying, "there was likewise a beautiful custom in Jerusalem to train their young sons and daughters to afflict themselves on a fast day: at the age of eleven to the middle of the day, at the age of twelve the full day, and at the age of thirteen [the boy] was taken round and presented to every elder to bless him and pray for him that he may be worthy to study the Torah and engage in good deeds".<sup>81</sup>

The combination of the indignation of Jesus and the special form of blessing highlights Jesus' regard for children and the conditions for discipleship. In this respect it is very significant that, excluding v15, Jesus is depicted as "an example of the way in which the disciple ought to receive one of the least respected members of society, the child... The children are brought to him and he blesses them; the disciple who receives the Kingdom will also be the recipient of Jesus' blessing".<sup>82</sup> That, they are shown as positive paradigms for entry into the Kingdom of God, and that any attempt to marginalize them rouses Jesus' anger in a way we do not see elsewhere in Mark's Gospel, shows the central role they have in the Kingdom of God.

<sup>78</sup> C. WESTERMANN, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*. Fortress Press (Philadelphia 1978), 58.

<sup>79</sup> DERRETT, *Why Jesus Blessed the Children*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> WESTERMANN, 65-67.

<sup>81</sup> mass. Sof. 18.5. Although the Minor Tractates of the Talmud are much later than Jesus' own time, we cannot throw out the possibility that the oral tradition reaches back to Jesus' time. WEBER, 15.

<sup>82</sup> BEST, *Following Jesus*, 108.

## Other Appearances of Children in Mark

Apart from the texts where Jesus welcomes and blesses the children, we see him interacting with children in other scenes, most notably four separate instances where he heals children, namely, the healings of Jairus' daughter, (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43 par.), the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, (Mk 7:24-30 par.), and the epileptic boy, (Mk 9:14-29 par.).

We have to be aware in some of these cases that we cannot be completely sure of the age of the person mentioned, and indeed whether they constitute what we should term "child". A further question that needs to be addressed, and hopefully answered is, 'how old were "children" in the ancient Mediterranean world when they stopped being "children" and moved into the adult world?' This will affect how we look at these Gospel passages.

### Jairus' Daughter, (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43 parr.).

The first thing to note is the fullness of Mark's account compared to Luke, and especially Matthew. Also, there is a second healing story inserted, that of the woman with the haemorrhage, which will not be dealt with, except to point out Mark's technique of making 'sandwiches', which is Mark's narrative ploy to heighten the sense of occasion in the text and to bring to the fore the theological point he is making. Here that point is faith. The poor, shamed, haemorrhaging woman who comes up to Jesus from behind is inserted into the story concerning the well-to-do Jairus who speaks to him face-to-face and as an equal, as another example of faith.<sup>83</sup> Her link with the daughter is another tool used by Mark, which is mentioned below.

We read in Mark that the child is at the point of death, (τὸ θυγάτριόν μου ἐσχάτως ἔχει Mk 5:23). In Mk 5:39 we get to the heart of the story, where Jesus performs the miracle. While Mark uses the common τὸ παιδίον to describe the child and Luke just refers to her,<sup>84</sup> Matthew uses the much rarer word τὸ κοράσιον (the two occasions here, vv 9:24, 25 being the only times he uses it: Mark uses it four times, twice here and twice to describe Herodias' daughter). κοράσιον is the diminutive for κορή, which is not encountered in the New Testament, and only three times in the Old Testament, where it is used figuratively.<sup>85</sup> We have to ask whether κοράσιον indicates the age of the girl (although we are told

<sup>83</sup> J. R. EDWARDS, *Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives*, *NovT* 31 (1989), 193-216, here 204.

<sup>84</sup> In some versions Luke also refers to the girl as τὸ κοράσιον in 9:52, cf. Aland, *Synopsis* 192.

