



# Childhood theology and implications for pedagogy



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## Dates:

Received: 08 Apr. 2021

Accepted: 15 Nov. 2021

Published: 17 Feb. 2022

## How to cite this article:

Chiroma, J.A. & Chiroma,  
N.H., 2022, 'Childhood  
theology and implications  
for pedagogy', *Theologia  
Viatorum* 46(1), a115.  
[https://doi.org/10.4102/  
tv.v46i1.115](https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v46i1.115)

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This article argues for a childhood theology informed by systematic theology, which enabled the researcher to mould the concepts of childhood theology to understand in order to use it. Child theology has been a neglected study in most African scholarship. Systematic theology guided the analysis of data as objectively as possible and contributed to the development of a childhood theology model that best accounts for all the data, showing that how childhood theology can be constructed in the African setting. The philosophy of Christian education aided the analysis of childhood theology and to assess the pedagogical relevance towards maximising a child's potential in learning. Considerations of African theological perspectives, western perspectives and biblical evidence for childhood theology are explored to configure its significance to African childhood theology and the implications for pedagogical practices that are holistic, God-centred and transformative.

**Keywords:** childhood theology; systematic theology; pedagogy; holistic education; philosophy of Christian education; Africa.

## Introduction

Childhood theology triggers the social structure centred on God as an outstanding and necessary feature of a child's dignity and value in the Christian society. Concepts, such as childhood theology, have developed not only to give meaning to a particular conception of human personhood and dignity of a child with God but as well to postulate an agenda and structure for maximising a child's potentials, purposes and possibilities in a given society, and sustain it for the survival of youth in a given society (Africa) and in our educational settings (De Witt 2016:246–247; Gyekye 2000:317; Thiselton 2015:136). Conceptions of childhood theology call for critical analyses and arguments of realities of its scholarship and theological frameworks of human potentialities, possible child's relationship with God and the image of God the child bears, and approaches that educators can employ to cultivate and nurture through education (De Witt 2016; Gyekye 2000:317; Thiselton 2015:10).

Childhood theology is a contested concept. Scholars have raised questions regarding childhood theology in various dimensions, such as moral, social, cultural and psychological aspects that investigate childhood in connection with the philosophical and ethical significance of self or person (Ansell 2005; Gyekye 2000:317; Thiselton 2015:102). Other scholars uniquely analyse the child as a person within the theological dimension about God's image represented in the child (Thiselton 2015:102). According to Gyekye (2000):

Moral and political philosophers raise metaphysical question on whether a person, even though lives in human society, is a self-sufficient atomic individual who does not depend on his/her relationships with others for the realization of personhood, and who has ontological priority over the community, or whether the person is by nature a communal being, having natural and essential relationships with others. Moral questions, which may in some sense be said to be linked to or engendered by metaphysical conceptions of the person [childhood], relate to The status of rights of an individual, the place of duties, and the existence and appreciation of a sense of an ordinary good life or common (collective) good. (p. 317)

From the above, one can deduce that a child is a person who has the fundamental rights that cannot be overruled in any situation and has duties ethically concerning others' interests and welfare. Besides, a child has a sense of everyday life and collective good.

Scholars argue that theological, moral and normative concerns about childhood theology (theologising with children) can be articulated in complex and intricate theoretical formulations. However, reasonable formations regarding childhood theology can be articulated and translated

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in the authentic way of the life of children – in the way children respond to communal concerns and how they instinctively socialise and care for one another, and the possibility of a relationship with God (De Witt 2016:247; Gyekye 2000; Mtata 2009:85; Thiselton 2015:29, 136; Ware 2001).

