



DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE, HISTORY OF IDEAS AND RELIGION

CHILD AS METAPHOR

A theological perspective on liberation and hope
in texts by Jürgen Moltmann

Katarina Johansson

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Supervisor: Martin Westerholm (HT24), Ola Sigurdson (VT24)

Abstract

Metaphors of the child are commonly used in theological contexts but rarely analyzed and problematised. This dissertation will examine how metaphors of the child are used and deconstruct the metaphors to identify the underlying discourse of children and childhood. The metaphor of humans as God's children will be analyzed to understand the images it holds of humans, children, and God. The reciprocal relationship between human and God means that these images intervene with each other. To exemplify the metaphor at use, I will analyze text from systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann. How does he use the metaphor of the child? When deconstructing the metaphor, what underlying images or presumptions about the child, or about human as child of God, can one find? Can it be said to be liberating and hopeful? I will raise critical questions about Moltmann's metaphorical use, through texts by Natalie Carnes and Lee Edelman. Stating that systematic theology concerning metaphors of the child, is of immense importance because it changes with time and context and concerns our understanding of children, humans, and God.

Child theology has been an evolving field through the last decades. I want to engage in the important and interesting discussion on how the child is placed in the middle of theology. Considering metaphors, I tend to show that context and personal experience affects how we both use and interpret a metaphor. Child as 'concept' or children's rights or place in society changes, the metaphor 'child of God', can be said to vary and then our image of God has changed with it.

The field of child theology is broad in topics but share a common feature of advocating for its own existence, while also thinking new theology. My dissertation will be a contribution to this dialog, showing the need of a systematic theology on children. Theology on children is an ongoing project where we can learn something unique from the perspective of the child and should be acknowledged as an integral aspect of theological discourse, applicable to all individuals, as opposed to being restricted or limited to minor group or a special interest.

Keywords: *Becoming, Being, Child, Childhood, Critical Childhood Studies, Child Theology, Hope, John Wall, Jürgen Moltmann, Liberation, Marcia Bunge, Metaphors, Motherhood, Natalie Carnes, Queer theology, Systematic theology.*

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1. Introduction.

Theological and Christian studies of children represent an intriguing and growing field of research. This dissertation aims to engage in the discussion on children in theology and more specifically how our understanding and conceptualization of what it means to be a child of God. How do our images of the child correlate to ourselves? And how this metaphor intervenes with our perception of God?

Theological discourse informed by feminist perspectives has demonstrated that the applicability of certain concepts and principles to individuals in general does not necessarily extend to women, daughters, and girls within a religious context with equal certainty. From a feminist perspective, the discussion is enriched by the introduction of new elements. It seems reasonable to posit that a deeper and fuller understanding of the reciprocal relationship between God and human beings may be achieved if the concept of human beings is broadened, not only to encompass female as well as male, but also to include children in addition to adult. Despite our commitment to inclusivity and the treatment of children as human beings, there remains a risk of losing sight of the child's perspective in theological discourse. It can be argued that to ensure an inclusive perspective, it is first necessary to consider the particularities of being a child in a theological sense. This will enable the identification of any implications, which can then be considered when including children and childhood in religious and theological language.

The Christian faith has engaged with the question of the nature of the triune God and the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. To describe the transcendent, we use metaphorical language to communicate concepts that lie beyond the realm of the visible. Two of the personalities are referred to as the Father and the Son. The values and connotations associated with good parenting are subjective, changing with time and context. This makes the question of metaphors of the child even more urgent to examine.

In this dissertation, I will make a systematic theological approach, exploring the metaphor of child and childhood as a framework for understanding a Christian person's relationship with God. An investigation will be conducted into the way these concepts are employed and understood within the context of theological discourse. The discussion will encompass

metaphoric language and an examination of its usage in theological contexts, with a view to establishing the theoretical background. To identify suitable source material for this study, I will consult the writings of a well-known and established theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. One of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. His published output is extensive as he continued to teach, write, and engage in theological discourse until his passing in May 2024. Moltmann produced a significant body of work on a range of theological topics. One of the texts that has piqued my interest is an article based on a lecture, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”.¹ The text employs the metaphor of children to explain the particularity of being a child of God.

Child theology is theology *about* children, *for* children and *with* children. When reading and engaging in the field of child theology, one thing strikes me. Though the field stretches systematic, to practical, historical, and ecclesiological theology – a discussion about *why* we need to include children in the theological discourse, and argument *for* such theology. I like to engage in the field and in this important discussion – by showing how metaphors of the child are linked to our understanding of God and self and how the underlying characteristics associated with the child varies tremendously. That the metaphors of children also impact theology on the trinity. Since thoughts on childhood and parenting change with time and society, child theology needs to change with them. Since theology on the trinity is always in the center of a systematic theological discourse, so is the theology of the child.

1.1. Purpose.

This dissertation aims to examine the use of children and childhood as metaphors in theological discourse. It is proposed that there is a correlation between our conceptualization of children and the formation of metaphors. When such metaphors are employed in theological language, they become a distinct entity, as evidenced using terms such as 'we are God's children' to bridge the gap between humans and the divine. Subsequently, the metaphor imparts substantial characteristics to our conceptualization of God.

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope” *Theology today* (2000, volume 56:4, 592-603).

This implies that the metaphor can be used in a way that affects our perception of children, which in turn influences our view of God, and *vice versa*. So, I will therefore include a section on the concept of metaphor, its construction and analysis, and its deconstruction to reveal the underlying image. Furthermore, I will examine the use of metaphors of children and childhood in theological language, using theological examples from the texts of Moltmann. Then analyze how he uses metaphors in general, and children as a metaphor, in particular.

I will try to identify the specific instances within Moltmann's theology where the images of *child*, *child of God*, *Father*, or *Son* serve as metaphors and examine the characteristics that these concepts possess. The term *child* is not simply a synonym for "young person." The term itself is conceptualized and imbued with a specific meaning and set of expectations. The concept of humanity as children of God is based on underlying assumptions and preconceptions. The use of the terms *Father* and *Son of God*, draws upon a substantial corpus of images pertaining to paternal and childhood relationships.

To understand how Moltmann employs the use of children or childhood as metaphors for hope, five key texts by Moltmann will be examined through qualitative content analysis. Focus being on the concept of mutual relations within the Trinity or between humanity and the transcendent. Following a qualitative content analysis, it would be possible to pose the question of what the metaphor conveys about the nature of children or God, and whether it is an expression of liberation and hope, as is characteristic of Moltmann's theological perspective. This is achieved through a combination of textual analysis of Moltmann's work and the posing of critical questions by other theologians to the material under examination.

1.2. Previous Research -Towards a Theology of the Child.

Let me make a brief introduction to the field of theology concerning children, to lay out the canvas where my dissertation supposedly will be able to cover a small corner. The term Critical Childhood Studies (CCS) are an interdisciplinary field covering aspects from philosophy, social science, history, and anthropology, developed over the last two decades. About the same time a new interest could be noticed in the field of theology. Issues concerning children has always been a part of theology, but parallel to CCS, new questions

were raised. An early contribution came from Marcia Bunge, a theologian who has been writing about children's place in theology since 2001:

Despite the rising concern for and curiosity about children, scholars of religion, theologians, and ethicists across religious lines have had little to say about children, and they have had little to contribute to the growing political and academic debates about children or our obligations to them. Many have not treated childhood as a topic meriting serious attention, and they have not sought to articulate robust religious understandings of children themselves.²

Bunge's edited a pioneer work from 2001, *The Child in Christian Thought*,³ a systematic review on how the great theologians of history have been writing about children and childhood. Bonnie Miller McLemore, address why questions about children and motherhood has not been on the feminist theologians agenda – a fear of the double exclusion in a patriarchal theology tradition – which led to a clear setback for child in theology.⁴ Stortz problematize how Augustine's view on original sin, has made an impact on how we treat children, up until modern times.⁵ And Bunge states how theology and the urge to foster children as good Christians both made way for public schools, and physical punishment.⁶ In 2021, Bunge published, together with researchers from all over the world, *Child Theology - Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives*.⁷ An ecumenical project with researchers from all over the world; South Africa, USA, Brazil, and Malaysia. The focus is on Christian thinking about children in our time and on discussing children in today's churches. Orobator and Mtata, both address the need for child theology from an African context, where churches are growing rapidly, and 40% of the population (South of Sahara) are under 15 years.⁸ Smit presents a chapter on how hope in the child and their future raised courage and resistance during apartheid.⁹

² Marcia Bunge, 'The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood' in *The Journal of Religion* 2006, Vol. 86 (4) (549-579), 554.

³ Marcia Bunge Ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001).

⁴ Bonnie Miller McLemore, 'Let the Children Come' in Bunge Ed. *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001 (446-473)).

⁵ Martha Stortz, "Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent? – Augustine on Childhood." In Bunge, Ed. (2001) *The Child in Christian Thought*. (Grand Rapids, MN. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, (78-102)).

⁶ Bunge, *The Child*, 2001.

⁷ Marcia Bunge Ed., *Child Theology. Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021).

⁸ Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, 'Placing Ethics and Children in the Heart of Ecclesiology', in Bunge, Ed. *Child Theology. Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021 (129-149)). And Kenneth Mtata 'Children in African Theologies of Community and Human Person', in Bunge, Ed. *Child Theology. Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021 (33-51))

⁹ Dirk Smit, 'Reimagining Hope with and like Children', in Bunge, Ed. *Child Theology. Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021 (206-230))

Bakke, Odd Magne. (2005) In *When Children Became People*, Bakke gives an overview on how children were threatened throughout the early history of Christianity. He mentions examples where the innocent voices of children, appealed to God in a unique way, and children therefore had the gift of saying prayers for the whole congregation, (400 AD). And how just centuries later the child was born so defected by origin sin that their parents own salvation where at stake if they did not foster the child to become a good Christian. ”whether again by your license they [the sons] are undisciplined and sin, you their parents will likewise be guilty on their account before God.”¹⁰

In Swedish context we have a doctoral thesis from 2021, by Karin Rubensson (now at University of Gothenburg) on how children interpret their own participation in church service.¹¹ The adults (employees and churchgoers) in the survey read much more into the children's participation, then the children themselves do. They see children as ‘evidence of an inclusive church’ and make children's presence a ‘significant sign of God's reign.’ Thus, children's participation is not based on a shared understanding of its value, nor is it fundamentally a sign of the child's mandate or autonomy. Participation is still the extra, the abnormal, the party and the carnival.¹²

Anne Richards, National Adviser for Mission Theology, Church of England who wrote on children in the bible.¹³ She brings forth new perspectives, on familiar stories: like the unborn child Johannes, who still in the womb is the first living human to recognize God incarnated in the world, and kicks vividly when Elisabeth and Mary meet in Luke 1:41.¹⁴ She states that children in the bible are worthy! Worthy of calling, of salvation, of commission, of healing and of blessing.¹⁵

¹⁰ Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People – the birth of childhood in early Christianity*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress), 159.

¹¹ Karin Rubensson, *Karnevalsk gudstjänst – barns plats i kyrkans liturgi*. (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2021)

¹² Katarina Johansson, *Att erkänna barnet som teologiskt subjekt- Childism, asymmetri och Axel Honneths erkännandeteori*, (Stockholm: EHS/Gupea, 2021, Magisteruppsats.), 29.

¹³ Anne Richards, *Children in the Bible- A fresh approach*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013).

¹⁴ Richards, *Children in the bible*, 15.

¹⁵ Richards, *Children in the bible*.