<sup>85</sup> Primary meaning: 'girl, young woman' Hom. et al.; TestSol 26:5; Just., A I, 27, 1; Tat. 19, 2; Ath.; on a smaller scale 'doll' Dio Chrys. 31.). The tiny image reflected in the iris of the eye gave rise to the use of the term κ. (=Lat. pupilla) to denote the 'pupil' of the eye. Cf.



independently that she was twelve years old, does this mean that Herodias' daughter (Mk 6:22,28) is also twelve years old or thereabouts?). Derrett suggests that κοράσιον fits either the Hebrew קַרְטָּוִי - a girl of about marriageable age - or even a קַרְטָּוִי - a small girl.<sup>86</sup> Jeremias notes that the concept of 'virgin' was restricted to girls from twelve to twelve and a half years of age (m. Yeb. 6:4).<sup>87</sup> Therefore the twelve-year-old girl was just at the age when she would be marriageable. As such, Jairus may well have had a suitor lined up for her, and her illness and death at this age would have been particularly damaging for his honour and status. The economic consequences of a daughter dying at twelve would have been significant, since it was costly to raise children and the financial rewards of marrying off a daughter would have gone some way to redressing that. The daughter could be seen as a kind of commodity exchanged in marriage.

The term κοράσιον is as much a term of endearment as a diminutive expressing age, since we know her age. Like the diminutive θυγάτριον, this does not indicate age<sup>88</sup> as much as the bond between father and daughter. By calling her θυγάτριον (Mk 5:23) and κοράσιον (Mk 5:41,42) the father's love for his daughter is accentuated. Jesus tells the little girl τάλιθα κουμ (only in Mk 5:41), and clearly translates τάλιθα as κοράσιον (little girl). Τάλιθα is the emphatic state of תַּלְתָּה<sup>89</sup> calling on the little girl. The root of this word is טל, which in Is 40:11, 65:25, means 'lamb' and in 1 Sam 7:9 and Sir 37:17 means a suckling lamb. To refer to the girl as a lamb certainly is more of a term of endearment than an indication of age. It certainly would not seem out of place for a parent to refer to their sick child in this way, and from the mouth of Jesus the diminutive certainly adds to this feeling of endearment and Jesus' concern for her and for her family.

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Dt 32:10, Ps 16(17):8, Prov 7:2. The English rendering 'apple of the eye' in the OT passages cited above confounds the imagery, but conveys the sense of something cherished. BAGD 444.

<sup>86</sup> J. D. M. DERRETT, *Mark's Technique: The Hemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter*. *Bib.* 63 (1982), 474-505, here 484. See also, H. VAN DER LOOS, *The Miracles of Jesus*, NovT Supp. 9, Brill (Leiden 1965), 571, n5. The way a girl was regarded changed according to her age: up to the age of 11 and one day she was a child, קַרְטָּוִי, from then to 12 years and one day, as קַרְטָּוִי "underage", from 12 to 12?, as קַרְטָּוִי, a "younger daughter", and from 12?, as an adult.

<sup>87</sup> J. JEREMIAS, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: an Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, Fortress Press (Philadelphia 1969), 154.

<sup>88</sup> θυγάτριον is the diminutive of θυγάτηρ, little daughter (though the word can denote one who is marriageable: Lucian, *Tox.* 22), BAGD 365. In Mk 5:41 codex D reads ραββί θάβιτα; this is meant for ράβιθά, the fem. of rābiā, *girl*; BAGD 733.

<sup>89</sup> BAGD 803, KB 352.



## The Syrophoenician Woman's Daughter, (Mk 7:24-30 par)

There are enough similarities within this story to be sure that we are studying the same event, and that Matthew has taken Mark's account, even if he has modified it quite a lot. Whoever the woman was, Syrophoenician or Canaanite, the healing of her daughter and the phrase about throwing what belongs to the children to the dogs remain similar.