Pedagogy is pivotal to a child's holistic development – social, bodily, emotive, spiritual growth and transformation. There is a need for Christian educators to rethink childhood education that is holistic and centred on God for spiritual transformation. The concept of pedagogy underscores the art, craft or science of teaching. Smith (2019) defined pedagogy as 'an orientation, a set of processes and a way of thinking', and used this to influence (through pedagogical process) children to grow. Prehistoric Greek philosophy distinguished substantially between the activities of pedagogues and field-specific educator. Historically, pedagogy played a significant role in moral transformation (Young 1987:156). The educators (pedagogues) historically serve the responsible position in the child's upbringing and training, especially in the informal settings with parents and or knowledgeable others at home. The relation of the educator (including parents) with the child is a fascinating one. It contributes to transformative pedagogical meaning to a child's education. According to Hederman (1982:3), Freire's concept of the pedagogy of the oppressed is an education centred on bringing hope to the hopeless – a critical approach to teaching and learning that leads to transformation and growth. Aristotle's pedagogy comprises leading with the connotation of a moral disposition to act honestly and rightly (Carr & Kemmis 1986:132). This kind of education for Aristotle values dialogue in learning – learning that characterises social interaction and praxis-oriented, including cognitive and practical wisdom (Carr & Kemmis 1986:132; Grundy 1987). Transformative pedagogy is essential for early education because it aids the socialisation of children into established models, customs, and attitudes to preserve social stability and stratify individuals in line with the dynamic complexities in the social world and continue a moral, social harmony (Carr & Kemmis 1986). A nuanced conception of childhood theology bears the potential for a Christian educator to employ pedagogical approaches informed by spiritual awareness that includes the way the educator views the child in reflection of how God sees them – this way of teaching can contribute not only to physical, social, cognitive but also to a spiritual transformation of the child.

Debates centred in pedagogy around the world depict several pedagogical approaches. Some proponents argue for holistic forms of pedagogical practice (Huitt 2011; Rudge 2008, 2016). Whilst others view pedagogy away from the minimalistic understanding, education is more than mere predefined learning outcomes (Brühlmeier 2010:5). Teaching and learning should involve educating the total person in terms of physical, mental and emotional intelligence and growth. Education should influence a child's head, hand, and considering the childhood theological framework heart (Brühlmeier 2010; Gazibara 2013). The heart reflects the

child's spiritual growth that affects their moral reasoning and conscience whilst instilling the virtues, standards and viewpoints that guide the child's well-being – the kind of person they become (Brühlmeier 2010; Doyle & Smith 1999:33–34).

Besides that, pedagogy depicts the teachers' ability to reflect, imagine and respond to teaching, and encourages them to develop concepts, reasoning capabilities, hand-on skills and imaginative strengths (Eisner 1979). Therefore, it is paramount that teachers and parents extend their role to a pedagogue, especially given the diverse challenges they confront teaching children at all levels, whether informal (school and church) or informal settings (home).

In contrast, other scholars advocate a rethinking of pedagogical approaches that are more learner-centred such as cooperative and collaborative learning (De Witt 2016:17; Le Grange 2019; Myers 2013:147). This kind of learning resonates with the child's view within the African culture and how such collaborative activities can transform the way the child learns any subject (De Witt 2016:70, 247; Le Grange 2019). De Witt (2016:247) noted that a child can form relationships with fellow humans, which allows the child to play together with others to learn acceptable behaviour. Therefore, providing a cooperative learning environment can enable learners to learn rules and morality to survive and to engage in both vertical and horizontal relationships.

## The problem statement

This article explores the concerns that bear on childhood and community theology; how the two concepts showcase in African culture will be pointed out. I use African understanding of childhood to illustrate individuality and communalism as understood in Africa generally. Then I focus on childhood theology as depicted in the Bible and concentrate on the biblical aspects of childhood (personhood), community and God.

Popular concepts of childhood or youth have been neglected by social sciences in the past, mainly because it was predominantly male oriented (Ansell 2005:14; Mtata 2009:92). Thus, the studies around the importance of childhood theology did not attract scholarship. Childhood studies have been ignored by scholars mostly because it was considered unimportant; this is critical because children's needs are never taken seriously, and possibly the assumption that children's lives are transient and insignificant. This perception has influenced how scholars have engaged with aspects of young people (Mtata 2009:92). In recent times the study of childhood theology has emerged as a discipline (Ansell 2005:17). Much of the children's tasks are centred on psychological perspectives, examined around child development, attachment theory and adolescence (Ansell 2005:17–18; Neufeld & Maté 2013:27). More studies on young people from the sociological, anthropological and cultural views concentrate on children and youth subcultures' socialisation.