Thinking Theologically About Children, is a short book from 2024, by Oslo Scholar Robyn Boéré.¹⁶ She posits that “We can only understand human childhood properly in light of what it means to be children of God, and we can only understand what it means to be children of God through human childhood. Theologically, this means that ‘child’ is first and foremost a relational term.”¹⁷ Drawing from Wall, an advocate for children’s rights who set forth the term *Childism*, a pro-child movement, regarding children’s rights in the same way feminism, argues for the rights of women.¹⁸ Boéré discuss how our theological view on children also affects our image of God. If all humans are created in the image of God, then if God is powerful and omnipotent, the child is less of an image, then the more capable adult. So, we may turn to a more vulnerable image of God to compensate and being inclusive, then with a clear risk of “glorifying vulnerability to abuse and injustice.”¹⁹

Wanda Deifelt interprets the God-Child paradigm, specially focusing on the “paradoxical reality that all – whether adult or infant – are children of God.”²⁰ And Rohan Gideon concerned by “the full humanity of children”, in the field of soteriology. We are all, in our diversity, “made in God’s image”. He states that “A robust and child-attentive concept of salvation clearly builds on the notions of salvation as humanization and liberation and ensures that children are included.”²¹ Annemie Dillen, summarize and evolve recent theology on children in her article in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*.²²

The article describes a diversity of images of children as they figure in social sciences, in biblical studies, in the history of theology, in ethics, and in practical and systematic theology. By considering these images, it will become clear how children are sometimes considered as passive objects but, in recent times, mostly as active subjects showing resilience and agency. Children are not only to be protected; they also have a voice.²³

¹⁶ Robyn Boéré, *Thinking Theologically About Children*, (Cambridge: Groove Books, 2024, D11).

¹⁷ Boéré, *Thinking Theologically*, 6.

¹⁸ Ibid, also Wall, *Children’s Rights*, 2017, 163n2.

¹⁹ Boéré, *Thinking Theologically*, 12.

²⁰ Wanda Deifelt, ‘The God-Child Paradigm and Paradoxes of the Incarnation’, in Bunge, Ed. *Child Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021, (72-89)), 74.

²¹ Rohan P. Gideon, ‘Soterology and Children’s Vulnerabilities and Agency’, in Bunge Ed. *Child Theology*, (New York: Orbis Books, (90-107), 2021), 102.

²² Annemie Dillen, ‘Children and Christian Theology’, (*St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Ed. by Brendan N. Wolfe et al., 2024). <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ChildrenandChristianTheology> (Retrieved 16 January 2025).

²³ Dillen, *Children and Christian theology*, Abstract.

Dillen addresses questions about vulnerability, power, and children's agency in different ways of thinking theologically: such as religious education, children and faith, children and liturgy. In practical and systematic theology.

Karl Rahner published 'Ideas for a theology of Childhood' in 1971.²⁴ Although a short text, it has been influential on the field of theology and children. Not that Rahner has made an excessive production on the topic of children, but early on he opened the discussion. Therefore, still being analyzed and interpreted again by other scholars and still contributing to the field. Jessie Rogers, present how he has contributed in *Irish Theological Quarterly*:²⁵ Childhood is not just a preparation for adulthood, but has its own value which includes a direct relation between the child and God.²⁶ His view on children could be said to be both "realistic and idealistic", since he acknowledges even the children's participation in a fallen world and the original sin, but also as receivers of grace.²⁷

James McEvoy, authors an article on how children belong to the kingdom of God, their agency and ability and on how important it is for the church to develop (and continue this task) a theology of children. His article takes off in the inquiry of sexual abuse of children in the Roman Catholic Church in Australia: raising the important question – would it be possible to conduct and be unnoticed those horrible deeds towards children, if there were a thorough theology of children and their rights in place?²⁸ The answer must be negative. So, for the church to move forward: learn about children's perspectives and learn from children what it means to be disciples in the kingdom of God. Not will it only lead to a theology of children but will "reforming ecclesial life".²⁹

Why is research on children and the church a relevant and important topic? Marcia Bunge explains what she wants to achieve with her research: "In this way, the intellectual task of exploring the themes of children and childhood in relationship to the world's great religions

²⁴ Jessie Rogers, 'Karl Rahner on Childhood', (London: Sage Journals, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 2021-05, Vol.86 (2)), (111-126), Retrieved 16 January 2025.

²⁵ Rogers, 'Karl Rahner'.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ James McEvoy, "Towards a Theology of Childhood: Children's Agency and the Reign of God", in *Theological Studies*, (SAGE Publications, 2019, Vol. 80, (3), (673-691)), 674.

²⁹ McEvoy, "Towards a Theology of Childhood", 691.

has the potential not only to strengthen interdisciplinary research on children but also to increase genuine respect and concrete support for children here and around the world.”³⁰

We can find samples of the emerging field of theology on/for/with children from the various disciplines of theology: systematic, (Bunge, Boeté), practical theology, (Rubensson), Church history (Bakke), Feminist theology (Miller-McLemore), and two common features strikes me. One is that everyone is taking responsibility on writing about children in a new way in their familiar corner of theology. A clear effort to include the child in the discussion and by doing so, broaden the field of theology for a new aspect on humans life. But I also find it striking that they all argue for why they write their text on children, in a way we more rarely see when writing another essay on church fathers or on soteriology. To legitimize the theology of children seems to be a quest on its own, proceeding the theology itself. When deconstructing metaphors of the child in this dissertation, my aim is to show how characteristics of the child both are constantly altering due to contexts, changes of values in society and from personal experience. And how characteristics are often found in the spectra of power (lack of), agency (lack of), and ability (lack of). This will be a vast argument on *why* we need to write, think, and publish on the topic on children and theology: low on rank and theological status, constantly altering – theology on child and childhood constantly needs revisiting, for the child’s sake. Being a central metaphor of human and divine relation in the “child of God”, the interpretation of what it means to be a child is ever presenting in the midst of theology.

1.3. Research Question.

There is an exciting discussion about children and theology that I want to both learn more about, and participate in, by writing this paper as a contribution. Theology about children comes from many directions and disciplines. Apart from presenting new and interesting theological perspectives, there is a common trait of defending the project of children and theology as such.

If children are used as a concept in the metaphor of human beings as children of God, it is interesting in a theological sense to examine what that metaphor means. If children are in the

³⁰ Bunge, 'The Child, Religion, and the Academy', 579.

world of the church and are to be included on equal terms, a theology is needed that recognises the child as a theological subject.

Deconstructing the metaphor can reveal both the structures of power and subordination and the underlying character traits on which the metaphor is based. This may explain the low status of theology of children, and the feeling of having to defend the existence of the field. The necessity of constantly continuing to interpret children in metaphorical use in theology is that the view of children and what is a good childhood change very quickly. It varies with the person, with time and with different socio-economic conditions. Theology, in its broadest sense, is an ongoing and changing project. The theology of children is evolving rapidly and requires ongoing reflection and rewriting.

My research questions will then be:

1. How can the metaphor of humans as child of God be deconstructed to reveal the underlying view of child, human and God?
2. What arguments for a broader and deeper theology of children can be derived from these deconstructed metaphors?

1.4. Discussion on Methodology.

For a study of metaphors in a systematic theological context, I like to outline the methodology of this dissertation. Starting off with an introduction to the field of theology and child (1.2), will serve a double purpose: to make the new and expanding field known to the reader and to establish in what discussion this dissertation is trying to engage and contribute. Then turning to metaphor theory (2.1), raising questions on how are metaphors constructed, how can they be analyzed and deconstructed? The specific interest of my study regards metaphors of the child. The definitions and models from metaphor theory will prove important to analyze and deconstruct the metaphors in Moltmann's texts, (Ch. 3). I also want to make a theoretical

background, turning to the inclusive perspectives of Queer theology (1.4),³¹. Driving from the aim to challenge theology from a perspective of power and broaden and deepen theology including new perspectives. The perspective of *child* as a theological subject, are well aligned with those theories, previously highlighted in my last dissertation (Magisteruppsats), *To Recognize the Child as a Theological Subject – Childism, Asymmetry and Axel Honneth's Theory on Recognition*.³² Foucault argues that *power* and *knowing* are intimately linked.³³ To read with "a Foucault-Inspired Gaze.", is a method of analyzing how a phenomenon, such as children, is portrayed in the text. Considering who is speaking and with what authority? The descriptions can then be compared to 'conditions of possibility' to assess their liberating, encouraging, and developing impact. They can also be described as normative and as an expression of a control mentality, indicating that the descriptions aim to be limiting, disciplining, and restraining.³⁴

Once the theoretical elements have been established, an analysis of five selected texts from Moltmann's will be at center of the dissertation. On what grounds were these texts selected? The straightforward response is that the selected texts are merely illustrative examples. Different texts and texts from another, or other theologians, would be interesting in other ways. If the purpose were to identify instances of clarity and consistency in the use of metaphors, the selection of texts and theologians would be significant. Then any similarity or consistency could be questioned and said to be a coincidence and that the result would vary if other texts were selected. And that would be true! But in this case, it is my intention to present a contrasting argument: namely, that our perception of children is dependent on context and reader. This view, in turn, affects the interpretation of the metaphor and, consequently, the properties transferred through the metaphor to the transcendent entity it is set to explain. Our own thoughts and presumptions on what *a child* are, affects our images of God, through the metaphor human as "child of God".

³¹ Line Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018). Bonnie Millar McLemore, 'Let the Children Come' in Bunge Ed. *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001 (446-473)).

³² Katarina Johansson, *Att erkänna barnet som teologiskt subjekt*, 2021.

³³ Mats Börjesson, *Diskurser och konstruktioner - en sorts metodbok*. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2003),36.

³⁴ Ulf Olsson, Att läsa texter med en Foucaultinspirerad blick. In *Textanalys* Ed. Carl Anders Säfström & Leif Östman. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1999), 222–236.

It is also important to consider the underlying perspective on children and the associated image of God that this metaphor evokes as the relationship is reciprocal.

I will analyze a few well-known biblical passages where children are used as metaphors (2.3), accompanied by a brief exegetical analysis. This is not intended to detract from the systematic theological perspective, but rather to provide additional insights into the interpretation of these passages and their implications for the broader context of children as metaphors in theology as such, and in Moltmann's texts specifically.

In chapter 3, critical text analysis will be my method on reading the texts of Moltmann, trying to deconstruct the metaphors through the concept and models from metaphor theory. The characteristics associated with the child could then show us the underlying discourse of the child. Discourse is created through description, reception, and interpretation. It interacts with context and social society so that it both influences, and is influenced by, them. Therefore, text needs to be analyzed against context.³⁵ By analyzing children as a *construction*, we can gain insight into the underlying ideological motivations. This enables us to ascertain whether the narrative of the child creates a submissive or empowering effect. It should be noted that text-critical reading and a discourse-analytical approach are not neutral. It is an approach rather than a method, based on asking critical questions of the material with the intention of discovering structures and hierarchies. Jørgensen and Phillips suggest three approaches for a critical perspective on the material, contra discourse. *First*, using language to describe the taken-for-granted phenomena, in this case 'child'. *Secondly*, using an out-of-center perspective to notice discrepancy between center and periphery. And *third*, look for “gaps in the dominant structure from where neutralized categories can be problematised.”³⁶

Since Moltmann states that the ‘child is a metaphor of hope’³⁷, I will have a brief section on the theology of hope (4.1), raising critical perspectives and questions to the material through theology on hope by Jeanrond and Kelly. Edelman will provide a negative perspective of the

³⁵ Marianne Jørgensen & Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002), 60–62.

³⁶ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, 195.

³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, In *Theology today* (2000, Vol. 56 (4), (592-603)).

not-inclusive hope, presented in *No Future* (4.2).³⁸ Before concluding the dissertation with my discussion, Carnes' *Motherhood* will provide another perspective on the child and the mother – raising important questions both to the Moltmann analysis and to the final discussion (4.3).

1.4.1. Definitions.

To provide context for the following discussion, I will define two everyday words, here used as terms, from *Critical Childhood Studies* (CCS). This will enable us to consider how the concepts are used in research contexts. The term 'children' encompasses a wide range of characteristics and attributes. In *Critical Childhood Studies*, the terms *being* and *becoming* are used to denote two main points of departure for what the child is. The *being* perspective views the child as a complete human being, with different typical traits and skills than the adult human being. However, the value remains consistent, and differences in attributes are simply variations. Both the child and the adult can learn from each other. The *becoming* perspective views the child as a developing human being, while the adult is more or less, a complete human. The child gradually acquires skills, knowledge, and morals, and thereby *becoming* an adult, a human, to a greater extent.³⁹

From Social Childhood Studies, I will use two perspectives explained by John Wall (and others.) Wall calls them 'the bottom-up story,' and 'the top-down story,' respectively. The concept that children are born without inherent goodness and with the potential for evil is referred to as 'the top-down story.' The position is not tied to a specific age and culture but has been more influential at certain times. This concept is referenced in the Bible, specifically in the fourth commandment, as well as in the theological doctrine of original sin. In philosophy, it is put forth by Kant for example, who states that capacity for rational and moral action develops over time. Consequently, it is not possible for a child to fully comprehend the consequences of their actions or the impact they have on others. Therefore, it is essential to provide guidance and instruction to help them become morally responsible individuals.⁴⁰

³⁸ Werner Jeanrond, *Reasons to hope*. (New York: T&T Clark, 2020). Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, (New York: Orbis Books. 2006). Lee Edelman, *No Future*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³⁹ For example: Jens Qvortrup, *Studies in Modern Childhood - Society, Agency, Culture*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3-7. Or Allison James & Adrian L. James, *Constructing Childhood - Theory, Policy and Social Practice*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 27.