It is notable that this woman is a Gentile, and both Matthew and Mark use this to show that news about Jesus has spread beyond the frontiers of Israel, and that, despite questioning her in a way we do not see with other miracles, Jesus does not reserve his power for Israel. By going beyond the boundaries of Israel into the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus opens himself to the Gentiles.<sup>90</sup>

Mark refers to the girl as θυγάτριον (7:25), once again the diminutive form. The girl's sickness is not described in a way we can diagnose, just ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλῃ (Mk 7:25). We have to guess the age of this woman's daughter. It is almost impossible to separate the likely age of the daughter, i.e., the literal effect of θυγάτριον, from the emotional voice of the parent in distress who will use the diminutive form to stress the dearness of their child. Given that she was a Syrophoenician, and not a Jew, do we know how old she would have been in that society and culture to be of marriageable age? We gain a small insight into the social status of the child; she is lying 'on a bed', κλίνη, rather than on a κράβατος, the sleeping mat of the poor.

Jesus' question and her response to Jesus are the important things here. This type of question and counter-question is a typically Rabbinic way of teaching. Bultmann suggests that Mk 7:27 is the oldest part of this extended apothegm, which has undergone supplementary expansion.<sup>91</sup> When Jesus says in Mk 7:27, ἄφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα, οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν, Jesus is clearly using the term τὰ τέκνα in a figurative sense to refer to a relationship between Israel, as the chosen people, and the Gentile world who are given second place behind them. It is clear to the reader that Jesus is not using the term τέκνα literally, but does the woman understand it this way, since she is pleading on behalf of her daughter, not some metaphorical child of Israel? It seems that she does, as evidenced by her reply. Whilst she uses the same metaphor and throws it back at Jesus, she too mentions metaphorical children in her reply, rather than her own daughter. She is astute enough to appreciate what Jesus is saying to her, and to use it to her advantage.

<sup>90</sup> G. THEISSEN, *Colorido Local y Contexto Histórico en los Evangelios: Una Contribución a la historia de la Tradición Sinóptica*, Sígueme (Salamanca 1997), 74-95.

<sup>91</sup> BULTMANN, 41.

It is quite striking that children and dogs should not only be used in the same image, but that in the first part of the metaphor, the dogs end up better off than the children.<sup>92</sup> What does this say about children's status? Is it any better than that of the dogs they are compared to? Jesus is talking about children in general in his metaphor, not any child in particular, since he refers to τὰ τέκνα not τὸ τέκνον. The use of the metaphor also underlines the distinction between Israelites and Gentiles. Using such a picture of children and dogs (at least in our perception of them) to illustrate the primacy of Israel over the Gentile world represented by Tyre and Sidon, shows that there is no way anyone would seriously consider throwing crumbs to the dogs while the children are still hungry. This underlines that in the ancient Mediterranean world, the status of children does not appear to be much higher than dogs! If this is so, then even more than before, Jesus' actions here and elsewhere are seen to be novel and radical. Can we gauge the status of children by this apothegm? Ultimately this may seem like a throwaway comment, but it is significant to juxtapose children and dogs like that to assess role and status. Pokorny notes that here, the semantic field of 'child' is raised, by being mentioned, not just in terms of the woman's daughter, but also in the metaphorical sense as opposed to dogs. "The Lord accepts her position as the mother of a daughter and through the healing, he confirms that the child belongs to his household... accepting it (the unprivileged position) they received the status of children" in being willing to accept Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

### The Epileptic Boy, (Mk 9:14-29 par.)

This pericope, which we find in all of the Synoptics, occupies the same relative position in all three, after the Transfiguration and before the second prediction of the Passion. The key element to focus on in this pericope is the chronic nature of the boy's illness and the social constraints it imposes on his family. We are not told about the age of the epileptic<sup>94</sup> boy, but just that he has a spirit of dumbness ἔχοντα πνεῦμα

<sup>92</sup> THEISSEN, *Colorido Local*, 75 n1, describes the mention of dogs as an insult, and n2 gives a more positive evaluation of dogs as faithful and domesticated, yet with the association of dogs and pagans the first is clearly closer to the mark here. What is more, as Joel Marcus points out, κυνάριον is not the common diminutive for dog, that would be κυνίδιον, and so there is no effort to use any kind of endearing diminutive. Therefore, the insult is not diminished. J. MARCUS, *Mark 1-8*, AB 27, Doubleday (New York 1999), 463.