Many childhood studies revolve around childhood as 'socially constructed' (Ansell 2005:21). For this reason, childhood theology cannot be delinked from the social evaluation, including the ideas around gender, ethnicity and class. The study also considers that children's social associations, values and beliefs are critical as they stand out differently from adults' concerns (Ansell 2005; Grobbelaar 2012). Besides that, ethnography is a specific applicable methodology suggested by scholars for the study of childhood as it allows children's voices to be heard, and the development of a new paradigm that contribute to reconstructing childhood in a society (Ansell 2005:21; Grobbelaar 2012:23).

An average African conception and theories of childhood have nurtured and not remained tied to societies in which they initiated. Africa has actively interpolated around the world over several centuries of colonialism, migration, missionary activities, slavery, democratic regimes and globalisation, which has shaped a global understanding of childhood (Ansell 2005:23; Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984).

How teachers perceive, regard and treat children in schools is critical, especially for Christian educators. It is hoped that childhood theology can provide nuances for pedagogical choices that would lead to transformation.

## Methodology

Smith (2008) explained that a two-fold process is central to research in systematic theology, namely, the collection of data from scriptural and dogma-historical references, and theory construction such as the possibility or impossibility of a specific doctrine or a variation thereof (Smith 2008:184). A systematic theologian's task is to analyse the data as objectively as possible (Thiselton 2015:17) and develop a childhood theological model that best accounts for all the data, showing how childhood theology can be constructed in the African setting necessary to capture the African experience and life. Grobbelaar (2012:23) argued that childhood theology in Africa needs to consider the complexities of the African context in terms of diversities of culture and traditions, and the still emerging African identity from ethnicity, colonialism, race, family, gender and class. Grobbelaar (2012:29) argued that the African child suffers an identity crisis amidst this diversity that is laced with poverty that tempers with the child finding his or her place in the society that ranks them at the bottom of the hierarchy persons. Thus, he proffers a childhood theology that is hermeneutic, missional and captures the African child's way of life:

It is systematic theology which spreads it before us in the form most accessible to our modes of conception, pours it, so to speak, into the moulds of our minds, and makes it our assured possession that we may thoroughly understand and utilize it. (Warfield, Brown & Smith 1910:192)

The philosophy of Christian education also informs both the methodology and methods in this study. Philosophy of

Christian education 'provide transcultural and cultural universals to guide thought and practice' (Pazmiño 2008:85). By this, Pazmiño refers to axioms or beliefs that originate from God and from a given society, which are binding to humanity. He bolsters the vital role of philosophy in educational practice. According to Pazmino, the philosophy of education is 'the attempts to articulate a systematic and life-giving scheme of thought that can guide practice' (Pazmiño 2008:85). Educational practice bears the results of its philosophical origins. For Christian education, practitioners need to seek a philosophy of explicit and consistent education with a Christian worldview. Philosophy of Christian education informs this study in the following ways: firstly, it provides a worldview underlying the ideas that inform childhood theology and its implications to pedagogical practices in thought and acts upon in education. Secondly, it gives a Christian knowledge with fundamental beliefs that most adequately describe the relationship between God and the child with a holistic goal towards child identity and potentials towards pedagogical approaches that explore transformative education. Thirdly, the Philosophy of Christian education enables this research to systematically interpret some thoughts on childhood theology (its values and realities) and its implications to pedagogical practices. Giving their meaning from the Bible teachings and the African experience (metaphysical) towards building faith-based pedagogy and finally providing conceptions of education as a socialisation process enable the child to become a responsible member in a community with others (Pazmiño 2008:89).