⁴⁰ John Wall, *Ethics – in Light of Childhood* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2010), 15-20.

Simultaneously throughout history one can identify the exact opposite perspective. This is the concept that Wall refers to as the "bottom-up story." The argument posits that children are born with a natural innocence and purity, but that this is corrupted by exposure to an immoral and depraved world. This results in the child becoming cynical and selfish. In theology, note the doctrine of man created as *Imago Dei*, in bible readings for example "Become like children" and in philosophy represented by Rosseau and others. Consequently, children require protection from reality and represent a state of blissful ignorance, an ideal that is forever excluded from the realm of adulthood and which adults nevertheless nostalgically long for.⁴¹

⁴¹ Wall, *Ethics*, 20-23.

2. Theory.

2.1. The Nature of Metaphors.

Metaphors are an ever-present feature of everyday language, manifesting in both written and spoken discourse. Metaphors can be employed without an accompanying explanation. For example, when my children are impressed by a friend – or, on rare occasions, by their mother – they will exclaim: "You're KING!" This assertion does not indicate the existence of monarchs between their acquaintances; rather, it is a demonstration of respect, acknowledging the manifestation of power or grace in an exceptional manner. However, the metaphor is neither referenced, nor explained.

Metaphorical language is common and simple, but analyzing it is difficult. The use of a metaphor is often implied, and the first challenge is to identify the metaphor. The sender's intention is unclear. The receiver varies. Given the variability of individuals, contexts, and time periods, both intended meaning and interpretations of metaphors vary. Before examining Moltmann's texts, it would be beneficial to overview existing research on metaphors. The metaphor of 'God as shepherd', from the 23rd psalm, will be deconstructed as a case study.

2.1.1. Metaphors as Method.

In *Metaphor*, David Punter surveys the use of metaphor from ancient to postmodern times. The simplest form of metaphor that is used is *the simile*, the resemblance. Often preceded by 'as' or 'like.' For example, 'strong as an ox'. "Simile may be in one sense cruder than other forms of metaphor; in that it does not seek to conceal its artificiality; but alternatively, one might say that it is the original form of metaphor."⁴²

"A metaphor is bound to time and context, so the metaphor itself can never be neutral. Public metaphors are a way of gaining and securing power," Punter says.⁴³ It helps to read time and society and is used to create a narrative of our time in the way we want. Jacques Lacan said that metaphors are an important way of understanding the world and forming the subject, the

⁴² David Punter, *Metaphor* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

⁴³ Punter, *Metaphor*; 47.

self. “The evolution of language, according to these ideas, can no longer be treated separately from the formation of subjectivity, and metaphor comes to be seen as an essential factor in the psychic apprehension of outer and inner worlds.”⁴⁴ But if a metaphor is used too much, it can be regarded as a *dead metaphor*, a metaphor that is no longer useful to bear the connotations in a way it once did.⁴⁵

Punter employs Derrida's pedagogical approach to elucidate the indispensable and enigmatic aspects of deconstruction. “For Derrida, ...”metaphor is not that which happens when the writer applies him- or herself to the craft; it is what happens when there is a drawing back, a willingness, conscious or unconscious, to let go of the writing, to abandon it to its fate”.⁴⁶ Relating metaphor to author and context in this way will be a useful approach to reading theology. Metaphors will then be deconstructed to reveal what is implied in Moltmann's use of children as metaphors.

2.1.2. Metaphors of the Transcendent.

Metaphor is the most effective means of discussing concepts that cannot be perceived through the senses, such as ‘love’ or ‘God’. To discuss the transcendent, it may be necessary to employ rhetorical forms to describe the resemblance. “In view of the Christian’s insistence that he will not or cannot transpose his concept of God into supposedly imageless speech, attacks on the meaningfulness of his metaphorical language are, in fact, attacks on any of his attempts to speak of a transcendent God.”⁴⁷ The quotation is from Janet Martin Soskice, who has written on the use of metaphor as a way of discussing the transcendent.

A metaphor involves considering two objects at once. This lets us examine an object from an ontological perspective. We can then extend the metaphor with additional dimensions. Soskice's research is particularly focused on the analysis of religious language, with her theories being based on the ideas of Paul Ricoeur. She explains: “Metaphor should be treated as fully cognitive and capable of saying that which may be said in no other way. It should explain how metaphor gives us ‘two ideas for one yet do so without lapsing into a comparison

⁴⁴ Punter, *Metaphor*, 75.

⁴⁵ Punter, *Metaphor*, 146.

⁴⁶ Punter, *Metaphor*, 111f.

⁴⁷ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), x.

theory.”⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur was early in writing about metaphors. Soskice summarizes: “Ricoeur is known for developing, based on his notion of slit reference, a ‘tensional’ conception of metaphorical truth. Metaphor is an expression that says both ‘it is’ and ‘it is not’”.⁴⁹

For a metaphor to be effective, the object being used as a metaphor (X) must possess characteristics that are analogous to those of the object for which it is being used as a metaphor (Y). Furthermore, if the metaphor is beneficial, it will facilitate the observation of new characteristics of Y through the comparison of X and Y. However, at the same time, X and Y are distinct entities, and there are linguistic elements or characteristics that could be employed to describe one but not the other. Soskice posits that metaphors are employed in Christian thought, yet their characteristics and limitations remain unacknowledged. Metaphors are frequently conflated with models, analogies, and myths. Mark Johnson explains the steps of deconstruction in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*.⁵⁰

If you acknowledge conceptual metaphors, then you have to give up literalism. If you give up literalism, you must abandon objectivist theories of knowledge. If you reject objectivist metaphysics and epistemology, you must abandon the classical correspondence theory of truth. Eventually, you will have to rethink even your most basic conception of what cognition consists of.⁵¹

Johnson posits that metaphors can be understood as overlapping domains. For a metaphor to be effective, there must be a set of shared characteristics between the ‘source domain’ and the ‘target domain.’ If the metaphor is accepted by the reader based on shared characteristics, the source domain can be transferred and explained in terms of new characteristics inherent to the target domain. The definitions of source and target domains will assist in elucidating the way metaphors are comprehended and deconstructed in this thesis.

⁴⁸ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 44.

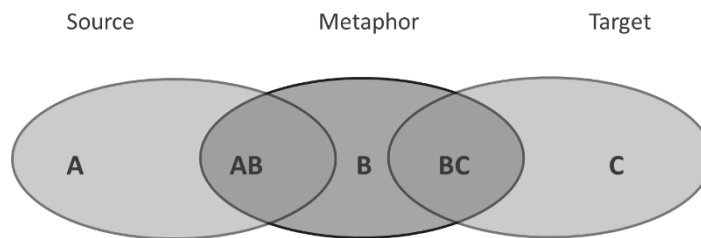
⁴⁹ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 88.

⁵⁰ Mark Johnson, Philosophy’s Debt to Metaphor. In Ed. R. W. Gibbs Jr., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (39-52).

⁵¹ Johnson, Philosophy’s Debt to Metaphor, 51.

2.1.3. Deconstructing Metaphors.

A systematic deconstruction of the metaphor is required to ascertain its usage. The models that follow are intended to demonstrate the way characteristics are transferred from the source to the target, with a view to emphasizing specific features or traits. These characteristics have consistently been present in the individual or object in question, albeit at an unconscious level. The metaphor is employed to articulate or manifest these characteristics.



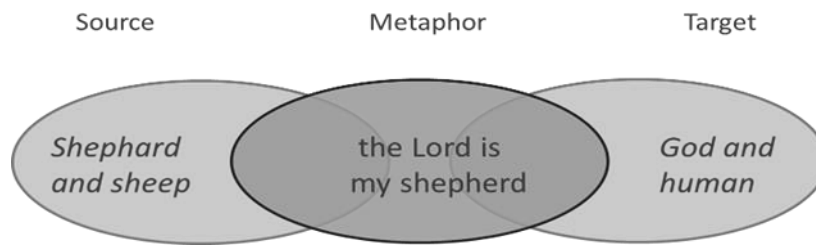
Model 1. Metaphor - a diagram.

Considering the previously outlined theories, it seems reasonable to propose the following model. Three distinct sets, with partial overlap. Set A represents the characteristics of ‘the source domain’, Set C, those of ‘the target domain’, and Set B, which are used in the metaphor. Consequently, the characteristics of AB are those shared by the metaphor and the source domain within the metaphor, which are used to explain the corresponding characteristics of BC. These are the characteristics shared by the metaphor and the target domain. This domain represents the fundamental characteristics for employing a metaphor.

In accordance with Johnson and Ricoeur's seminal definition of a metaphor as "both and neither"⁵² it can be demonstrated in B what the metaphor is. Then, the transition from A to AB and from C to BC shows the characteristics that a metaphor ‘is not’.

Prior to applying the theory of metaphor to Moltmann's texts and theology, it is instructive to consider a well-known example from the Bible to illustrate the theory in action. In the 23rd Psalm, in the Bible, God is referred to as "my shepherd". A representation of the relationship between God and humanity. The characteristics will now be listed in a systematic manner, according to the model previously outlined. In this example, the phrase "the Lord is my shepherd" serves as the pivotal element within the metaphorical construct.

⁵² Johnson, *Philosophy's Debt to Metaphor*, 51.



Model 2. Psalm 23.

The author of the text is human, and the 'I' can be identified as the author, the reader, or any Christian, depending on the approach taken to reading and teaching the Psalm.

An author's relationship with God can be seen as the target domain C. The metaphor B, with God as a shepherd and followers as lambs, extends this concept. The source domain is the shepherd and his flock. This metaphor comprises two images: the shepherd-God and the sheep-human. Their relationship facilitates interpretation and insight into the author's relationship with God. In considering the metaphor, it is possible to identify characteristics in accordance with Model 1.

Characteristics of the source domain, A. Shepherd, and sheep.

The shepherd looks after the sheep.

The sheep follows the shepherd.

The shepherd knows what is best for the sheep.

The sheep trust the shepherd.

The shepherd is one. The sheep are a flock.

The shepherd only works during the day. And they need sleep.

The sheep all have white curly hair.

The list of characteristics is not exhaustive. For illustrative purposes, this list will suffice. Readers must determine which characteristics are associated with A and which are associated with AB. This quantum is pivotal in the metaphor and corresponds to BC. It points to the interconnection between C and God and man through the metaphor B, which portrays the Lord as a shepherd.

