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### **Reading for Inclusion: The Girl from Galilee (Luke 8:40-56)**

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This year marks the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It both heartens and grieves me that the United States now remains the only of the 193 member nations of the UN to have *not* ratified this Convention. We have, as of October, finally been surpassed even by Somalia, of whose recent ratification the directors of both UNICEF and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child praised as “a significant and very welcome step” toward realizing the rights of the country’s 6.5 million children.

Somalia today has one of the highest under-five mortality rates in the world, alarming malnutrition rates, and very high levels of violence affecting children. However, children in the United States are not without challenges of their own. According to an August 2016 report of the *Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development*, more than 20% of American children live in poverty.<sup>1</sup> The United States remains the only high-

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<sup>1</sup> Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development, CO2.2: Child Poverty ([http://www.oecd.org/els/CO\\_2\\_2\\_Child\\_Poverty.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/CO_2_2_Child_Poverty.pdf)) Accessed 13 March 2017.

income country not to grant paid maternity leave (an identified indicator in child health statistics), and the only country in the world that sentences offenders under the age of 18 to life in prison without parole—which the Convention opposes. To say nothing of the growing concern around protecting children from trafficking, prostitution, pornography, and recruitment in armed conflict—all optional protocols that the convention addresses.

In light of the sobering status of children in the United States, this paper offers a biblical reading with emphasis on the experiences of healing and being made whole that Jesus extends to a young girl from Galilee as recorded in Luke 8:40-56. Although such a reading does not offer any direct solutions for the problem of child poverty, it intends to offer a starting place. Specifically, this child-centered reading suggests that true wholeness, such as Jesus offers to the girl from Galilee, is only possible when each child is treated as Jesus treats this girl—as a full person and unique individual within a community, and as such, when such children are granted the full protection of all their human rights.

*First, a word about the girl as a “child”...*

The narrator tells us that Jairus’ daughter is “about twelve years old” (v. 42). Roman law permitted girls to marry at the age of twelve<sup>2</sup> and evidence suggests that the law was somewhat lenient in this respect, allowing earlier marriage for a variety of social and moral considerations.<sup>3</sup> Such early marriage was particularly prominent among elite families for the purposes of political matchmaking and the guarantee of legitimate heirs.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Harlow, “Family Relationships” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Berg Press, 2010) 17; Rawson, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Lauren Caldwell, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 116.

<sup>4</sup> Caldwell, 123.

with this notable exception, information gathered from analyses of funerary inscriptions and other extant evidence, suggests an average age of marriage among common girls well after puberty.<sup>5</sup> P.R.C. Weaver estimates “the *average* age gap between first husband and first wife is at least ten years, probably more,” with girls marrying between 15-20 years old and boys, on average, ten years later than that.<sup>6</sup> This age corresponds with the prime years of childbirth. With regards to the marriage as a vehicle for offspring, Macrobius observes that girls typically begin menstruation around fourteen years of age<sup>7</sup> and Roman law under Augustus sets the required age for first childbirth at 20 years.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, rather than assign twelve as the blanket age at which a girl became an adult in first-century Mediterranean society, the consideration of her actual marital state among other social factors provides a more nuanced perspective.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to boys whose transition to adulthood was frequently marked with a series of public rituals, “There was no comparable civic rite of passage for girls, as they never became full citizens in the political sense of voting and standing for office, and they were never eligible for military service.”<sup>10</sup> In place of a public transition to citizenship, a girl publicly attained adulthood

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<sup>5</sup> Eve D’Ambra, *Roman Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 46. Cf. also Robert Garland, “Children in Athenian Religion,” in in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 214; Harlow, “Family Relationships,” 17; Janette McWilliam, “The Socialization of Roman Children,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, edited by Judith Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 273; P.R.C. Weaver, “Children of Freedmen (and Freedwomen)” in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, edited by Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 175.

<sup>6</sup> P.R.C. Weaver, “Children of Freedmen (and Freedwomen),” in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 176.

<sup>7</sup> Macrobius, *In somn.* I.6.71 cited in Caldwell, 125.

<sup>8</sup> *Tit. Ulp.* 15-18, cited in Caldwell, 125-126.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chapter 1 on definitions of childhood.