## African understandings of childhood theology

Childhood studies in Africa have not been explored explicitly towards theological framings. According to Mtata (2009:86), the African theology of personhood (African theology's Anthropology) undermines childhood and does not offer a fairground for constructing childhood theology. He provides examples of how Early African theologians who engulfed a narrow understanding of the community that excluded both women and children in the conception of personhood (identity) were rather hierarchal and male-dominated. According to Mtata (2009), the immediate post-colonial theologians did not do justice in recognising all believers' personhood; instead, narrowed and did not even recognise childhood as personhood. However, much of the research has dealt with personhood analysis about the individual, community and God. For example, African thought on community plays an essential role in the metaphysical understanding of childhood theology (Grobbelaar 2012; Teffo & Roux 2002). Besides:

[A] child is held to be the property of the community, and it is the community who are going to see to it that the individual child becomes a significant member of the community, an asset to all. (Teffo & Roux [2002:1440] citing Raditlhalo [1996:123])

Other key scholars who contribute to childhood meanings include sociological framings of childhood within families

and community (Gyekye 1997; Kayongo-Male 1984; Mtata 2009). Additionally, moral and political-philosophical analyses of personhood concerning individual and community (Grobelaar 2012), and psychological-social aspects of young child in identity formation about schooling, learning and child development and how family, environment and poverty affect childhood development (De Witt 2016). Mtata (2009:84) critiques the African theology based on anthropology and communitarianism as narrow and inadequate to build childhood theology. Mtata (2009:85) noted that the anthropological framings of childhood theology limit and exclude children from the church's life because it is hierarchical and places children at the bottom of personhood and other margins. However, this may not be true if evaluated from ecclesiological framings.

From the preceding section, it is evident that the African personhood with the community's sense of belonging has contributed immensely to how African theologians have engaged with constructing a theology of childhood. That is to say, the cohort of African theologians thus far have neglected the holistic childhood theology and somewhat diminished the position of children in the hierarchal understanding of community as a sense of belonging. Consequently, the voices and the need for the child's place in theological development have attracted little attention and have not caught much recognition and reconceptualisation. In the following section, I argue that the African notion of community can be expanded to include the current African experiences of dynamism to allow for defensible childhood theology nuances.

## Community and personhood in Africa: Potentials for childhood theology

There is a possibility that African notions of community and personhood still hold potentialities of childhood theology. However, a renewed sense of communitarianism can be reconstructed to include children and the current challenges and development needs in Africa. This can be referenced to the notions of African sense of belonging vis-a-vis Ubuntu as an instance of the African community to become a concept. That is to say that Africa is not static, and that meaning of community holds potentialities for childhood theology. In other words, a sense of community in the current African context has evolved to the child's inclusion. In which sense, a childhood theology is grounded in the renewed sense of belonging to a community.

Ubuntu (community) is a concept with a viable ideology to synthesise emerging conceptions of African sense of community that is dynamic and bears prospects for African Theology of Childhood. This article focuses on how Ubuntu as a concept is studied within scholarship and the possibilities it bears for childhood theology. Ubuntu depicts people's value and their cultural heritage (Chiroma 2015:149; Grobelaar 2012). It also foregrounds how members of a society connect amidst global trends.

Benhabib's (2011) philosophical reflection on reiteration enabled this research to comprehend humanness in Africa and, in general, relate to the universal discourses on understanding humanity in a society (Chiroma 2015:149) and theological systems in childhood identity. Ubuntu as a concept is contextual to African communalism – a shared sense of humanness, in most cases, has united the African continent, especially when divisiveness features and so have formed the basis in which reconciliation has been considered to resolve conflicts that arise within the region (Chiroma 2015; Letseka 2011; Ntamushobora 2012:6). Despite the strong propensities Ubuntu holds for African humanity and community, it is a contested concept within scholarship. A handful of scholars differ in its viability for a possibility to resolve conflicts of common humanity (Chiroma 2015; Enslin & Horsthemke 2004:545). In contrast, some argue for the possibility of Ubuntu contributing to the conceptualisation of personhood (Gyekye 1987; Mbithi 1970; ed. Wiredu 2004), citizenship (sense of belonging) (Chiroma 2015; Mbiti 1970), care (Waghid & Smeyers 2012), hospitality (Waghid 2014:92), Justice (Waghid 2011) and forgiveness (Chiroma 2015; Ntamushobora 2012). In this vein, I argue that Ubuntu bears the possibility of rethinking childhood theology and the implications for pedagogy.