<sup>93</sup> P. POKORNY, *From a Puppy to the Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis Demonstrated from Mark 7:24-30/Matt 15:21-8*, NTS 41 (1995), 321-337, here 337.

<sup>94</sup> Although, of course, there is no definition of epilepsy in the descriptions by the three evangelists, it does seem to be a likely diagnosis based on the symptoms described, especially by Mark, but also to a lesser degree by Matthew and Luke. "The symptoms described – convulsions, foaming at the mouth, falling into fire and water, gnashing the teeth and going rigid – are all symptoms of an epileptic fit". H. VAN DER LOOS, *The Miracles of Jesus*,

ἄλαλον (9:17), which is manifest in a variety of symptoms. It is the boy's father who brings him to Jesus. Given the role of the *paterfamilias* this appears to be the normal situation.

Because of the severity and chronic nature of the illness the boy is suffering from, ἐκ παιδιόθεν (9:21), we need to look at survivorship of children in New Testament times. Certainly a boy as disabled as this one appears to be, with the severity and permanence of his condition, and the clear dangers that the condition places him in, especially are that καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτὸν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν (Mk 9:22). He would need constant care and supervision, and it would suggest that his quality of life is very low.<sup>95</sup> In fact, it appears that he is lucky to still be in one piece. It is common for the gospels to relate stories of Jesus healing people supposedly 'possessed by a demon', which in our current way of thinking would be described as mental illness, including illnesses such as epilepsy and schizophrenia. Obviously we know a lot more about these conditions now and we have effective remedies to help the sufferers, but in Jesus' time these were not available and the sufferers did not receive much help. However, Jesus is able to help these people whom nobody understands and few accept.

The social stigma attached to having a child suffering in this way would have been great, especially if he was the only son. The family would be seen to be cursed, seen to be sinners or the child of sinners; cf. John 9:2 in the case of blindness, '*and his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*' This family would be doubly cursed, having only one son, and him 'demon-possessed'. Added to the social castigation and shame, the family would suffer be an economic burden. This boy would need to be looked after, and being an only son, who would do that? His father would have to work to gain enough money for the family, and his mother would have to look after him in the house as well as doing all the normal household work. Maybe there would be a member of the extended family (if he has sisters, they may be given this task) who could spend a certain amount of time looking after him to stop him endangering himself. If the family was rich, they could have employed a slave to care for the boy, but since he often threw himself into fire and

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NovT Supp 9, Brill (Leiden 1965), 401. Matthew uses his own terminology to describe the boy's affliction as σεληνιαζεται, which, literally would be 'moonstruck' or 'lunatic'. It is interesting to note the lunar effect on mental illness (whether scientifically provable or not). BAGD links σεληνιαζομαι with epilepsy, (in the ancient world epileptic seizure was associated with transcendent powers of the moon). BAGD 746.

<sup>95</sup> Donald Capps suggests that, according to the prescriptions of the Jewish Law, that his parents may well have treated him as a wayward or troublesome child, and therefore he would have been beaten regularly. Prov 29:15 implies that a wayward child will be the disgrace of his mother, indicating that it would be her duty to discipline him. He is brought up by his father, not by his mother, suggesting that he has reached puberty, and is in the adult male realm. D. CAPPS, *Curing Anxious Adolescents through Fatherlike Performance*, *Int.* 55 (2001), 135-147, here 138.

water, this may suggest that they could not afford to have a person devoted to being his carer. Given the amount of times demon possession is mentioned in the Gospels, mental illness was likely a relatively common phenomenon, and there would have been many families in this situation.

Mark (9:22) mentions that the man asked Jesus to have compassion on the boy (σπλαγχνισθεῖς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς). To be in the position where one can have compassion is a position of strength. It is the person who has a choice who can choose to be compassionate on somebody less fortunate. Jesus is repeatedly presented as displaying this attitude. Of course, Jesus could still heal without being compassionate, but it is a key accompaniment to the physical healing. Jesus does not just heal; he heals with love and he rehabilitates people. The compassionate attitude of Jesus is just as important as the healing itself. It indicates the wholeness of Jesus' healing power. Mark links Jesus' compassion with the man's faith.