The shepherd takes care of the sheep. (AB)

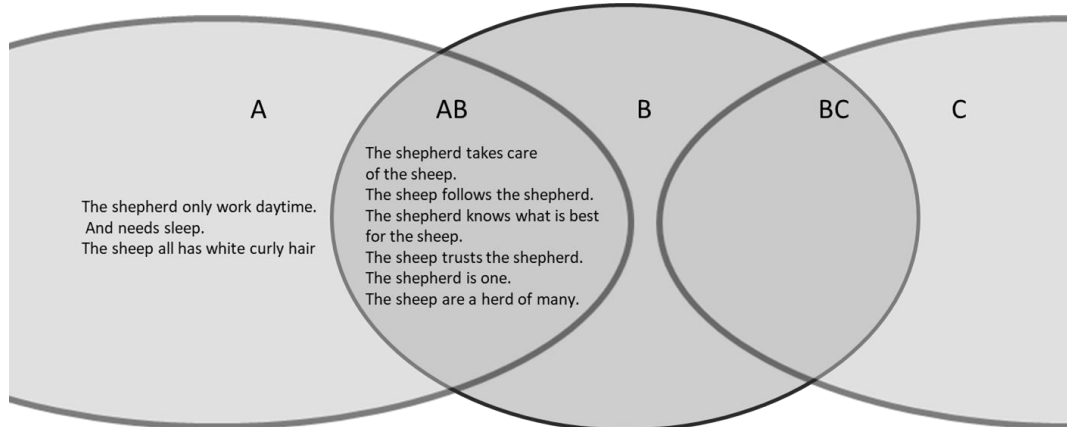
The sheep follow the shepherd. (AB)

The shepherd knows what is best for the sheep. (AB)

The sheep trust the shepherd. (AB) The shepherd is one. The sheep are a herd of many. (AB)

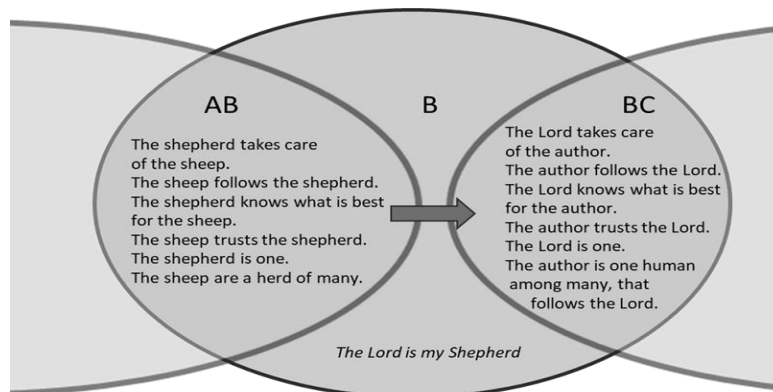
The shepherd only works during the daytime. And need sleep. (A not AB)

The sheep all have white curly hair. (A not AB)



Model 3. Characteristics of source domain, A and AB.

The quantum, AB, and the characteristics that are said to belong here, is then transferred to the quantum BC. Notice the shift of subject: shepherd equals God and sheep equals humans. And then we get the following list:



Model 4. Characteristics of the target domain, BC.

The Lord takes care of the author. (BC)

The author follows the Lord. (BC)

The Lord knows what is best for the author. (BC)

The author trusts the Lord. (BC)

The Lord is one. The author is one human among many, that follows the Lord. (BC)

In the absence of any information regarding the author's hair, it was reasonable to conclude that the description of "white, curly hair" in quantum "A not AB" should be retained.

Consequently, it was prudent to refrain from assuming that individuals who adhere to a particular religious belief system would necessarily possess this specific hairstyle.

Furthermore, the extended use of curly hair among churchgoers should not be interpreted as a theological point.

The metaphor shows how the writer wants to portray their relationship with the Lord. The Lord is benevolent, compassionate, and dependable. The author trusts in his judgment and is regarded as both an individual and as a member of a collective. The psalm can speak to the reader, inspiring them to emulate the author's relationship with God.

Characteristics of the target domain, C. God, and man.

To complete the model of the metaphor, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of God or man that are not utilized in the quantum "C not BC". To illustrate, examples of this include the assertion that "man can build cars" or that "God is invisible", which do not contribute to an understanding of the metaphor. Readers may wish to propose other examples. It is evident that this list of characteristics or the interpretation is incomplete. This is a crucial point, as evidenced above in the context of a metaphor. It is important to note that the characteristics that emerge and are emphasized are not universal. The metaphor of the sheep and shepherd is open to interpretation. Context and reader also play a part. Different historical periods, social contexts and readers give rise to different interpretations of the relationship between sheep and shepherds, and therefore, between God and humans. A parallel to the relationship between God and God's children.

2.2. An Inclusive Perspective: Queer Theology.

Queer theology is the further development of liberation theology via feminist theology. It develops an inclusive perspective and a deconstructive approach and explores how our interpersonal roles influence our perception of humanity and our understanding of the divine. This is especially relevant when discussing the child as a human being. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of inclusivity:

The Bible has not one message but many is demonstrated by the diversity of interpretations one sees today as people explore the through the interpretive lens of who they are as readers – black, brown, yellow, red, white; female, male, transgendered, intersexual; straight, gay, lesbian, queer; rich or poor; lay or clergy; mainstream or marginalized; academic or non-specialist.⁵³

Such an inclusive start when interpreting the Gospels in *The Queer Bible Commentary!* Please note that all categories represent adults and that there is no acknowledgement of children or age-inclusive perspectives. So, there is still potential for even more inclusive perspectives. This overview of queer theology looks at the relationship between the human and the divine and considers concepts beyond conventional roles and the adult male consciousness.

Moltmann is one of the 20th century's most influential liberation theologians. The development of liberation theology led to the emergence of feminist theology, which gave rise to queer theology. Feminist theologians highlighted the representation of women in the Bible and advocated for the use of both of the terms "mother" and "father" in reference to God. This perspective is subjected to rigorous examination in the context of queer theology. "Searching for feminine images of God is all well and good, but often such images become no more than complements to a divine masculinity that becomes increasingly fixed the more it is denied."⁵⁴

A queer understanding requires a critical examination of the dichotomy between sexes or genders and an expansion of the conceptualization of gender. Queer theology employs a queer perspective on the concept of God, proposing that the divine is neither male nor female. The concept of God is not constrained by the duality of gender.

⁵³ Thomas Bohache, Matthew. In Ed. Deryn Guest et. al. 487-516, *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 487.

⁵⁴ Line Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 73.

Theology talks about a God the Father and a God the Son, but pretends fatherhood and sonship have nothing to do with sex or gender even if Christianity has also (but not only) been a system of patriarchy throughout its history. What would theology say if it told these truths? That is the question of queer theology.⁵⁵

A queer perspective is useful when considering God as a father and son. It allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human and can be used to challenge the notion of adulthood as a universal norm and examine conventional portrayals of children and childhood.

Christianity has been patriarchal throughout its history. The concept of 'father', 'son' and 'sonship' are understood in a variety of ways and affects our image of God. This is the strength and weakness of metaphor. A queer theological perspective can help us identify and address our pre-understandings and challenge them.

Queer theology by Linn Tonstad is an introduction to the field.⁵⁶ Tonstad addresses the relationship between sexuality and the comprehension of a fully actualized human being. Is this why it is more difficult for society to understand and accept non-binary or asexual people? Or exclude children or the elderly?⁵⁷ Tonstad writes about the 'liberal subject': the normative against which a person is measured and compared. Tonstad says that "the 'liberal subject' is 'white, male, well-off and rational.'"⁵⁸ It is important to note that the term "liberal" is typically associated with the notion of an adult human being. It is essential that this image be subjected to thorough examination and challenged as we challenge the concept of adulthood as the norm and extend this to include children as complete humans. As an adult, being a 'child of God' requires relating to both images and metaphors. We simultaneously occupy the roles of children, who can be vulnerable and small, and adults, who can be caretakers with responsibility and capability. This raises the question of whether these two images may conflict with one another? Distinction between children and adults is a key consideration.

⁵⁵ Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*, 77.

⁵⁶ Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*.

⁵⁷ Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*, 14.

⁵⁸ Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*, 63.

2.3. Children in the Bible.

Throughout the Bible, there are stories where children have major or minor roles, where children receive a calling or cooperate with God. There are stories where children are used as examples and as metaphors. There are stories where children help in a miracle or are helped by a miracle. Moltmann often refers to various biblical passages to refute his theological position but not always clear about why he emphasizes a particular passage or how he wants to interpret it; in many ways, these interpretations are left to the reader or are expected to be self-evident.

In preparation for the analysis of Moltmann's texts, I would therefore like to highlight a couple of particularly well-known biblical passages where children are used as described above. I would now like to give some examples of accepted interpretations of these biblical passages.

2.3.1. We are family.

It is beyond dispute that one of the most influential passages in the Bible where Jesus speaks is Matthew 6:9, which has become an obligatory part of the Christian liturgy, the Lord's Prayer. The introduction to it and the text about who are Jesus' true family may constitute a minor exegetical discussion about the inclusive sonship of God. To gain a deeper understanding of these two passages, it is necessary to examine them in closer detail.

Matt. 6:9 "The Lord's prayer."

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*⁵⁹

This is an intriguing discussion of the concept of *Abba* and the way Jesus refers to God as our Father. It is evident that the inclusive address is made when the disciples surrounding him are also included. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to God as "my Father" many times.

There are numerous instances wherein the close relationship is evident. It is only within the context of liturgical prayer that the relationship between humanity and Jesus is characterized

⁵⁹ NRSVA, Matt.6:9.

as that of children of God. This can also be interpreted as a reconciliation between humanity and Jesus, and humanity and God.

There are scholars who would highlight the personalized approach as particularly noteworthy, even offensive, among Jews of the time. But in the biblical commentary NIB, the authors instead emphasize that personal address was an obvious practice for both Jews and Greeks in the first century. In Greek, Pater was used, and in the synagogue liturgy, prayers began with 'our father, our king' (*Avinu Malkeinu* אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵינוּ). It is also emphasized that in Aramaic, *Abba*, was not a toddler's language but was also used by adult children to refer to their own parents.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, it is evident that Jesus prioritizes the disciples, and subsequently, all humanity, within the collective "we" that is oriented towards "our Father." The concept of childhood with God is a prominent theme in this context, as is the notion that, as children of God, we are also siblings to one another and to Jesus in a sense of mutual solidarity.

Given that the Sermon on the Mount is frequently regarded as a discourse on the life of a disciple of Jesus, this passage can be interpreted theologically as an act of Jesus including the disciples in a state of childhood with God. This is evident both in his relationship with God and in his interactions with his disciples. While the Lord's Prayer emphasizes equality and brotherhood, it is notable that Jesus also uses the term 'my father' in other passages yet elevates this relationship to a unique level. This theological perspective is developed in the Erdman's Bible commentary:

Here are the raw materials for a theological system which posits a unique filial relationship for Jesus and a derivative relationship for God's other "children" into which Jesus introduces them (cf. 11:27) but in which he does not share with them on the same level. While such a doctrine may be more fully developed from other parts of the NT, Matthew is content to allow it to emerge by implication from his usage. But it is primarily here, in the discourse on discipleship, that this privileged status of the disciples emerges, and in the family prayer which is at the heart of the discourse it is most appropriately expressed as their corporate address to God.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Boring, "Matthew", 203.

⁶¹ Boring, "Matthew", 214.

An illustrative example of how childhood can be illuminated in relation to both human beings and the divine is the notion that we are, in principle, always in different relationships at the same time. This can be conceptualized as a state of *simul*, which is to say that we can simultaneously occupy the roles of both child and brother, and simultaneously both child and adult.

Matt. 12:46-50. “Jesus true family.”

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’⁶²

It must be emphasized that this is not about creating distance between Jesus and his earthly family. The new family unit, formed by the disciples, is undergoing a process of enhancement and reinforcement. Those who follow Jesus have renounced their familial ties and established a new familial structure among themselves, with each member regarded as a brother or sister. It is particularly noteworthy that the text uses the inclusive "and sisters." As in the prayer in Matthew 6:9, Jesus makes an indisputable equivalence between his disciples and himself, regarding them as equal brothers and as children of God the Father.⁶³

It is important to note that the Gospel of Matthew makes only brief mention of Jesus' earthly family. A short passage, Matt. 13:56, refers to his sisters. This suggests that the interpretation should focus on the disciples as the new family, and that the Christian congregation should emulate this pattern, rather than being taken as a rejection of the biological family.⁶⁴

Bohache writes the chapter on Matthew in the queer theological commentary on the Bible, which I have used in this paper. Here he emphasizes the queer perspective of a family of one's own choosing, which sympathizes with and respects the life choices one has made. An

⁶² NRSVA, Matt. 12:46-50.

⁶³ Boring, “Matthew”, 298.