In the African context, a person is defined by their sense of belonging to a community. A person's being and identity are also viewed in terms of belonging, as in the common catchphrase commonly used by Mbithi (1970:141), 'I am because we are'. Mbiti's (1970) phrase portrays a person's distinctiveness in survival with another in the context of community. The phrase prompts a person's collective identity, dignity, participation and living, and captures the African initiative of articulating the essence of personhood (Chiroma 2015). Put differently, Mbiti's description of a person specifies that one's (childhood's) humanity is connected to others' network within a community. It describes the person (child) to others' connections in an ethical consideration (Menkiti 2004:24). Personhood within the African context is also considered beyond the biological connectedness to more robust identities of cosmopolitan sense of belonging to human beings' community (Chiroma 2015; Menkiti 2004:24). This understanding considers human diversity in ethnic mosaic, multiracial, languages, religions or economic class that exist together but still need each other to survive. In an African context, an individual realises that there is common humanity within the diversity of existence and values the common humanity where they find themselves. This way of understanding personhood and humanity recognises and symbolises their source of human ethics as a community.

We argue 'Ubuntu' in terms of how the child is connected to the community and not necessarily an individual self. This argument leads us to the morality of the child's humanity relevant for the African context (Chiroma 2015; Menkiti 2004:330). This consideration discloses the worth attached to a person by the African context and all humankind. Our



common humanity is evident in both the African and the Euro-American conceptions. To begin dealing with justice and human rights concerning recognising children's individuality and their sense of belonging, we must start with the understanding of humanity. For instance, Nussbaum (1997) argued for the cultivation of humanity, Benhabib (2011) for human rights, Rawls (1999) for justice and public reason, and Habermas (1978a, 1978b) for speech and thought as considerations for valuing humanity. They also argue for common concepts for reimagining human identity with connotation to promote justice, a sense of belonging, and respect for human rights and dignity, which are necessary to describe childhood and considerations for pedagogy (Chiroma 2015).

The community's idea here argued for points to the community's spaces, whether in abstract form or intangible human behaviour, the standards, regulations, guides and vicarious models from which the child can learn foundational moral behaviour (Chiroma 2015). A child needs to develop, survive and thrive in their potentials, so they need to learn the standards and guidelines to live within a world – the community of others. Thus, knowing about others inevitably forms the potential for and possibility for a renewed theology of childhood.

Culture is an aspect of community that plays a significant role in developing conceptions of childhood theology in Africa. Within the African culture, different communities – tribes – have various practices that set the tone and defines a child's identity. An example of how culture plays a role in defining personhood can be illustrated using the Akan community in Ghana (Chiroma 2015; Gyekye 1987; ed. Wiredu 2004). Wiredu (ed. 2004) and Gyekye (1987) show three significant components of their culture that define a person's identity and development. First is 'the blood principle' also known as *honam* or *mogya* (Chiroma 2015:137), which designates a person's clan identity, majorly inherited from the maternal lineage and represents a new member of family arrival and continuity of a parent lineage (Chiroma 2015). The second component is the soul, referred to as *okra*, which is believed by the Akan community to represent life and is God given; it also represents the self and one's individuality (Chiroma 2015:137; Wiredu 1996:157). The third component is the 'spirit' referred to as *sunsum*; this represents a paternal heritage and is considered as given by the gods; it is believed to die when a person dies, it is embedded in one's body (Chiroma 2015:137).

There is an emerging interrelationship amongst factors that contribute to a person's identity within the cultural communities. The factors can help explain a childhood identity as well. It points to the interconnectedness of a child as a complex being with different complexities, yet intrinsically intertwined existence. This denotes the child's spiritual, physical and social connectedness that points to Kinship, as illustrated in the political culture of the Akan community where decision-making included all persons as

essential members of the community. This designates the worth of a child's respect and human dignity their individuality to others (Chiroma 2015:137). Ideas on the African community bear essential considerations for childhood theology in Africa. A theology is contextual and yet points to how we view childhood in relation to God.