<sup>10</sup> Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships,” 27-28.

through marriage and childbearing.<sup>11</sup> When a girl married, she left her childhood, along with her paternal family, behind and joined the household (οἶκος) of her husband. By narrating the girl in this textual unit as residing in the home of her father (cf. Lk 8:41, 49, 51), the narrator seems to understand her as not yet married. Thus, with respect to her status in the household, she remains a child.

The girl's status as child is further confirmed textually when the narrator refers to her as a "child" (ἡ παῖς) twice in v. 51. And, again, in the voice of Jesus' character, calling out, "Child, get up!" (v. 54). Although it could be argued that the noun παῖς does not categorically refer to non-adult children in the ancient world, particularly with regard to cases in which it is used as a diminutive for servants or slaves, the use of the term within this unit seems clear. The girl's stated age, which Luke moves to the forefront of the story relative to the other synoptic accounts, thus giving greater emphasis, combined with the overall context of her presence in her father's home confirm her social experience as that of a non-adult child. As such, while one must be careful to acknowledge that no two children are the same, this girl's experience can be read as *an* experience of divine inclusion of a child—indeed, even a paradigmatic experience that suggests similar acceptance for children across time and place.

*What, then, does such inclusion entail?*

A key theme throughout Luke's gospel account is *inclusion*. Specifically, Luke

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<sup>11</sup> Harlow, "Family Relationships," 17; cf. also D'Ambra, who describes this transition vividly as a still liminal time, despite the definitive moment of marriage: "The adolescent girl, often represented in the visual arts as part child, part woman on the brink of growing up, was domesticated by marriage" (12); This transition was often marked by a ritual sacrifice of the girl's childhood dolls, cf. Harlow, "Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood," 332, 334-335.

narrates a radical inclusion through which people across social and economic lines experience wholeness both personally and within community on account of the gracious acts of God through Jesus. For her part, the Galilean girl is subsumed into God's grace both in relation to her immediate experience of well-being (through resuscitation) and her broader experience of community (through faith).

### 1. Immediate Well-being

At the most basic level, the twelve-year-old girl in her father's house is included in Jesus' ministry as a recipient of his healing power.

In its present form, the Lukan author uses this girl's healing as a frame around which the healing of a hemorrhaging woman unfolds. These separate miracle accounts were likely woven together by the Markan and Lukan authors due to topical similarity and/or literary effect.<sup>12</sup> In either case, the result of this fusion has often been either an adult-centric focus on the healing of the hemorrhaging woman as the central miracle in this unit or a margining of feminine themes without concentrated attention to the girl as child.<sup>13</sup>

From a child-centered perspective, the narrative interruption of the girl's healing during which Jesus attends to the needs of an adult before those of a child could raise cause for concern. In John's gospel account, Martha objects to Jesus' delay in coming to her brother Lazarus when he was dying, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). Similarly, in Luke's account, as Jesus is speaking to the hemorrhaging woman, "someone came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Doubleday: New York, 1970) 743.

<sup>13</sup> Such emphasis is seen in the commentary title given to the unit, e.g. "The Cure of the Woman With a Hemorrhage" (Fitzmeyer, 742),

dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer” (Lk 8:49).

Typically the delay in both instances is interpreted as an opportunity to display Jesus’ power over death. However, in the United States the whims of adults are too often put above the needs of children in policy-making and care provisions. For this reason the United States is unwilling as a country even to affirm the United Nation’s convention on the rights of a child lest such a protections potentially impede the rights of an adult parent, and congress debates the merits of providing free and reduced school lunches in the shadows of rising military spending. In this context, it would be irresponsible to not at least consider the danger of reading Jesus’ actions as following a similar pattern of preferencing the wants and needs of an adult over and against the urgent illness of a dying girl.<sup>14</sup>

Such a reading implies a hierarchy of needs in which the adult woman’s healing is put first. However, in light of the overarching emphasis on divine inclusion both in this textual unit and in the larger narrative, I resist such a hierarchy. As humans, we tend to act as though everything in our world must be zero-sum, such that if Jesus helps one person another person is necessarily neglected. However, throughout Scripture God consistently chooses a different path. God doesn’t operate with a zero-sum. Indeed, this is why in John’s gospel account Martha follows up her objection to Jesus’ tardiness with the confession, “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask” (John 11:22).