⁶⁴ France, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICNT) Series “The Gospel of Matthew”, 367.

experience that was a reality for the first Christians, when they often had to choose between their faith and their family; an experience that is a reality for many queers, even today, who in many contexts are still questioned for their life choices.⁶⁵ We can certainly use the 'modern life' of the queer community as a touchstone - but we can just as easily turn to ancient times and the Proverbs for arguments (since used several times in this dissertation). "Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin."⁶⁶

2.3.2. The Child as Role-model.

We shall now consider three further biblical passages, which are of particular significance in Moltmann's argument (for details, please peruse Chapter 3). In this passage, the child serves as a clear conduit between humanity and the divine, as accepting a child is analogous to accepting God. Our actions towards a child or towards the most vulnerable among us are actions that are directed towards God through our fellow humans. And these actions serve as the standard by which we will be judged at the end of time, and the child represents both the means and the model for attaining and becoming part of the kingdom of God.

Matt. 18:3 "Become like children"

He called a child, whom he put among them, and said,

'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children,

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*⁶⁷

Matthew identifies the initial quality ascribed to the child as humility. The child is presented as an exemplar and model for the adults who are listening to Jesus' teaching. In this passage, Jesus places the child at the center of the discourse and makes an emphatic assertion that all must become "like children". Such individuals are already incorporated into the kingdom of God. The child is endowed with a natural citizenship that the adult lacks due to their independence. The child is in a state of belonging. The child is a member of the kingdom of

⁶⁵ Bohache, Matthew, 509.

⁶⁶ NRSVA, Prov. 18:24.

⁶⁷ NRSVA, Matt. 18:2-5.

God, and the kingdom of God is a member of the child. This image is, and has always been, a source of contention. Nevertheless, it is an accurate representation of reality. The child has the capacity to impart a radical perspective to the adult. The child's approach represents the sole means of ensuring the inclusion and citizenship of all members of society. Additionally, the child is regarded as a conduit for the divine. In accepting a child, one accepts God into one's life.

The pericope concerning Jesus and the children is situated within a larger pericope sequence, designated in the bible commentary by Eerdmans as "The Discourse on Relationships." The text's primary focus is on the way the disciples and the Christian church should conduct themselves in relation to one another. The text places great emphasis on the individual perspective, asserting that each person bears responsibility for upholding the common good of the group. This is not to be achieved through self-aggrandizement or the pursuit of one's own interests, but rather through the act of serving one's fellow humans. In particular, the text highlights the importance of care for others, initially through the question of 'Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' and subsequently through the placement of children at the center as an example, and finally through the emphasis on the importance of care for 'my little ones'.⁶⁸

The NIB presents a more radical interpretation, saying that what Jesus does is a radical and symbolic, prophetic act. At that time, children were seen as unimportant and without status, and therefore very unlikely examples to follow. In the previous pericope, when the disciples consider who is first in the kingdom of heaven, there is a hierarchy between them. The children, of course, are not included in this hierarchy. When Jesus brings the children into the kingdom and into the equation and sets them higher and as a conditional example for the disciples, the teaching takes a radical turn.

The NIB also suggests what qualities are typical of a child and therefore desirable in this context, and what qualities give access to the kingdom of God: "humble, innocent, without lust, open and trusting, spontaneous, vulnerable and dependent, allowing oneself to be given a gift without any compulsion to "deserve" it, etc."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ France, "The Gospel of Matthew", 477.

⁶⁹ Boring, "Matthew", 374.

This can be seen as an illustrative example of a key point to be addressed in this dissertation, namely that the characteristics we perceive in a child have a significant impact on our understanding of the relationship between human and God. If the qualities we attribute to a child undergo a transformation, it follows that our expectations regarding the nature of this relationship will also evolve. When the child is employed as a metaphor for the relationship between humans and the divine, the characteristics in question assume a pivotal role.

2.3.3. The Child is Vulnerable.

Matt. 25:40. “The parable of the King and the least of his brothers”

*And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*⁷⁰

In the parable, Jesus depicts a king who welcomes and subsequently excludes guests who have arrived to participate in a grand feast. Those who are permitted to attend the feast are those who have been benevolent towards the king, whether by providing care when he was unwell, helping when he was impoverished, or visiting him in prison. It is beyond question. Similarly, those who did not help the king during his period of need and despair are also excluded. Both groups are equally astonished. Neither have observed the monarch in these challenging circumstances. In this context, the individual with needs assumes the role of a deputy deity. The act of receiving a child is equivalent to receiving Christ himself. The act of providing help to an individual in need and experiencing distress is an act of virtue and mercy, related to showing compassion to Christ himself. This is a scene from the last judgement, told as a parable and as a life pattern to follow in preparation. “to the reader’s surprise (ancient and modern), the criterion of judgement is not confession of faith in Christ. Nothing is said of grace, justification, or the forgiveness of sins. What counts is whether one has acted with loving care for needy people.”⁷¹ The NIB places the objective of the narrative on how to illustrate how we should coexist in this environment, rather than to provide information regarding the end times. While Erdmann’s takes the opposite stand: this is a discourse about the ending times, one that rejects the Lutheran idea of ‘faith alone.’

⁷⁰ NRSVA, Matt.25:40.

⁷¹ Boring, “Matthew”, 455.

2.3.4. Through the Child, receive God.

Mark 9:37. “welcome a child, welcome me.”

‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’⁷²

Once again, the biblical commentaries demonstrate the stark contrast between the perception of a child in antiquity and that of the modern era. For instance, the NIB illustrates the practice among childless Romans of adopting a child to ensure an heir, yet their preference was to adopt an adult rather than a child. It is unclear whether one can infer from this practice that the status of the child was unimportant. It is possible that this was also due to high infant mortality or to a practical aspect, in that it was preferable to have a fully grown human being rather than one in the making.⁷³ And it is this radically different way of looking at children, at people, at ourselves, that becomes a pattern to follow from the teaching of Jesus as presented in the Bible. “Karl Barth describes the radical acceptance of others as a basis of Christian ethics: ‘To think of *every human being*, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him on this assumption.’⁷⁴

The child is a marker of the lowest possible status in this passage and should not be interpreted in terms of the character traits typically associated with a child, says France in NICNT.

To ‘become like a child’ (Mt. 18:3) is to forgo status and to accept the lowest place, to be a ‘little one’ (Mt. 18:6, 10, 14; 10:42). Mark does not use the same terms as Matthew, but the latter’s fuller version rightly draws out the implications of Mark’s child analogy. In this pericope there is no call (as in Matthew) to become like a child (that will follow in 10:15), but rather the injunction to ‘receive’ the child, to reverse the conventional value-scale by according importance to the unimportant.⁷⁵

⁷² NRSVA, Mark 9:37.

⁷³ Perkins, P. “Mark”. In *The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB)*. (507-734). New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII New Testament Articles Matthew Mark. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. 637.

⁷⁴ Perkins, “Mark”, 637.

⁷⁵ France, “The Gospel of Matthew”, 373.

So, according to France's argument, the child would have only one characteristic, namely that of the lowest possible status among humans. Which in turn would imply that this status, is above all, what the Christian person or disciple should strive to emulate.

2.3.5. Let the Children come!

Luke 18:15-17 “Jesus Blesses Little Children”.

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’⁷⁶

“So, the blessing of children offers privileging, visibility, an order in the creation, a vision of God’s heavenly world and intention, a sign, a message, and a profound affirmation of the child as a child.”⁷⁷

In this text, the disciples function as an entourage or court, whose role is to keep the people, especially the children, away from Jesus. Luke employs the Greek word for infants, *brepheos* βρεφός whereas Mark uses the term *paidia*, παιδία which is translated as children in a broader sense. The reason for the children being carried to Jesus is not revealed in the text. However, at the time, infant mortality was high in both this region and the wider world, which may have been a cause for concern for parents and a desire for the blessing of the travelling prophet.⁷⁸ The act of lifting up and bestowing a blessing is reflected in the miracle of the bread and fish.⁷⁹ Subsequently, Jesus elevated the offerings and expressed gratitude to God, conferring a blessing that provided nourishment for five thousand men. It would be remiss not to consider the exaltation of bread and wine in the context of the communion. This is an indication of divine approval and the divine presence in the Eucharist. Although the text can be interpreted as describing how children are used as an example rather than as a metaphor, the interpretation is left to those around or to the reader to determine why children have a special

⁷⁶ NRSVA, Luke 18:15-17.

⁷⁷ Richards, *Children in the Bible*, 128.

⁷⁸ Alan Culpepper, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 1994 IX Luke, 344f.

⁷⁹ See Matthew 14:17 and parallels.

place in the Kingdom. NIB suggests a number of reasons which we propose to interpret. These include the following: the innocence of children, their lack of power, their lack of virtue, and their readiness to receive God's love.⁸⁰

It would be wrong to consider children in the Bible as merely a collective of extras or supporting characters. Children are both subjects and main characters in direct contact with the divine. Children are heirs to the Kingdom and serve as channel, through which we can receive divine grace and reciprocate our love and devotion to God through the child. The children are situated among the disciples and bestowed with blessings. Such children may be considered fully human, in contact with the divine.

Neither the child's characteristics nor their low status serve to distinguish them. The contrast with the adult and self-righteous, those who feel sure of God's care, is the child's dependence. This illustrates the dignity of God's love as a gift, and show us how it is impossible to achieve righteousness through own actions:

the whole point of the story focus upon the rebuke of the disciples. It is to 'such as these that the Kingdom belongs'. It is to those without status and without self-sufficiency that the Kingdom is offered and, indeed, given. It is pure gift and therefore cannot be received unless one takes on the stance of a little child. This should not be seen as simplicity, or innocence, or some other idealistic outlook. It is something much more demanding, namely a consciousness of need, of a total lack of self-sufficiency, and a recognition of one's dependence upon others and so upon God.⁸¹

The passages presented above, while not exhaustive, offer insight into how children are perceived in the context of biblical teachings. Children can be used as an example or metaphor for the disciples or the reader of the Bible, particularly in relation to their perception of themselves and their relationship with God. Even in this limited corpus, it becomes evident that there is no definitive portrayal of the child, nor of the way they may serve as an exemplary. Might we consider the child's innocence, their lack of desire, and their spontaneity? Or consider the child's low social status within the societal context of the time? A third interpretation might be suggested - we might perceive the child's dependence on the adult environment as a model for the adult's relationship with God?

⁸⁰ Culpepper, "Luke", 345.

⁸¹ The Oxford Bible Commentary, 2013, LUKE, (18:9-17).

3. Child as Metaphor in Moltmann's Theology.

3.1. Metaphors for Experiencing the Spirit.

3.1.1. Introduction.

The quest of exploring metaphors of the child in Moltmann's texts starts with "Metaphors for the Experience of the Spirit," from *The Spirit of Life*.⁸² Here we have a text where Moltmann states that he works with metaphors, and that may prove important for going further with other texts, where he applies metaphors but not mention them specifically.

3.1.2. Metaphors of the Spirit.

Moltmann sets out his purpose in writing the text:

Discover the inner relationships in these metaphors – the relations between subject and force, origin and field of energy, force and space, presence, and counterpart. I should like to find patterns for the realities and experiences of life which are expressed in the astounding and still wholly uncomprehended assertion that 'God the Holy Spirit' is 'poured out' on all flesh.⁸³

Then he structure metaphors used for the Spirit in categories, namely: *personal* like Lord, Mother and Judge; *formative* like energy, or space; *moving* like tempest, fire, love and *mystical* like water, source of light and fertility.⁸⁴ But there are few biblical references given where these metaphors can be said to be used.

It would be unreasonable to expect Moltmann to analyze metaphors in accordance with the methodology and model that has been developed in more recent times. However, we can still compare how he describes the characteristics of *fire* that are relevant to the comparison and that could therefore be said to belong to 'the source domain'.⁸⁵ Tempest – fire – love – works

⁸² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 269 - 285.

⁸³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 270.

⁸⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 269f.

⁸⁵ See argument from Johnson, page 20 in this paper.

as metaphors that “sweeps people of their feet”⁸⁶ The concept of fire as a ‘source domain’ is associated with notions of warmth and light. In ‘the target domain’, this implies that Spirit pervades us with these qualities, which we can then pass onto others. Moltmann explains: “like fire, enthusiasm ‘kindles’ enthusiasm. Fire warms us, and we pass on the warmth. It lights us up, and we begin to shine. It consumes us, and we become a consuming flame for other people.”⁸⁷ So, this is what lies in the concept of ‘the source domain’.