Africa has a valuable culture for cultivating care towards understanding personhood with such dignity. The question could be asked, why there is so much violence and prejudice towards children? Are children not human persons? According to Serequeberhan (1994:55), the phenomenon of violence in Africa requires deep philosophical reflection, hence the need for African philosophers to adequately address the issue as it relates to African experience. The notion of child violence has received less attention in philosophical thought and theological literature, except in Wiredu's (1980) and Oruka's (1998) studies, who consider personhood as a critical reflection relevant to the African culture.

Besides that, Ubuntu as an African concept and lived experience can proffer a constructivist theological approach to building a theology of childhood that is contextual and relevant for African current development needs. African culture and values bear a powerful sense of community that calls for collective theological engagement that will include the most influential African community members – children. Ethical virtues of respect, hospitality and respecting differences are axiological and moral conceptions for African childhood theology. Ubuntu denotes that African theology encompasses children in theological thought and practice as a sign of collective synergy towards achieving ethical results in childhood theology. It also advances the notion of individualistic thought by providing concepts and constructing realistic supports in policymaking to make better the community (Chiroma 2015:140). Ubuntu as a concept and a practice, and a way of life in the communal sense can minimise ethnic wars and violence that may interfere with child development and well-being. For this to happen, there is a need for a critical engagement with child theology and African philosophies of child and childhood. Ubuntu also designates against a sense of morality and cultural values that can contribute to the development and theological thought in conceptualising human dignity and the value of childhood care.

## Global framings of childhood

Dionysian and Apollonian are critical western views that inform childhood concepts in the global sense (Ansell 2005:11). The Dionysian theory states that 'children should be seen and not heard; children need protection from themselves, and that childhood is a time to learn discipline' (Ansell 2005:11). Whilst the Apollonian views childhood as '...a time for play, and not for work. Children need protection from the world; children are innocent, children are passive, and childhood should be happy' (Ansell 2005:11). The

Dionysian and Apollonian mutually view childhood as separate from the adult world; yet define their sense of belonging within families. They also agree that children belong to nature than adults, and that they are incomplete, that is, that they are less than an adult. The views differ, in that Dionysian views the child as the devil that needs taming from the liberation of the sinful nature, whilst the Apollonian views the child as an angel that the adult world should not pollute. In the west, by '1975, children were considered more like super-pet at the beginning of the 21st-century childhoods are described as predominantly Apollonian' (Ansell 2005:13).

## Conceptions of childhood rights and duties

Children's rights have taken a centre stage in the 21st century to protect children from violence. Adults can no longer mistreat children as in the previous century, yet children cannot be left to their expedients (Ansell 2005:13). Ansell (2005:13) pointed out that debates that are defining childhood today 'have become conventional wisdom'. These debates are a critical starting point for reflecting a child's sense of belonging to concepts of childhood outside away from the social context the child inhabits. The view of childhood as naturalistic has contributed to Western models' generalisation and presumptuous to employ in the same way in non-western settings.

Conversely, features of childhood that are common in Western mass media debates only partially relate to western youths as they lived currently. They differ from the childhood experiences in Africa and other developing world. Yet, they remain impactful on the development of policy and practice, and their traces are visible in the childhood policy in Africa. For instance, 'children's innocence, vulnerability and need for protection are frequently stressed, including by development practitioners in their attempts sensitize the plight of the children in Africa' (Ansell [2005]:13 citing Boyden [1990]).

