

Marsha Snulligan Haney\*

## INTRODUCING THE THEME

To acknowledge the complexity of issues facing persons, cultures, and societies in our rapidly changing world is obvious. However, what is not so apparent is specificity related to the most vulnerable members of society during times of transition—the children and youth. The fact of belonging to a minority group (children) within a dominant adult culture is a hermeneutical reality requiring reflection and articulation. One of the major discoveries in the field of faith-based initiatives in the last decade is the critical invisibility of children as a subject of the religious academy.

In the Lucan account recorded in Acts 16, the narration is Christ's disciples going to a prayer service and their encounter with a young (servant) girl. She was possessed of a spirit; it was impossible to make money for her owners. The young girl followed Paul and the disciples for many days, identifying them as servants of the most High God. Paul exorcised the spirit within her, and immediately it left her. When her owners became aware that their means for making money was gone, they grabbed Paul and Silas, dragging them before the magistrate, but we hear nothing else about the girl.

What happened to her physically and emotionally? Were the values that caused her predicament in the first place ever addressed? Did she experience salvation as wholeness and liberation? While this particular passage focused on the "girl-child," a penetrating glance into Hebrew Scriptures, such as

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those passages that speak of Ishmael, raised similar concerns about the communal, religious, and social care of the “boy-child.” Although there is direct biblical evidence linking his final outcome to a greater promise fulfilled, too often the figure of the child is underrepresented in the academic circles where applying theories and models of learning in religious studies is becoming more and more crucial. Theological and religious education is mandated to serve as a pathway of exploring the transitions and transformations of children as human persons, especially in the context of capitalism.

Maintaining that divine (God’s) revelation is known not only in Scripture, but also through human efforts that situate the love ethos into practice, each contributing author expands our understanding of the personal, social, and cultural realities of twenty-first century children. The insights presented are deeply aware that theological education has to express itself in everyday living if it is to be truly authentic. Our intent is three-fold.

- To force the reader to reconsider carefully the urgent missiological question—the need for theology, social sciences and strategic solutions to bear upon the threats and opportunities facing children in human living;
- To uncover our own assumptions in light of personal, sociological, and pastoral analysis of the post-modern challenges related to children; and
- To encourage an interdisciplinary approach in addressing the many facets of the human experience of children through an examination of specific meanings and dynamics provided by the various arenas within theological education.



An urgent question for Christian missiology in North America today is the massive changes that transformed modernity and shifted children from the center of religious concern to the margin. However, the need of theological insights to impact the lives of children is not simply a North American phenomenon. In viewing the continuing ethnic, cultural, and religious conflicts in today's world, this introduction to the theme "Persons, Culture and Society: The Challenges of Transition and Transformation" includes a photographic visual culture of issues of continuity and change facing children around the globe.

The term visual culture has become a popular phrase in scholarship and its relevance for the study of religion is significant. Presenting the international dimension of caring for children throughout the world, we see with clarity that what is true of poetry is also true of visual culture: "...[it] calls us to pay more attention to our lives: birth and death and love and the ordinary things that people do. If we do that, we are led to something greater than ourselves."<sup>1</sup> We seek to help religious people (not just Christians, because children are not a Jewish, or Muslim or Christian issue, but a human issue) to discern their mission among children and youth and to act with confidence and hope in a broken world.

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<sup>1</sup>Gayle Boss, "Alert Enough to Receive: An Interview with Kathleen Norris," *The Other Side: Strength for the Journey* 38 (September/October 2002): 36.