## **Conclusion: Jesus' Attitude to Children**

In the course of attempting to separate the possible words of Jesus from the Marcan redaction, one notable thing surfaces: the closer we get to Jesus, the louder the voice of the child is. The reconstruction of the two pre-Markan pericopae have something in common; the voice of Jesus speaking directly about the child, not in a metaphorical way, but in a very concrete way. The disciples are warned for preventing them, and we are left in no doubt, either by the positive paradigm, ὃς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται, ἐμὲ δέχεται, (Mk 9:37), or the negative one of 10:14, ἄφετε τὰ παιδία ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, that Jesus places the child squarely at the centre of his world view. Also, it is not just of one child, rather the characteristics of every child that Jesus highlights.

We see the use of two verbs used only in relation to children: ἐναγκαλίζομαι and κατευλογέω. These verbs highlight Jesus' regard for children and the special place he has for them. Whether they come from a pre-Markan source or not, the fact remains that they represent Jesus' special relationship with children. Rare verbs do not have to be pre-Markan, although they may be, but it is clear that the underlying sentiment goes back to Jesus, and in as clear a way as his words, the actions expressed, show his attitude to children.

We do see in the pre-Markan stratum, the command of Jesus to the disciples, ἄφετε τὰ παιδία ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά, (10:14), as the words of rebuke to the disciples when they try to stop the children. Jesus objects to the disciples obstructing his mission, which here is to welcome the children and present them as models for all of his followers. This is coupled with his anger, a characteristic of Jesus, seldom

seen, and nowhere else seen directed at his disciples. In 10:14 Mark uses the rare verb ἀγανακτέω. Its use here is the only time the sentiment of indignation is described of Jesus himself. We can see the attitude of Jesus through the text.

Jesus' own attitude is the key factor, but to be seen to its fullest effect, it has to be seen against the backdrop of the surrounding culture, and this is represented here by the disciples. They present the prevalent view of children as belonging at the bottom of the social ladder. Their place is among the voiceless, marginalised and dispensable section of society, and it is within the theme of 'greatness' that they are introduced. "Underlying the disciples' attitude and the resultant teaching is the same concept of the child as the least important member of society... Jesus repudiates this valuation by word and example".<sup>96</sup> Jesus turns the concept of 'greatness' on its head. Yet, to see Jesus' attitude as remarkable and novel, it has to be seen in context.

Jesus introduces a new phrase, ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου. Not only is Jesus welcoming the children himself, but he also expects his followers to do likewise. To be a follower of Jesus, his disciples must copy and express his own attitudes and his way of life. We saw what happened when they did not; Jesus had sharp words for them. The contrary attitude of the disciples mainly served to put Jesus' own attitudes in relief, and thereby to heighten their effect. Therefore, they are of vital importance for the Christian follower. As mentioned above, Jesus blesses the children, which could have a variety of meanings, but it shows his concern and love for them in a way he reserves for no one else. By blessing the children, he personally makes them holy. Whilst we could abstract this to say that he is presaging infant baptism or that he is doing it to show the disciples the correct attitudes for Christian life, (which this action also does), the immediacy of Jesus' actions and his physical touch of these children must not be overlooked or over-theologised. Jesus called the children to him, and laid his hands on them in blessing. Given that Jesus' actions are strongly associated with his salvific power, we must not forget the power in his blessing. This is not just a tap on the head; it is transference of divine power, imbuing that power in the children. The blessing denotes growth, maturity, prosperity, and bearing fruit.<sup>97</sup> "The blessing and the laying on of hands impart to the children in some way the Kingdom itself".<sup>98</sup> That is significant in itself: that he never does that to anyone else is even more so.

Jesus was prepared to sacrifice his honour<sup>99</sup> in order to welcome the children. He was well aware that the patriarchal structure placed

<sup>96</sup> FRANCE, 395.