## Biblical evidence for childhood theology

### The status of rights of the child

The biblical writers (Munyon 2017:238–239) maintain that God created human beings (Gn 26–28; 2) in his image (Gn 5:1). Human beings are composed of a heart (2 Cor 6:12); mind or will (Mk 12:30); body (Lv 21:11; Nm 5:2; Dt 6:5; Mk 12:30); spirit (2 Cor 7:15; Mt 27:50; Lk 23:46; Ac 7:59); and life, soul and self (Jos 2:13; 1 Ki 19:3; Jr 52:28; Mk 8:35). A child is a human being created in God's image. Therefore, a child is composed of a heart, mind and will, body and soul (self, life and person) (1 Th 5:23). This understanding of what a child gives the child an important place in the community of human beings is central to God, which is also similar to the child's African view, as exemplified in the Akan illustration. Meaning that the child also needs a holistic education: the mind–intellectual knowledge of God;

soul–spiritual education that enriches their heart to please God and desire to be a responsible member of the community, and then the body needs knowledge of self and physical health. It also has major implications to the relationships (community–family) that the child needs to grow to maturity. Proverbs 127:3 states, '[c]hildren are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him'. For instance, Munyon (2017:8) observed that God enabled Adam and Eve (family) to bear children who were like themselves in composition (Gn 5:3). There is a common truth that children inherit tendencies to sin from the parents, as in David's case (Ps 51:5). Besides that, Paul in his address to the Areopagus in Athens providing the background for engaging with the concepts of the 'unknown god' states, 'from one man he made every nation' (Ac 17:26), which means that the components of humankind from Adam are inherited by the rest of humanity, including sinful nature. Thus, a child is inherently sinful until they confess Christ at the knowledge of his salvation gift.

The parents have a responsibility towards the child. Proverbs 22: 6 states, '[s]tart children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it'. Besides that, Ephesians 6:4 admonishes fathers not to exasperate their children; instead, to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. This stands to the words of Jesus when the disciples looked down on the children and wanted to hinder them from going to Jesus; Jesus emphasised the necessity of letting children go to him for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to children (Lk 18:16; Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14). Three things stand out in these verses that relate to the African conception of a person (child, not equated to the biblical concept), such as individuality of the child, the community in which the child grows (family aka parents and those surrounding the children, as in the example of the disciples) have a responsibility towards child training, upbringing and care. However, it must be noted that child upbringing in most African concepts differs from one culture to the other. For example, in most culture, boys and girls are brought up differently. This is significant to the knowledge that children can be saved, and that they can inherit the Kingdom of God, and that parents (community) have a responsibility to start them off in the ways of the Lord.

### The place of duties of a child

Paul admonishes the child (son) to submit to the father (1 Cor 15:28). This does not mean that the child (son) is inferior to the father but that each member's role in the family is for all family members' benefit in obedience to God. And by implication we argue that the same apply to the father–daughter relationship and son–mother relationship. Also, the child is commanded to obey his or her parents in the Lord, for that is right, and this is the first commandment with a promise that they may live long in the world (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20; Dt 28:62). Children have a responsibility and duty to obey their parents in the Lord, and the reward is long life – meaning that they will inherit the Kingdom of God. It is a reality and obligation to understand children's place in our

communities to create a sense of everyday life for God's common good and glory. Parents have the responsibility to bringing up their children in the Lord in the context of various cultural and social factors.

### Contemporary significance of the theology of childhood in Africa

Childhood theology, therefore, needs to consider the child from the perspective that God views the child – the one created in the image of God. Although a child is created in God's image, they inherited the sinful nature of their forefathers (Adam and Eve), passed down through generations. Childhood theology should be mission oriented. The child's sinful tendency can be tamed, taught and saved through the parents' instruction, the saving grace of our Lord, and continuous recognition of the rights and the place of the children in our societies and the Kingdom of God. The education that nurtures the child needs to be holistic is penetrating the child's heart, mind, body and soul for a compelling sense of belonging to the communities they live in and in the body of Christ and the future they look forward to in Heaven. Childhood theology needs to consider the ethics of care and nurture, hospitality and create deliberative spaces to allow the child to grow in the ways of the Lord. Childhood theology thus needs to consider every child's individuality and uniqueness to maximise their potentials to the glory of God. Childhood theology should not just be a one-time occurrence but should be dynamic and a growing practice that reflects the child's everyday way of life.

