

James M.M. Francis. *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament*. Religions and Discourse, no. 17. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006. Pp. 346. ISBN: 3-03910-020-3. \$68.95 USD, paper.

1. Within the last two decades research on children in classical and late antiquity has flourished. During the last ten years much important work has also been done on the biblical and the early Christian material. A relatively neglected field has, however, been the use of childhood in a metaphorical sense. It is for this neglect that Francis' book aims to compensate.
2. The book consists of an introduction, eight chapters dealing with a variety of ancient sources, and a concluding discussion. The introduction takes up issues about the historical relationships between childhood metaphors, attitudes towards children, and the treatment of children. Chapters 1 and 2 present attitudes and metaphors within a Greco-Roman context, in which children frequently signify weakness and immaturity (25-60), and within Judaism, in which Israel is often viewed as God's child and servant (61-96). In chapter 3 Francis turns to the New Testament and especially to Jesus' own use of childhood metaphors; in Francis' opinion Jesus never speaks of childhood in a pejorative way (97-146). Chapter 4 (147-68) deals with the individual gospels, and Francis's conclusion is that they preserve features distinctive of Jesus' usage, for example of childhood metaphors furthering care for the weak and a view of the church as a family of God (with Jesus as God's Son), though with emphases differing according to the theological interests of each gospel.
3. In chapter 5 (169-215) Francis discusses the childhood metaphors of some of Paul's letters and tries to show how his language serves partly to mark boundaries vis-à-vis the outside world and partly to enhance the Christian experience of belonging to God and to the church. A brief chapter deals with Hebrews (217-30) and a lengthy one with 1 Peter (231-64); Francis sees some parallels with Paul in the case of the former and with Matthew as concerns the latter. Chapter 8 (265-82) focuses on the NT infancy narratives and how ideas about childhood inform their thinking about Christology; somewhat surprisingly, John 2:1-11 (Miracle at Cana) is counted among the infancy stories. Finally (283-96), Francis summarises his findings and points to central functions of the NT childhood metaphors: they serve to strengthen the idea of the church as God's child and servant, to invite one to discipleship and entry into the church and the kingdom of God, to inform the relationship between the church (God's household) and the social households to which the Christians belonged, and to give an "ikonik value" to Jesus himself as a child. The final part of the book (297-346) has a brief glossary of "child" terminology, a bibliography, a detailed subject index and an index of ancient references.
4. Francis's book has been an informative, but also demanding, and frequently frustrating, read. On the positive side, the book surveys a significant amount of ancient material, Greco-Roman and Jewish; it has many enlightening textual analyses, and it succeeds particularly in showing the importance of Old Testament and Jewish traditions for the interpretation of the NT childhood metaphors. It has some interesting discussion about the interplay between metaphorical usage of childhood and ancient attitudes and praxis towards children, and it often manages to show how childhood metaphors contribute to a NT writing's theology more generally, especially as concerns ecclesiology, e.g., in the case of 1 Peter.
5. On the problematic side is the overall presentation of the material: Francis does not render sufficient account of his structuring of the book or his selection of NT writings and passages. This makes it difficult to see where he is heading and whether this is a reasonable path to follow. For example, he uses almost twenty pages on 1 Cor 3:1ff, whereas he refers only in passing to

Philemon, a letter which abounds in the kind of language and rhetorical strategies Francis is dealing with. Furthermore, his collection of the ancient material, which is impressive in range, is heaped together in unsystematic fashion, in which Francis can turn from Gilgamesh and Plato to Paul and the Apocalypse of Peter on the same page, material spanning more than a millennium and from very different cultural contexts. Sometimes he cites ancient sources at a length (some of them in archaic English) without warrant. The non-Christian sources are rarely analysed with a view to their function within their own setting but are primarily used as ancillary material for the Christian texts, yet they are only occasionally actively employed in the analyses of those texts.

6. Methodologically, the book also appears confusing. For example, Francis does not at the outset clarify his understanding of the concept of metaphor, but throughout he refers to terms such as “root metaphors”, “images”, “simile”, development of metaphor, etc. Although he has a brief discussion of metaphor theory in the conclusions, this is of limited avail. In the chapter on Jesus, he also appears to vacillate between the historical Jesus and the redactional level. As for matters of textual criticism, Francis—with only a superficial discussion—chooses in 1 Thess 2:7b the reading *êpioi* (instead of *nêpioi*; now preferred by an increasing number of scholars) and in 2:17 takes *aporphanisthentes* simply to mean “bereft” (and not “made orphan”, as many scholars now hold); thus, he in both cases puts Paul on the “adult side” of the metaphor. There are good reasons, however, to interpret these passages in a way that depicts the apostle himself as a baby and an orphan, an understanding which will alter the understanding of Paul’s childhood metaphors in significant ways.

7. The language of the book is sometimes unnecessarily complicated, with long and windy sentences, and missing punctuation occasionally makes reading less easy. Francis converses with a considerable amount of scholarly literature, but with some of it being quite old, and with important contributions not being sufficiently consulted or missing, for example, P. Balla’s 2003 book on child-parent relations, D. von Allmen’s groundbreaking 1981 book on Paul’s family metaphors, and B. Rawson’s 2003 book on children and childhood in Roman Italy.

8. In sum, Francis’s book is in some respects illuminating and stimulating, but in other respects appears unfinished and essayistic, thus leaving much material and space for further study, systematization and reflection.

Reidar Aasgaard
Norwegian Bible Society
Oslo, Norway

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