<sup>97</sup> WESTERMANN, 67.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> This introduces us to the important dynamic of honour and shame, in many ways a more important currency in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity than money. Honour "is basically a claim to worth that is socially acknowledged. It surfaces especially

children at the bottom of the pile,<sup>100</sup> and his own reputation was at stake not only in welcoming them, but also in giving them the same status as himself, as the envoy of God. This was a risk he was prepared to take to show the place of the child in the Kingdom of God, not just for himself, but also for his followers. When Jesus teaches his disciples that they should place children at the centre of their view of the Kingdom of God, this is an unexpected teaching, and it stretches the parameters of what is normal acceptable behaviour, and what would be considered as honourable. Jesus' honour is determined by how people accept him, the disciples' honour is determined by their reaction to Jesus, and the children do not have any honour before they are brought to Jesus. The children acquire honour because Jesus gives it to them, yet for this honour to become 'currency' it has to be accepted by others, most notably by Jesus' followers. Since, as we have seen, children in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity do not possess ascribed honour due to their position on the social ladder, the honour they have is granted to them by Jesus, coming from his own honour. As Jesus appears to invert the existing structure, we shall see whether children receive honour in early Christianity, and whether Jesus loses any of his as a cause of his unexpected reversal of the value system.

One of the key factors that this hinges on is that in the Kingdom of God there is a much flatter structure. "The pre-Markan tradition contrasts the patriarchal family with the community of equal discipleship."<sup>101</sup> The arrival of the Kingdom of God presupposes a radical shake-up of social structure. This requires a new way of looking at patriarchy and honour, values that were mainstays of the existing structure. This was valid for all levels of society, from government to the family. Within the family, the child and the slave, representing the lowest members, are used as models for the new family, indicating that the new family was not based on the *paterfamilias*, rather on equality, and that families who wish to welcome the Kingdom of God must do it this way.<sup>102</sup> This is the background for the child as the paradigm for true discipleship, and for the Christian family.

In these two scenes where Jesus welcomes children, his attitudes are clear, and are backed up by his words, linking them in a very open way to the Kingdom. He has come to bring the Kingdom, and children are exemplars of and participants in it (10:14). Given this context, when we looked at the way Jesus treated the sick children who were

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where the three defining features of authority, gender status, and respect come together". B. J. MALINA, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. WJK Press (Louisville 2001<sup>3</sup>), 29.

<sup>100</sup> A father would gain honour from obedient children, since that is what would be expected, and a disobedient child would bring him shame. Likewise, a disciple would be expected to obey his teacher.

<sup>101</sup> E. SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Crossroad (New York 1983), 147.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

either brought to him, or to whom he was asked to attend, we see that his attitude is just as positive there as well. It is important to remember that in the cases of Jairus, the Syrophoenician woman and the nameless man with the epileptic son, the primary focus of the Gospel is to highlight the faith of the adult who approaches him, and the healing of the child is subsequent to that. Jesus says to Jairus, μή φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευε (Mk 5:36), to the Syrophoenician, διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὕπαγε, ἐξελήλυθεν ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον (7:29) and to the man with the epileptic son, τὸ εἰ δύνη, πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι (9:23). Jesus does not just heal, he restores, and he does not do it just for the sake of the parent, but also for the child. The healing of the child is linked to the faith of the parent; Jesus requires faith as a response from adults, but not from children.

In all of these encounters with children, even when the child is not physically present, we see the attitude of care and concern for the child as a real person. Jesus is aware of the characteristics of children, and he holds them up as exemplars, either of what to do or what not to do, as here, Jesus includes children at the centre of his vision of the Kingdom.

Just as children are not required to study Torah until they are thirteen, Jesus does not put any constraints or conditions on them; at the same time he holds them up as exemplars for entry into the Kingdom of God. “Jesus affirmed what children were; but he challenged adults to become what they could be”.<sup>103</sup> This is radical and new.

## Mark's Attitude to Children

Whilst we can see the attitude of Jesus in the pages of Mark, we have been able to do so only by separating out Mark's own perspectives. These are of great value in themselves, as they give us the first insight into how attitudes to children changed in the time between Jesus and Mark's Gospel. This is an important insight into the second Christian generation. Mark does not just write down Jesus' words: after all he is not a firsthand witness, and so there is always going to be a contextualisation of Jesus' thought to fit Mark's concerns for his audience.