Doing childhood theology in Africa requires a renewed understanding of the community that considers the child's humanity, not only to the particular ethnic, tribe or community of biological and national orientation but the humanity of every individual child irrespective of where they are coming from. For the world and the fullness thereof is the Lord's. A confined understanding of community will limit how children will view those who are different from all indications. The African community (church) needs to reposition the child in the centre of the church ministry without neglecting the other aspects of adult ministries. The church in Africa needs to rethink childhood theology in terms of rights and responsibilities and not just in the traditional African thought (of the child as a semi-human being at the bottom of the hierarchy) but as an individual created in the image of God and who is capable of inheriting the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the church should nurture and educate children holistically to grow spiritually, socially, physically and morally.

The church (as a community) needs to protect the child from the various violations faced by the children in Africa today, such as rape, child trafficking, child abuse, parental neglect, pornography, amongst others. This will only be possible when church leaders engage in engendering sound childhood theology that sees the children as Christ saw and valued

them. More emphasis and resources should be allocated to children's ministry.

### Contemporary significance of the theology of childhood towards transformative pedagogy

What does the above imply for child educators? First of all, teachers should be aware of learners' socio-cultural frameworks because this influences how children learn and how the teachers make choices of teaching approaches to include all children. For the educators to do so, they have to enter the student's mind-world and extend their role as facilitators of learning, who rightly acknowledges learners' potentialities in the learning spaces. Often, educators focus on covering the curriculum and conveying knowledge, forgetting that the children's training comprises much more than just intellectual growth. However, it is holistic because it develops the spiritual, physical, mental, emotional and practical skills children require to function in a society. Teaching children to pass the examination and complete the curriculum is merely teaching similar to what Paulo Freire identifies as the 'banking system' – making deposits of knowledge. This implies that when students are assessed, they can give the teacher what they have learned just as they were taught.

Similarly, an individual can draw from the ATM what they have put into their account. So, in most cases, we teach children as those with empty slates – 'a tabula rasa' (Duschinsky 2012:509). In return to what we have taught them, teachers often want the children to give back exactly as they have been taught without processing the knowledge to fit their context. It can stem into perceiving children as passive non-living things without life or abilities to act and think, so their agency as humans is ignored; instead, children are human beings with the God-given ability that needs to be guided and led out. Children require functional relationships (De Witt 2016:246–247) to inform teachers' pedagogical encounters to lead out their potentials. In contrast, in order to call ourselves 'educators' and pedagogues, we need to consider the prospects of acting with children instead of on them. Understanding childhood theology provides nuances that call for pedagogical practicalities that view the child as God's creation. That is, one who has potential for speech and thought, who values relationships and learning in other communities, has cultural values and faith, and has the potential to become other than they are. Teachers' pedagogical approaches should value education as caring, transformative and relational, and is a sacred call to nurture God's creation (the child) to become what God wants them to be. Education distinct from schooling is a deliberate process of designing and learning to encourage and transform the child's development. It is an intentional act of living, socialisation process (Dewey 1963; De Witt 2016:250; Pazmiño 2008).

### Conclusion

Childhood theology has been a neglected area of study, especially in Africa. The African child matter to God for



Christ recognised their importance in the Kingdom of God. It is imperative that begin childhood theology in Africa reflects on the notion of community as a defining denominator for values and practice for the African child. However, the community's idea needs to be disrupted and reconceptualised to include all the narrow understanding of the society in the traditional African sense. This is because globalisation and colonisation contributed to transformative movements that have opened African borders to extend their sense of community to include all humanity, in which case a community of believers from all works of life. This way of thinking expands child theology to notions of care, cosmopolitan hospitality and developing a church's universal concept towards all believers' priesthood. Childhood theology, therefore, should focus firstly on God, contextualised to the context where the child originates, and consider God's salvific plan to redeem all humankind. Childhood theology needs to encapsulate the child's rights in the community to the Christian belief and defines the child's responsibility to God, community (the church as God's people) and God's creation.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

J.A.C. was involved in the conceptualisation and resources, and N.H.C. contributed to editing, resources and writing.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without any direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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