The interpretation comes as somewhat surprising: “It is the fire of purification in which everything is reformed: an image for the new creation of the world.”⁸⁸ Unambiguously an eschatological interpretation, as might be expected from Moltmann, but I lack an argumentation of the steps between ‘the source’ - *fire* and ‘the interpretation’ - *the new creation*.

Moltmann makes a point about ‘the feminine metaphor’ of the mother. It is said to be inclusive and can be traced back to the medieval concept of *fons vitae*, or fountain of life. Moltmann notes that the metaphor is derived from an experiential understanding of the transcendent in life and thus represents a subjective experience and a personal relationship. However, Moltmann's analysis tends to focus on the metaphor as a single aspect of the concept of likeness. The concept of the spirit as a mother may be regarded as a *simile*, as previously suggested by Punter. In accordance with Johnson's definition, the source domain and the metaphor then become equivalent domains. Moltmann posits that Spirit is like a mother, a one-dimensional concept metaphorically – but a lot more could be said if the discourse of ‘mothers’ were to be interpreted.

The concept of 'formative metaphors', particularly the idea of the Spirit as flowing energy, has been employed by women mystics. In fact, it is possible to discuss and interpret these metaphors in a multitude of ways. To illustrate, the concept of the Spirit as flowing energy and living water can be compared to the mystical metaphors of a ray of light and water.

The mystical metaphors function as an ecosystem, wherein a tree requires water and light to thrive and bear fruit. The metaphorical 'water' symbolizes the new life that emerges from the

⁸⁶ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 278.

⁸⁷ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 279.

⁸⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 280.

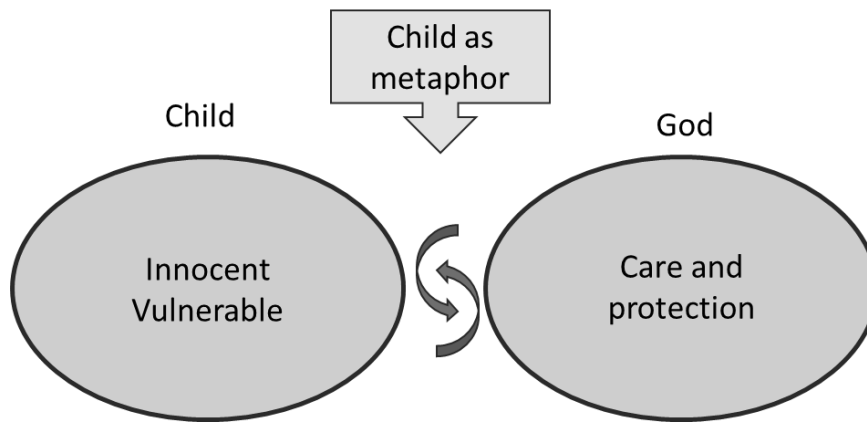
womb or through baptism. Moltmann reaches the following conclusion: “in the mystical metaphors, the distance between a transcendent subject and its immanent work is ended. The distinction between causes and effects disappears. In the metaphor of light, water, and fertility, the divine and the human are joined in an organic cohesion.”⁸⁹

3.1.3. Analys of Moltmann’s use of Metaphors of the Spirit.

Moltmann's approach to metaphorical language is somewhat relaxed. There is no evidence to suggest that he becomes more rigorous when using metaphors, but this is not explicitly stated. However, if we allow ourselves to follow his somewhat bold associations, we can identify potential connections that could be useful in our own arguments.

For example, metaphor as eco-system is an innovative and sophisticated use of metaphorical language. It means that the initial metaphorical comparison between ‘source’ and ‘target domains’ will subsequently expand and begin to interact, influenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. But with a more scientific approach, we can acknowledge that by using metaphors we use language to connect various phenomena with each other. The shared quantum, which serves as the metaphor, increases in size because of mutual interaction. An exchange of characteristics occurs, resulting in an impact on the target from the source and alterations to the characteristics. As time progresses, the source and target domains become increasingly similar, exhibiting a greater number of shared characteristics. In the case of humans as child of God, one can imagine that this reflexive eco-system of shared characteristics, leads to a more holy approach to children and a more personal relatable image of God at the same time. Then what Moltmann shows us in “Metaphors for the Experience of the Spirit,” is how discourse could be altered via metaphors and language.

⁸⁹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 285.



Model 5. The eco-system of a metaphor.

3.2. Promise and Future.

3.2.1. Introduction.

If we consider the child to be a metaphor for hope, then hope becomes a central concept in discussions of how the metaphor of the child, and man as a child of God, realizes hope. I would now like to consider a text from the book that made Moltmann an established theologian, as well as something of a celebrity. First published in 1965 and subsequently reprinted in new editions, most recently in 2021, this book continues to offer significant contributions to the ongoing discourse on liberation theology. “The Word of Promise,” from *Theology of Hope*,⁹⁰ focus on God’s promise to his people. But there is a promise that still belongs to the future.

The publication of Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* in 1960 had a significant impact on Moltmann's work. Bloch's philosophy is atheistic and based on Marx and Feuerbach, so Moltmann sought to pursue a parallel line of enquiry while anchoring hope for the world in God's promise for his creation, rather than in any political ideology. To date, over 500 doctoral dissertations have been written on Moltmann and his theology. This illustrates the considerable influence he has had on Protestant theology over the past six decades.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope - for the 21st Century*. (London: SCM Press, 2021), 89–92.

⁹¹ Jürgen Moltmann & Miroslav Volf, "Who is God for you?" YouTube /Yale Divinity School. <https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=volf+moltmann&&mid=EF77BEB5A26B151D4EA0EF77BEB5A26B151D4EA0&&FORM=VRD GAR> (Retrieved 14 August 2024).

In *The Future of Theology*, Catherine Keller, Dorothee Sölle, Miroslav Volf and other theologians inspired by Moltmann discuss the task of contemporary theology and demonstrate how it can be understood as an intellectual legacy of Moltmann and others. Sölle puts forth the proposition that the objective for human Christians and theology is aligned – "the origin is simultaneously the goal".⁹² As we originate from the divine, it is inevitable that we will enter the divine realm; each day we make incremental progress towards this ultimate reality. The proximity between theologian and believer, theology and lived reality is a key concept in Sölle's work and is also characteristic of Moltmann's approach. Although he may be deficient in theoretical study, he is not lacking in lived experience of God's presence in the world. Keller puts forth the notion that the contemporary epoch is typified by a phenomenon referred to as "utopian burnout," wherein the prospect of hope is perceived as both challenging and potentially misleading. Nevertheless, it is feasible to reinstate trust in hope if the source of hope and promise is reinterpreted.⁹³

3.2.2. What is Hope?

In seven declarations, Moltmann explains the relationship between God's word of promise and the theology of hope. In faith, "promise is a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist."⁹⁴ The history of Israel, this is exemplified by the promised land and the promise of the coming Messiah. The concept manifests in eschatological narratives such as the second coming of the Messiah, and/or creation of a new heaven and earth. God's promise serves as a unifying element between past, present, and future. "God's promise binds man to the future and gives him a sense of history."⁹⁵ Moltmann suggests that the promise and anticipation of the future are not merely a replication of historical occurrences. Both hope and the future are inherently unknowable, the "word of promise,"⁹⁶ implies that the "word has not yet found a reality congruous with it."⁹⁷

⁹² Dorothy Sölle, *Kneeling and Walking Upright*. In Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, Thomas Kucharz, (21-25) *The Future of Theology; Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 22f.

⁹³ Catherine Keller, *Pneumatic Nudges; The theology of Moltmann, Feminism and the Future*, In Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, Thomas Kucharz, (142-153) *The Future of Theology; Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 142.

⁹⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 89.

⁹⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 90.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

The tension between promise and fulfilment can be seen as the domain in which hope is situated. A critical juncture where we must decide whether to maintain hope and extend our thoughts into the unfulfilled future, or to dismiss hope and thereby reduce the period for the promise to be realized. It can be argued that a loss of hope signifies a reconsideration of the promise, accompanied by the assumption that the period designated for its realization has elapsed. Such a perspective may also lead to the conclusion that God lacks the necessary power or is not to be trusted. To lose hope is to impose limitations on the fulfilment of God's promise.

Moltmann argues that “the promise is not regarded abstractly apart from the God who promises, but its fulfillment is entrusted directly to the God in his freedom and faithfulness.”⁹⁸ This demonstrates how hope serves to reveal our images and expectations of God. Hope is not contingent to prior occurrences or the potential of future events, nor contingent on our own intentions or capabilities. Despite the unfulfilled promise throughout the history of Israel, this does not diminish hope but rather expands its capacity. Moltmann suggests that the power, timeline, and impact of God's promise are not constrained by these instances but rather are amplified by them. “The peculiar character of the Old Testament promises can be seen in the fact that the promises were not liquidated by the history of Israel – neither by disappointment nor fulfillment – but that on the contrary Israel’s experience of history gave them constantly new and wider interpretation.”⁹⁹

3.2.3. Analyzing Hope as Target Domain.

Hope is an unrealized promise. In the timeline of eternity, hope is more linked to the ‘not yet seen’, than to the present ‘already here’. Hope is eschatological in its nature, suggesting that God will one day restore and renew the world. For a child to be a metaphor of hope, in this eschatological sense, the child holds potential, and a promise parallel to a new world a new life. The *becoming* perspective (as in 1.4.1. above), is strong. If the metaphor should truly be hopeful, then the top-down perspective must be present; otherwise, there is no positive development from a fallen world towards a state of recreated paradise. Instead, there is merely a regression from a utopian to an intra-worldly state.

⁹⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 91.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In this manner, hope is retained, and God's accomplished promises are acknowledged. Prophecies raise hope for the future, suggesting that God may once more intervene in history to care for or rescue God's children. "For God's promise is like a horizon which moves with us and into which we move. Promise has fulfillment ahead of it. That is why the hoping person begins to seek for the fulfillment of his hope, finding rest only in the reality of fulfilled promise."¹⁰⁰ Then, the characteristic that is given to the child is 'unrealized potential', while 'hope' is placed with God.

3.3. Jesus – Child of God.

3.3.1. Introduction.

The way of Jesus Christ – Christology in messianic dimensions,¹⁰¹ covers aspects of Jesus such as being the Messiah, his mission, his sufferings, and the Parousia of Christ. From this book, I will focus on texts concerning the human aspects of Jesus: "Jesus – the Child of God"¹⁰², "The Death of God's Child"¹⁰³, "The Childlike Human Being,"¹⁰⁴ and "The Son of Man."¹⁰⁵ In this corpus, one can expect to find discussions where child and childhood are used as metaphors - but not necessarily mentioned as such.

3.3.2. The Son of God.

"In Israel's messianic promise the one who is anointed with God's spirit is also called, 'Son of God' (Ps. 2.7). Moreover, Israel sees itself collectively as God's firstborn son."¹⁰⁶ Moltmann points to the well-known *Abba*-prayer, to describe the essence of this relationship. He calls it a "reciprocal intimacy" between a parent and a child. Moltmann says the word *abba*, in Aramaic, is baby-language, and is not particularly used to describe the male parent, but a close caregiver.

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 237.

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 142–145.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 165–167.

¹⁰⁴ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 149.

¹⁰⁵ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 13–20.

¹⁰⁶ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 142.

In Aramaic, Abba' is baby language. It is the children use for their original person of reference. Whether it be mother or father, the important point is the sheltering, intimate closeness on which a child's basic trust depends. So, when Jesus is calls God 'Abba,' he is not emphasizing the masculinity of the Father God.¹⁰⁷

(See 2.3.1, for comparison). To gain insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son, Moltmann proposes interpreting Jesus' self-understanding as that of a child of God and the Messiah. The characteristics are those of a subordinated clause, namely, sheltering, basic trust, and closeness. Moltmann employs these terms to illustrate why the relationship may be characterized as that between a child and a parent. It is therefore evident that he considers these characteristics to be intrinsic and self-evident when describing the relationship.