In this unit, the urgency of *both* individuals—the girl and the woman—is downplayed by Jesus, with the narrative effect of giving the impression that regardless of chronological order, *neither one* is given priority with regards to Jesus’ attention. As alluded

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<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge such a connection has never been made, no doubt in large part to the failure of the scholarly community to consider the Galilean girl independently in a concentrated way. I make this connection here only to acknowledge and hopefully avoid the potential harm to children were this text to be read in such a light.

to above, the separate healings are sandwiched by the Lukan author and his Markan source. This literary connection serves to draw a clear connection between Jesus' acts of healing and inclusion that return both the girl and the woman to wholeness.

The chronology of the narrative necessitates that one person's needs are met first; however, the narrator uses this chronology to demonstrate that chronological time no longer dominates in Jesus' Kingdom. Bovon explains, "Luke emphasizes, almost in Pauline fashion but with Johannine accents, that it is never too late for God, because God uses even situations in which—humanly speaking—everything is far too late, in order to reveal the glory of his Son."<sup>15</sup>

God works in *kairos*, rather than *chronos*, time in such a way that brings relief in the current moment, while at the same time always treating the moment as a larger whole. Such a *kairos* orientation looks both before and after the moment to bring about God's restorative grace. Thus, Jesus' attention to the woman and the girl does not need to be an either/or in terms of restoration or inclusion. Rather, it is a both/and through which Jesus brings the hope of God's eschatological Kingdom into the present, embodied in the paired vulnerable persons of a suffering woman and a young girl.

Within this *kairos* time, the young girl's experience of Jesus' power and thus God's inclusion is thus heightened by the narrative comparison of her healing alongside that of a grown woman.<sup>16</sup> Despite their different assumed roles in their households and community,

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<sup>15</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 339.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the narrative links between these two healings, cf. Johnson, 143: "More than a mechanical sandwiching links the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the hemorrhaging woman. Both women are called 'daughter.' The girl is twelve years old, an age traditionally associated with menarche (cf. *Protoevangelium of James* 8:3); the woman has had a 'flow of blood' (obviously gynecological in origin) for twelve years... The situation of both

fraught with as they were with their respective experiences of vulnerability and marginalization, both women are received as *subjects* through Jesus' healing power of touch.

In the case of the woman, "She touched the fringe of his [Jesus'] clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped" (v. 44). In the case of the girl, "Jesus took her by the hand and called out, 'Child, get up!' Her spirit returned, and she got up at once" (vv. 54-55). The woman, both because of her status and the degree of her illness (the girl being already dead), is able to approach Jesus more directly. However, the story does not let the girl's position (even in death!) define her into passivity.<sup>17</sup> Jesus does not simply touch the hem of her garment and declare to the father that his daughter is well; rather, Jesus takes the girl *by the hand* and demands action *of her*: "Child, get up!" (v. 54).

In both instances, through the emphasis on touch "Luke stresses the personal character of the healings."<sup>18</sup> The experiences of these two people are not merely paradigmatic of Jesus' healing power, as in summary statements at other points of Luke's narrative, but rather, reflect a deeper and personal connection that Jesus extends to each one of them. Bovon reflects,

Jesus the wonder-worker did not play the only significant role. Both the women [*sic.*] are relevant, especially in their relationship with Jesus. Sociologically, the account does not concern merely the crescendo from healing to resurrection, but

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seems hopeless...[Moreover,] The stories are joined most explicitly by the healing power of Jesus and the saving response of faith."

<sup>17</sup> It has been noted that even before her death, "[t]he sick girl does not appear, but rather her father" (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 335); however, neither should this be taken as indicative of her status as a child, so much as an indication of how sick she already was such that she was unable to approach Jesus, as the hemorrhaging woman does, on her own. For parallels of adults or people of uncertain age whose requests are likewise brought by a representative cf. Lk 4:40; 5:17-26; 7:1-10 and those approached directly by Jesus 6:8-10; 7:11-17; 7:21; 8:26-33; 13:10-13; 14:1-6.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, 143.



also Jesus' acceptance of two women, that is, their acceptance by the early Christian community.<sup>19</sup>

Bovon fails to recognize in this the significance of the girl's inclusion, not simply as a female, but as a child, referring to both characters at this point as "women," despite his acknowledgment of the recipient of the latter miracle as a child in his more text-critical remarks.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, he correctly notes the significance of this passage for establishing the inclusion of these characters, and by extension their demographic groups, within the Kingdom of God and later the early Christian community.