One notable thing that we see is that even as early as Mark's redaction, the voice of the child gradually becomes muffled, as the concerns of the communities take over. Mark writes for his community, and his presentation of Jesus reflects that as much as the historical Jesus.

<sup>103</sup> STRANGE, 64.



It is no coincidence that Mark has situated the second pericope (10:13-16) within a family instruction, since that indicates his concerns for community structure: that the Christian unit, the family, should be concerned with marriage, children and possessions, and that the child is just one element in that triad. Within this framework, the disciples represent the community, and it is their concerns that are expressed in Mark's Gospel. The theme of the disciples renouncing their own greatness and embracing a totally different attitude, redeploying the values of honour as they do so, is very strong in both of the texts studied, particularly 9:36-37.

The failure of the disciples to understand (e.g. 8:21), and their inappropriate response (9:33-34), 'on the way'<sup>104</sup> to Jerusalem represent, not only the failure of the 'twelve' or the followers of the historical Jesus, but also the failure of the Markan community, followers of 'The Way', to understand and appreciate the demands of discipleship in the wake of the persecution they had to undergo in following Jesus in the period immediately preceding the Jewish Revolt and the religious and political upheaval that ensued. The negative portrayal of the disciples is pre-Markan tradition, but Mark, rather than creating this characterisation, emphasises an existing one in order to educate his community.<sup>105</sup> Mark mirrors the attitudes of the 'Twelve' with the attitudes of those leaders in his own community who are associated with them. This, rather than the original 'Twelve' is the focal point of the teaching, Mark wishes to impress on the leaders of his community. The teaching about welcoming children underlines not just Jesus' attitude to children, but also that of the Markan community.

To love neighbour is to be last of all and servant of all, and Mark concretises this in 9:35, and in the following example of receiving a child. "There is a tension between meanings of the child image, a literal child (9:36) and child as a symbol for the believer (9:42)."<sup>106</sup> We see also that faith in God and the ethical life associated with it are not just the conditions that permit entry into the Kingdom of God at some future date, but are expressed here and now, as a relationship with God, and what Jesus said of the real child is still applicable in the Markan community: When Mark adds ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὃς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν (10:15), we can see that this image speaks to the disciple and is valid in any concrete example, positing childlikeness as an image of discipleship.

This image of discipleship is radical: "this entails renouncing the shape of one's present existence in order to recover an abandoned

<sup>104</sup> Mark uses the phrase ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ at 8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:52. These clearly represent the beginning and the end of the journey to Jerusalem, as well as the attitude of the disciples in 9:33-34. Yet it can as easily refer to the name the Early Christians called themselves. See also Acts 9:2, 19:23, 24:14 and others.

<sup>105</sup> BEST, *Disciples*, 129.

<sup>106</sup> VIA, 87.



potential",<sup>107</sup> being open to what God calls him to do. The Kingdom of God expresses the future, and allows the disciple to open himself to that future, by following Jesus, through death to a new life. "The child image in Mark in its capacity to focalise both the movement back to a new beginning and the movement forward to an open future discloses in an essential way this polyvalent character of symbols. Being a child is both the end and the beginning of the process of salvation."<sup>108</sup>

This fits well into the theme of instruction for the disciple, but we see that as early as Mark, the construction of the whole work places the child where Mark wishes to place him, which, while in its immediate setting within the pericope is still in the middle of the group and therefore still at the centre of Jesus' world-view, the larger construction of Mark's Gospel gives a different picture. In the wider picture painted by Mark, the child is not so central. In chapter 9 the child is hidden among the theme of discipleship, clearly placed for their benefit and instruction; and in chapter 10 the child is one element of the family ethic that Mark is constructing.

The child is still an exemplar, but in an increasingly indirect sense. The directness and the intimacy are fading, compared to when Jesus took the child and stood him in the middle of the group as an exemplar, and when he laid his hands upon him.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