Moltmann provides a detailed account of the characteristics typically associated with childhood, while also delineating certain traits as being more commonly observed in females. When Jesus shows mercy and compassion for the poor or those who suffers, "he substantiates God's 'feminine' attributes."¹⁰⁸ Then he turns to the reciprocal intimacy that characterizes the relationship between Christ and the divine. Taking Matthew 12:50¹⁰⁹ as an argument, Moltmann says:

The people who follow him, both women and men, will again find in the messianic community everything they have left behind them in their natural families – brothers, sisters, mothers, children. But there are no longer any fathers! This is often screened out because it is so strange (Mark 10.29-30). But it means nothing less than that 'There must no longer be any patriarchal rule in the new family - only motherliness, brotherliness, and the relationship of the child to God the Father.'¹¹⁰

To confess Jesus as Christ is to do so in three dimensions, whereby Jesus as the child of God represents but one important aspect, according to Moltmann. In combination with Jesus, the eschatological person, we recognize the Messiah who brings hope to the world. Jesus is recognized as a social entity, thereby enabling the identification of fellow humans.

¹⁰⁷ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 142.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ "And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother.'" NRSVA, Matt. 12:49-50.

¹¹⁰ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 144.

To confess Jesus as the Christ of God also means perceiving him in his *theological person*. He is the child of God, the God whom he calls Abba, dear Father. As the child of God, he lives wholly in God, and God wholly in him. He opens this unique relationship with God to all who believe in him and who, as children of God, like him cry ‘Abba.’ They participate in Jesus’ joy. In him believers recognize *the childlike human being*.¹¹¹

The joy and nearness experienced in the *Abba* prayer represents a stark contrast to the sorrow, distance, anxiety, and sense of abandonment expressed in Jesus' final cry at the cross on Golgotha.¹¹² Moltmann presents these concepts as two realities that are inextricably linked, such that one cannot be fully embraced without the other. It is anomalous that a child of God can be forsaken and perish on the cross. The same sentiment of solitude is experienced by all those who call upon God as Father in moments of adversity. Despite the lack of tangible evidence of divine assistance, they persisted in their prayers. “The uniqueness of what may have taken place between Jesus and his God is therefore something we do well to accept and respect as his secret, while we ourselves hold fast to the paradox that Jesus died the death of God’s Son in God-forsakenness.”¹¹³

In the concluding chapter of the book, Moltmann returns to the “trinity” of child, hope and eschatology, which is recognized from *Theology of Hope*. A new beginning and a more complete life, an anticipation of the idea that the most optimal outcome is yet to come:

People do not live merely from traditions. They live from expectations too. In their fears and hopes they anticipate their still unknown future and adapt their present to it, shaping their lives accordingly. The expectation of the future of the Christ sets the present in the light of the One who will come and makes bodily life in the power of the resurrection experienceable.¹¹⁴

Here, we see a clear statement that for Moltmann, hope, eschatology and the relations between God and humans are closely intertwined.

¹¹¹ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 147.

¹¹² Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 165.

¹¹³ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 167.

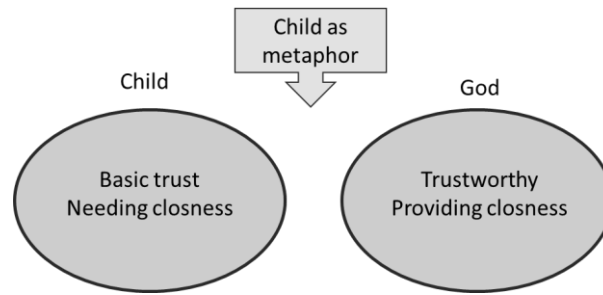
¹¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 340.

3.3.3. Analyzing the Discourse of ‘the Child’ in the Child of God.

The reciprocal relation represents a constructive approach to the concept of the trinity. Both the father (parent) and the Son (child) are equally invested in fostering a sense of proximity and trust. Moltmann characterizes the parent as "the original person of reference". A distinctive assertion that the child is reliant on the parent and perceives the world through the lens of the parent's perspective. As showed above, a different interpretation was presented, that the abba-prayer, was a widespread practice of addressing God. If a point should be made, it is not about baby language and Jesus closeness to God, especially since he refers to God as ‘my father’ on numerous occasions in Matthew. Rather, the inclusive language when using ‘our father’ which draws the disciples into a close relation with Jesus as siblings and to God as children.

From a discourse analytic perspective to equal Jesus care and attention with female traits, would be a ‘for-granted-taken’ assumption, that the female, to a greater extent, equals caregiving. The statement is problematic as far as it fails to establish an equality between the female and the caring. Yet it is liberating and inclusive as far as it establishes a connection between the female and God. It is noteworthy that the field of theology is in a state of constant evolution. At the time of the book's publication, Moltmann was regarded as a pioneering figure in the domain of feminist theology. In the context of contemporary queer theology, as articulated by Tonstad and others, the notion of a gender-neutral deity appears to be a more inclusive proposition. The concept of God is not limited to a dual biology. "God is queer" implies that God exists between and beyond the conventional dualistic understanding of gender. The exclusivity of addressing God as a father is thus open to question. In contrast, Jesus was a human male, but his sonship may not require the same degree of scrutiny but could be expanded to encompass all of God's children.

The characteristics Moltmann attaches to Jesus in his role as child of God, is closeness, to be sheltered and to be able to trust his father.



Model 6. Characteristics of Child and God, from Jesus as child of God.

Now, when including the disciples into the relationship, they inherit the same relations. To each other, to Jesus and to God. It is important to highlight that the attributes of the child ascribed to ‘the source domain’ in the metaphor and the child of God can be applied not only to human beings in relation to God. It serves as a metaphor for human beings. Since ‘the source domain’ regarding humans as ‘child of God’, is equivalent to the target domain in the human relation between child and the earthly parent. It might be taken as natural to regard one-self as dependent, trusting and in need for sheltering by an omnipotent God (if one believes in such a God). But note that this also means that this is how our children can look to their parents (or any adult) for guidance and support, based on the claims of generalizability implied by the metaphor. This may not be a problem if our discourse analysis of the child in our time is aligned with this view of what a child is. But if we, like Carnes (this will be brought forward in the closing chapter) would describe children as *beings*, and equally worthy as other humans – the metaphor is a dead-end-street. One cannot be free to realize the hope for the future, yet dependent. Not in need of shelter and still have the power to drive the Kingdom of God into realization.

3.4. Infant Baptism.

3.4.1. Introduction.

Baptism is a sacrament connected to the child’s capacity (or lack thereof) to function as a theological subject in relation to church and to the divine. If the child is regarded as a full human *being*, then God’s grace can be given and received through the baptism. The believe of an infant may be unspoken, but the relationship can be said to depend entirely on God at this stage. God and the child have a direct relationship of the same dignity as God has with all

God's children. It is neither different nor less valuable than the relationship between God and an adult.

The question of infant baptism versus believer's baptism is addressed in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*.¹¹⁵ The text places a particular emphasis on children, given the long-standing and pervasive practice of baptizing infants within the Christian tradition.

Moltmann's arguments in this text may prove particularly insightful in the context of this dissertation. One might expect that Moltmann's views on children and their characteristics or abilities would be reflected in his arguments concerning the theology of baptism.

3.4.2. Children as Believers and Receivers of Mercy.

In Protestant theology, baptism is regarded as a sacrament, along with the Lord's Supper. In the sense that baptism proceeds eucharist. The definition of a sacrament is frequently stated to be a physical ritual or instrument, established by Jesus Christ, and with the explicit assurance of his presence in the sacrament.¹¹⁶ "Through baptism men and women are born again to eternal life. Through the Lord's supper they are sustained in that life."¹¹⁷, Moltmann explains.

In the formative years of Christianity, it seems reasonable to posit that the practice of baptizing adults followed the newborn faith and the conversion. Subsequently, baptism followed the practice of faith. Moltmann considers personal faith to be of paramount importance and is mindful of the child's capacity to believe. However, he puts forth an alternative argument. That "parents have a messianic function towards their children too, being to a special degree missionaries and evangelists."¹¹⁸ Therefore, faith proceeds baptism in the case of infant baptism too "namely, the faith of the parents."¹¹⁹

If "baptism was to effect grace *ex opere operato*, as an unconditionally effective means of salvation, then all children have to be baptized."¹²⁰ Nevertheless, if only children of Christian families, in a declining ratio, are baptized, it is evident that this is not primarily based on the

¹¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 226–242.

¹¹⁶ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 227.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 229.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 230.

concept of preventing grace, but rather a consequence of the faith of the parents. As a child matures into adulthood, they must challenge and oppose their family to gain autonomy and independence. Their faith must also be subjected to questioning and challenge if it is to mature and develop.

Erosion of the Christian society chiefly appear in individuals at puberty and the age of independence. This gives rise to the curious situation that religion is still considered necessary and helpful for children, whereas for adults it is thought of as a private affair. Consequently, the religious ideas of adults often remain in their childish phase.¹²¹

This statement is challenged by the exhortation from Jesus in Mark.10:15 with parallel in Luke 18:16, for us to become like children. “But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is too such as these that the kingdom of God belongs’.”¹²² Does this quotation exemplify a discrepancy between the faith of children and that of adults? This raises the question of whether it can be described as *becoming*, as opposed to *being*, in the context of *Critical Childhood Studies*. It is notable that Jesus himself did not baptize, yet it was not long after his resurrection that the first Christians began to do so. Moltmann interprets this practice as evidence that “they understood their baptism eschatologically.” And that the practice was “proclaimed by the Holy Spirit.”¹²³

In the Gospel of Mark, baptism is associated with the baptism of Jesus. While in Matthew, baptism is understood as part of Jesus' "missionary charge."¹²⁴, and Luke distinguishes between the baptism of John in water and the Christian baptism in the Spirit, associating the latter with the events of Pentecost. In the case of Paul, “baptism is the expression of belonging.”¹²⁵ So, there is not just one way of interpreting baptism, even according to the bible.

“The theological dispute as to whether baptism is cognitive, or a causative and generative means of salvation ought to be open to solution.”¹²⁶ Moltmann develops this argument further by building on Barth's ideas to conclude that baptism of believers is the correct course of

¹²¹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 231.

¹²² NRSVA, Mark 10:15.

¹²³ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 234.

¹²⁴ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 234.

¹²⁵ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 237.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

action: “In so far it [i.e. Baptism, my explanation] has cognitive meaning. Barth deduces from this the inadmissibility of infant baptism and pleads for the baptism of believers.”¹²⁷

Moltmann closes this chapter with “Suggestions for a New Baptismal Practice.”¹²⁸ He proposes the implementation of a blessing ceremony to welcome the child and asserts that baptism should be a voluntary act. It is recommended (by Moltmann), that the ability to confess one's personal faith in front of the congregation should precede the baptism. He also states that the church must develop to facilitate this process. Proceeding from being a “religious welfare institution to the social body built up on firm fellowship.”¹²⁹

3.4.3. Analyzing the Theology of Baptism.

Moltmann's thoughts on children further evolved in the text above. Personal faith is not something a child can develop, and the child cannot stand before the congregation and proclaims its beliefs. Then the child is not mature enough to being baptized. It is also a direct valuation of a more superficial church when stressing that the church needs to develop from “religious welfare”¹³⁰ – which then is of lesser quality than “firm fellowship,”¹³¹ which is something to strive against.

While the subject of baptism is undoubtedly a fascinating one, from a theological perspective, it is not the primary focus of this discussion. It serves merely as an illustration of how Moltmann identifies arguments concerning baptism on the grounds of age and autonomy. The child is less able to express their own faith than the adult. The child is therefore less engaged with religion in terms of depth, actions, autonomy, and participation in a religious community.

In alignment with the conceptualizations put forth by *Critical Childhood Studies*, Moltmann perceives the child as undergoing a process of maturation towards adulthood. Accordingly, baptism should be reserved for those who can participate in faith and expressing it, and who are able to receive God's grace and function as a fellow Christian amongst others. It is notable

¹²⁷ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 239.

¹²⁸ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 240.

¹²⁹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 242.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

that the child is not the model in this context. Moltmann can be said to present a top-down perspective, whereby greater authority is attributed to the adult and less to the child. It is also noteworthy that the practice of baptizing children in the trust of God's prevailing grace represents a more uncertain path for the Church than the baptism of an adult based on the confession of one's faith.