This inclusion can be further seen in Luke's description of Jesus as having taken the girl "by the hand," an expression which, while used more frequently by Mark and in the LXX, is used with reference to healing by the Lukan author only in this unit. Uniquely, then, among his healing narratives, Luke uses the expression "by the hand" to link the girl's experience to that of the people of Israel, whom God is spoken of as taking by the hand (cf. Isa 41:13; 42:6; Ps 73:23).<sup>21</sup> In this way, the girl's clear inclusion as a child of Israel and thus a child of God is affirmed. At only twelve-years of age, she is just as much a part of God's salvation as anyone else.

## 2. Communal Well Being

Moreover, God's gracious act for this child is not limited to a single moment. Still more profoundly, the woman and the child in this narrative are linked by the saving effect

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<sup>19</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 335.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. also Bovon, *Luke 1*, 336: "If one is aware of the extent to which the vocabulary of resurrection was used in the early Church to describe Christian existence, could one not see in the daughter of Jairus the experience of young Christian women?" in contrast to Bovon, *Luke 1*, 334, 337, and 340-341 (esp. fn 61).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 340; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 749.

of faith. To the woman Jesus comforts, “Daughter, your faith (πίστις) has made you well (σέσωκέν σε); go in peace” (8:48). To the girl’s father, Jesus commands, “Only believe and she will be saved” (μόνον πίστεθσον, και σωθήσεται, 8:50). Although the NRSV translates each phrase with different words, the same roots are present for each in Greek—πίστις can be rendered as either faith or belief and σώζω comprehensively conveys the action of making one well and salvation, terms which were linked in early Christian understanding. Fitzmyer notes, “In the Gospel, ‘salvation’ often denotes deliverance from such evils as sickness, infirmity, or sin; and its relation to ‘faith’ (*pistis*) is often noted (e.g. 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19).”<sup>22</sup>

Both the woman and the girl experience such deliverance as subjects of Jesus’ healing in 8:40-56. So, Johnson notes, they conclude a longer sequence of miracle stories in Luke 7-8, in which “Luke has emphasized the call and saving of the outcast.”<sup>23</sup> Seeing, then, the two female characters at the center of this narrative, Johnson concludes, “Finally, these two women [*sic.*] joined by the isolation of sickness, death and impurity, are addressed as daughter, and saved by faith (8:40-56).”<sup>24</sup> Like Bovon, when he moves from textual analysis to a more theological reflection, Johnson inadvertently falls into an adultist treatment of both characters as women—presumably, grown. Nevertheless, perhaps in part because of this lapse, Johnson seems to move beyond for a moment the broader contemporary question of whether a child can have faith, to envision both characters as representative of saving faith.

Nevertheless, Johnson does not specifically name whose faith saves each character.

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<sup>22</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, 143.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, 144.

Indeed, on first reading, it appears as though the girl's salvation may be dependent upon her father's faith in v. 50 since his imperative to have faith is addressed to Jairus.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the broader context of faith and salvation as they are described in Luke's narrative suggests another possible reading.

Faith and salvation in Luke's gospel are not about intellectual affirmations, nor are they preceded by human initiative. Rather, they are linked by the common experience of hearing the word of God and responding. Take, for example, the woman who "stood behind him [Jesus] at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her faith. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment" (Lk 7:38). Although this woman never speaks once, Jesus says to her, "Your faith (πίστις) has saved you (σέσωκέν σε); go in peace" (7:50). These are the same words that he speaks to the hemorrhaging woman in 8:48. Yet, both women have *already* experienced the magnitude of God's grace *before* Jesus announces their salvation. Jesus is acting in *kairos* time.

In the first case, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the woman is acting with great love *because* "her sins, which were many, have been forgiven" (7:57). In the case of the second woman, "immediately her hemorrhage stopped" (8:44) before she is even acknowledged by Jesus. The reader is to understand, therefore, that neither of these women have contributed to their own salvation any more than the passive child lying dead in her father's home.

Rather, in his explanation of the parable of the sower, which transects these two accounts, Jesus makes clear that salvation (8:11) belongs to "the ones who, when they hear

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<sup>25</sup> The ambiguity of the Greek leaves possible (but unlikely) the messenger from Jairus' house as an alternative object of Jesus' command. The context, however, seems to suggest the father. In any case, the girl who is not present at the scene does not make sense either contextually or grammatically as the subject of Jesus' imperative.

the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (8:15). As such, faith, or more accurately translated, faithfulness, remains about each person’s openness to the movement of God in their life. In the words of the Lukan author, it is to respond with open ears and obedient action to the word of God.<sup>26</sup> The Galilean girl in this unit embodies her faith by resting her hand in the palm of Jesus as he guides her up.

Thus, while on first reading it may appear as though the girl’s salvation is dependent upon her father’s faith, in terms of faithful openness she actually outperforms her father Jairus in Luke’s account. In contrast to Mark’s present imperative, “Do not fear, only believe (πίστευε)” (Mk 5:36), which could imply a continuation of the faith that Jairus already has, Luke’s use of the aorist πίστευσον suggests that Jairus does not already have faith. Nor does the narrative give any reason to believe that Jairus’ state of belief changes prior to his daughter’s healing. In fact, the ambiguity of the Greek, which does not distinguish the mourners from Jairus and his family in vv. 52-53 in terms of who was “weeping and wailing” for the girl and “laughed at” Jesus “knowing that she was dead,” may actively suggest that Jairus *does not* believe before Jesus heals his daughter.

In contrast, when Jesus “calls out” to the girl (v. 54) she responds by getting up “at once” (v. 55). In its most basic formula, this child, despite the doubts of her father and those in his household, hears the word of God—through Jesus’ call—and obeys it. Even when the narrative diminishes her role, failing to either grant voice or name to this child who responds to Jesus’ call, her single-minded faithfulness shines through.

In their interpretation of this same sequence of events in Mark’s account, Horn and Martens note that despite her silence, this child, like the other children in Mark’s healings

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this as the qualification of discipleship and the role of children in fulfilling it, cf. Chapters 3 and 4 of this work; Cf. also Johnson, 143.

whom they describe, accepts Jesus' healing. Consequently, they reason,

Although the children are presented as silent in each of these cases [including that of Jairus' daughter, named above], their silence should not be read as indicating indifference. Their silent acceptance of healing is a lesson to the adult readers and hearers. To accept Jesus is to accept divine intervention as it might occur. This may be the model of receiving the kingdom like a child: the child's silence acknowledges the true nature of Jesus and demonstrates faith that he will heal the one who needs healing.<sup>27</sup>

The efficacy of the girl's resuscitation gives silent testimony to her inclusion in the saving power of Jesus through her faith. Or, to put it more simply, this Galilean girl, like the woman whom Jesus heals of a hemorrhage earlier in the same account, experiences *wholeness* as a child of God through her acts of hearing and responding to the Gospel,

Furthermore, this wholeness further extends to the inclusion of both the girl and the woman in their communities.<sup>28</sup> In the first-century, whether a person was pagan or Jewish, there existed no separation between religious and secular life. Therefore, the woman, who had been ceremonially unclean due to her hemorrhage for twelve years, had been excluded from both religious and community life due to this ailment. Likewise, the child, in so much as she was considered to be a part of God's covenant with Israel, was also considered to be a part of the corpus of the community. To be restored to life in one sphere was to be restored to life in the other. Thus, the girl's salvation from her death causing illness indicates, at the same time, her inclusion both among her family and community as well as among the broader people of God (of whom, as a daughter of Israel, she would have also

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<sup>27</sup> Horn & Martens, 263.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Johnson, 143: "In both stories, we notice, the person who is saved is restored to community. The girl is returned to her family. More impressive still is the woman with the hemorrhage who for twelve years was excluded from the common life of the people because of purity regulations."

previously been a part).

Applied further, to the early Christian context of Luke's presumed readers, Bovon adds, "The significance of πιστεύω ("to believe") and σώζω ("to save") are initially limited to the case of the girl who has died, but the reader sees beyond this to understand that it also means everyone's death and resurrection, and the Christian faith as such."<sup>29</sup> Such an inclusion both implicitly links the belief and salvation to the girl herself (rather than her father) and, from there, suggests that the faith of this child indeed models a response for all Christians in light of Christian teachings about a shared death and resurrection with Christ. The claim, while theologically significant in its own right, from a child-centered perspective makes visible the continuity of place for children across Jewish and Christian receptions of Luke's narrative as *included* and *made well*, indeed, *saved* as individuals among all of God's children.

Here we encounter the *kairos* time once more, as Jesus' action in time reaches across time to bring both the initial recipients of his grace, and through them, their whole communities to wholeness and completion. The girl's salvation from her death causing illness indicates, at the same time, her inclusion among her family and community in time, as well as among the broader people of God across time.

Once again, comparing this girl's experience to that of the male youth revived in Nain, we then see the thread of wide-sweeping inclusion of the young continue to expand across Luke's narrative. This narrative strand follows suit with the broader theme of inclusion of the outcast, and, indeed, reversal of fortunes in Luke's narrative. With regard to such inclusion in both resuscitation narratives, Tannehill notes,

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<sup>29</sup> Bovon, *Luke 1*, 340.

The Lukan audience would not only find hope and healing and resurrection in these stories but also encouragement to keep their communities open to contrasting sorts of people. A man and a woman, the former prominent in Jewish society, the latter excluded from the temple and a source of pollution to others, are accepted and helped by Jesus. Therefore, they must also be accepted in the community of Jesus' followers.<sup>30</sup>

These resuscitations performed respectively in Nain and Galilee, testify to a broader theme of acceptance among Jesus' community of followers. However, while Tannehill sees such acceptance drawn primarily in relation to gender and class, the application of a child-centered lens to both the same narrative units opens the possibility for a reading that also includes the acceptance of all people—child or adult—among the community of Jesus' followers.

Indeed, the case of the young girl and her father, Jairus, make clear that the quality of one's relationship with Jesus is in no way dependent upon physical maturity or age.

*A final word, returning us to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child...*

The more I have engaged with child-centered readings of the Bible, and through them, the interdisciplinary field called Childhood Studies, the more I am convinced of the active agency of children that I believe is characterized by the Galilean girl's response to Jesus in Luke's account. Children do not simply need healing, care, and protection from the adults in their lives and their communities, as though we are dolling out candy to Trick-or-Treaters. Children are *entitled* as children of God, human *subjects* to the full rights of personhood, including participation—bringing their own voices and agency to the table. Even, and perhaps especially, when to do so requires a reconfiguration of the rights and

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<sup>30</sup> Tannehill, 150-151.

entitlements that we as adults may have previously taken for granted or advantage of in our limited, *chronos* interaction with the world.

Journalist Karen Attiah, writing on the United State's recalcitrance in ratifying the Convention on Children's Rights poignantly observes, "opponents of the CRC [Convention on Children's Rights] overlook that protections for the rights of children are *human rights*. Protections of children with disabilities are protections for people with disabilities. Ending discrimination against children is ending discrimination against people. Ensuring paid parental leave, access to pre- and post-natal health care for women has been linked to better health outcomes for children and parents."<sup>31</sup> I could not agree more. But, Attiah's secular analysis of the injustice necessarily stops at the finite. My hope is that engaging in this conversation through the lens of a child-centered reading of scripture texts such as Luke 8:50-56 will introduce the element of the *infinite*.

Christians must engage with the rights of children not only as fellow human beings, but as fellow inheritors of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, if we are to follow the eschatology laid out for us in Luke's narrative, such kinship cannot be reserved for a faraway future outside of this world. Rather, the Lukan narrative insists that through his acts of restoration and inclusion, Jesus is bringing God's Kingdom to earth. As such, contemporary Christians are called to respond with the same active faith as the Galilean girl, hearing the word of God and believing.

In American society, there remains a hierarchy of needs. For as much as children are cooed after and coddled; for as much as their illnesses are, at times, even mourned more

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<sup>31</sup> Karen Attiah, "Why Won't the US Ratify the UN's Child Rights Treaty?" in *Washington Post* (21 November 2014) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/11/21/why-wont-the-u-s-ratify-the-u-n-s-child-rights-treaty/>.



than similar suffering of adults who have lived full lives, children remain at the bottom of the hierarchy. Children in American culture, even more so than in the ancient Mediterranean culture in which a twelve-year-old girl would have actively participated in the maintenance and upkeep of her household, are viewed as needy and dependent. As such, it is easy for us to hesitate to pass a convention on rights that views children as actively participating in their own being. However, to fail to do so is to downplay not only the abilities of children, but also their personhood—and, by extension, for Christians, their inclusion as full members with us adult Christians in the body of Christ. For Luke's text makes clear that this body—this household, as Luke describes it—is not dependent upon any human set of particularities. Rather, God in the person of Jesus has come into our world to extend grace and healing to each one of us, regardless of age or ability, but by sheer virtue of God's love.