Theological arguments in favor of infant baptism are founded upon a bottom-up perspective, which emphasizes the innocence and relevance of children in the eyes of God. The child is a subject of theological discourse, capable of interacting with the divine directly and deserving of God's grace. The child can be viewed as a model for other Christians who place their trust and faith in God's love. Moltmann's arguments challenge these perspectives. In his baptism theology, the adult who can express one's own faith in front of the congregation is the role model. The doctrine of God's prevailing grace is a firm doctrine of Christianity; however, it is not a unilateral act but rather a reciprocal bond of trust and faith. In this relationship, the individual seeking baptism demonstrates faith, and God, in turn, bestows grace.

Here, we see significant characteristics associated with the child in Moltmann's teachings. The synthesis of these perspectives would be those of innocence, lack of will, lack of knowledge and lack of faith. Let us now turn to the final text by Moltmann to be examined here.

3.5. The Child as a Metaphor of Hope.

3.5.1. Introduction.

The fifth text, discussed in this thesis, is an article that opened my interest in the first place. "Child and Childhoods as Metaphors of Hope"¹³², is based on a lecture by Moltmann held at the University of Tübingen, in 1999.¹³³ Then, published in *Evangelische Theologie*, (vol. 1 2000), called "Kind und Kindheit als Metaphern der Hoffnung".¹³⁴ Later published in english in *Theology Today*, the same year.

¹³² Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope".

¹³³ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 592.

¹³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, „Kind und Kindheit als Metaphern der Hoffnung“, *Evangelische Theologie*, (2000:2, 92-102).

This first issue of the millennium, presented a series of articles exploring connections between theology and children, examining a range of interrelated themes. Judith Gundry-Volf portrayed children in the teachings of Jesus. Cynthia Rigby examines why feminist theologians seems to avoid the topic of children, maybe afraid of the potential for a double exclusion. The article analyses the concepts of *child* and *childhood*, the use of metaphor as a rhetorical device, and the theological concept of hope.

3.5.2. The Article Summarized.

Moltmann starts with the promise of the Messianic child, discussing how hope is elevated through the metaphor. The promise from the Old Testament, is then followed up by the texts about Jesus and children. Exemplified in Mark 10:15, "Let the children come to me," and how God is received through the child from Matt. 18:3, "whoever welcomes a child in my name", as well as Jesus' message to the disciples to "change and become like children". All key elements in this discussion.

Moltmann offers a definition of *childhood*, examining it from three perspectives: that of the parent, of the child, and of one reflecting on one's own childhood.

(1) From the view of concerned parents and teachers, childhood is an age that is meaningful and good in itself on the one hand; on the other hand, it is a stage that is to be overcome by the child's own development, through training provided by adults and education provided by the society.¹³⁵

(2) What childhood is for children or how children view their own childhood remains a mystery. It is almost impossible for adults to access.¹³⁶

In this section, he uses the phrase "a normal, peaceful, middle-class childhood"¹³⁷, and to the discussion on what 'normal' is, I will devote a separate section (3.5.3). Moltmann discusses gender issues, implying a feminist theologian perspective; first in the parallel between Messiah – 'son of David' and wisdom 'as a daughter.'¹³⁸ The article concludes with a discussion of four implications for children today, based on the theological perspective presented throughout. A) Daughters and sons are equivalent bearers of hope; B) Children are a

¹³⁵ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 594.

¹³⁶ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 595.

¹³⁷ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 593.

¹³⁸ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 596/598.

gift; C) Marriage is optional and based on love; and D) every newborn child is a sign of hope.¹³⁹

In a manner characteristic of his style, Moltmann concludes the article with yet another three-point list: why children are “metaphors of hope”¹⁴⁰. Because 1) ‘with every child, a new life begins’, and then 2) ‘the reign of peace and justice is given a new chance’, and then 3) the child is also a “metaphor of God’s hope for us.”¹⁴¹

In his discussion of perspectives on children and childhood, Moltmann presents characteristics that are significant for the child. These characteristics will be either expressed or implied in the source and target domains when a metaphor is employed. Parents and other caregivers play a pivotal role during childhood in enabling children to reach their full potential as adults.¹⁴² Moltmann says: “since the beginning of civil age, belief in progress has influenced how people rear their children: childhood is only a preliminary stage to the true and full humanity of adults.”¹⁴³ The parental perspective, is exemplified by the commands to obey one's parents and to adhere to the concept of original sin. Children is to be instructed in to appropriate conduct and regulate their impulses. It is essential for the development of moral behavior and social skills, which are necessary for the transition to adulthood in a civilized society.

‘The child’s own perspective’ is to Moltmann a “mystery almost impossible for adults to access.”¹⁴⁴ And is exemplified in the recollection of childhood experiences by adults, rather than being articulated by children themselves. The sense of powerlessness, childhood as a period of relative insignificance, the observation that older children possessed a precocious capacity for understanding and action, and the image of a maternal figure who possessed omniscience, are supposed memories that adults can remember from their own childhood.

¹³⁹ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 603.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 595.

¹⁴³ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 600.

¹⁴⁴ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 595.

A sense of vulnerability and innocence is recalled, and memories of 'being taken care of' and being 'safeguarded.'¹⁴⁵ Moltmann states that when adults reflect on their own childhoods, they often experience a longing for the sense of safety and belonging that they felt as children. A desire for a return to a state of innocence and wonder, a feeling that life was filled with magic and miracles. Moltmann refers to this as the "longing for the lost." A paradise lost, if you will - is the key to the construction of "childhood as a metaphor of hope."¹⁴⁶ I think, it could be argued that the child is used not only as a metaphor, but also as a stereotype.

3.5.3. A Critical Perspective.

Moltmann states that "The context I am assuming is that of a normal, peaceful, middle-class childhood."¹⁴⁷ The designation of a particular phenomenon as "normal" is inherently problematic, as it effectively excludes other experiences and establishes a particular normative standard. Line Tonstad,¹⁴⁸ articulates a more expansive and inclusive theological perspective, elucidating the significance of such inclusivity. Tonstad posits that it is not possible to restrict the concept of divine grace, benevolence, or dominion to a specific subset of humanity, namely those who self-identify as "normal." The inclusive perspective is significant. Because, if God is the sole creator, then the same benevolent deity creates all people. Consequently, all humans are God's beloved children, and the metaphor of hope must be inclusive of all children, regardless of their living conditions or social status.

In examining the gospel and the story of Jesus, we find a poor baby boy from a Jewish background, born in the Middle East and living his first years as a refugee. He would not be included among the children, who's childhoods Moltmann refers to as 'normal'. It can be argued that the childhood of the Messianic child was never intended to be perceived as 'normal'. But it is incontestable that the childhood of Jesus would be excluded from Moltmann's three-point list, not on account of the miracles and the divine election, but on account of the poor living conditions, the lack of safety, the refugee status, and the upbringing in an occupied land. A definition that excludes Jesus must be seen as not-inclusive enough, I think.

¹⁴⁵ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 595.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 594.

¹⁴⁸ Tonstad, *Queer Theology - Beyond Apologetics*.

Moltmann suggests, that the child can be understood as a metaphor for hope. How does he argue for this thesis? The prophet Isaiah proclaimed to a people ‘walking in darkness.’ The destruction of the land, the expulsion from their home, their captivity and forced labor in Babylon have led to a ‘deep darkness of God’ that had befallen the people. In his proclamation of the birth of the messianic child and its reign of peace without end.”¹⁴⁹ The period of captivity and oppression is set against the backdrop of the reign of peace. The text is set in Babylon, the anti-thesis of the land of God. The oppressor of Babylon is set against liberation through the promised Messianic child. The limited duration of the captivity is set in opposition to the concept of eternal peace. In a strict literal sense, this cannot be considered an interpretation of a metaphor. Antithesis, the tension between the present and the future in the text, is the basis of interpretation. The child is not even a significant element in this context. Not child as concept, nor child as ‘childish’ in any way. The Messianic child in Isaiah is a ‘sign’, primarily. This is how we will recognize him when he comes.

It is the unrealized potential that serves as a source of hope and functions as a metaphor. In accordance with Ricoeur's definition of metaphor, the child is imbued with the hope of unrealized potential. Similarly, the Messianic child represents this hope, but the Messiah is a singular representation of God in the world. While every child is an image of God, the child is not God in the same sense that the Messiah is.

3.5.4. The Child as Representation of God.

In the New Testament readings, children are the focus of attention. Moltmann discusses the concept of the "good news for children" and the idea that every child represents a "promise."¹⁵⁰ In Matt. 18:5, the child can be seen as a representation of God. If we welcome a child in the name of Jesus Christ, then we also welcome Jesus Christ, and receive him in our lives. The child needs care and support, but so do fellow human beings. The God of Christianity is omnipotent and in no need of our care and comfort. Then the child, or ‘the least among you’, can be said to function as a ‘deputy God’. What you want to give back to God of love and support, can instead be given to the child, who needs it. And when doing so, God

¹⁴⁹ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 593.

¹⁵⁰ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 595.

who cares about the children, sees your love and care, and give back love and gratitude to you, through the child.

Here we can see a clear parallel with the Messianic child at the beginning of the article: the child is the one who brings God into his world. This is truly "good news" for children, as Moltmann puts it, if parents and adults all over the world were to live by it. Then every child would be welcomed as a gift *from* God, or rather as a gift withholding God. By implication, this reading should mean better living conditions, more respect, and more love for children everywhere. This is a hopeful future for children, at least in this life. But if we look for the metaphor in the texts – is it not the *gift* that is the metaphor, and the child received as a gift in gratitude?

In receiving a child, one receives God as Jesus. This is an almost sacramental interpretation of the gift of a child. Compare it with the understanding of communion, where we receive bread and wine on a visible and concrete level. While the underlying interpretation, is that we through bread and wine, receive Jesus Christ.

3.5.5. The Child as Representation of Humans.

In the passage on “becoming like children,”¹⁵¹ the child is employed as a model or source of inspiration for adults. Moltmann observed that Jesus characterizes them as children ‘who are already residents of the kingdom of God’. This is a natural gift for them! The child must have characteristics that an adult may or may not possess, but which are visible and desirable. However, this is something that adults learn from children or cultivate within themselves. The specific characteristics or deeds in question, are not explicitly mentioned in the biblical reading. The child is presented as an innocent creature who is closer to the reign of God than the adult. The child is depicted as a pure and all-good being, yet one who is growing up in a fallen world, forced to adapt. A ‘bottom-up story,’ as described by John Wall and others, as shown above.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Mark.10:15 With parallel in Luke 18:16.

¹⁵² Wall, *Ethics*.

The child cannot be regarded as the source domain in a metaphorical sense, since the characteristics of the child do not correlate characteristics observed in the adult phase. The child is thus a representation of innocence and trust in God, functioning as a *role model* for the imitation of these characteristics. While, in the first reading, it is recommended that children be cared for, and this will develop a closer relationship with Jesus. Thus, there is a notable shift in the perceived hierarchy between children and adults between the texts.

3.5.6. The Awaited Child – an Inclusive Perspective.

Moltmann turns to the poetic wisdom tradition in the Old Testament and the proverbs to bring forth an inclusive perspective that the awaited child is not only a boy. Here *hokmah*¹⁵³ – or *Sophia* in Greek – the "divine daughter, wisdom" is spoken of: "When he established the heavens . . . made firm the skies above . . . assigned to the sea its limit: . . . then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race".¹⁵⁴ And Moltmann comment on the text from the Proverbs that *Sophia* is "the lifegiving principle weaving together the world is thus female and as female childlike, that is, playful."¹⁵⁵

Moltmann states: "For a child has been born for us, a son was given to us" (Isa 9:6) - it represents only the order of male succession, without consideration for the equal rights of daughters and sons".¹⁵⁶ While the argument may have some merit, it cannot be said to be either exhaustive or unambiguous. The assertion that 'femininity is inherently playful and therefore childlike' is a proposition that can be subjected to scrutiny. Given that the noun "wisdom" is feminine, it follows that boys and girls are equal before God. This is not to say that the argument is necessarily incorrect, but rather that it is incomplete, or rather sweeping.

Theologians Athalya Brenner and Silvia Shroer have both written about images of women in the wisdom literature from a feminist theological perspective, and their texts raise clear questions to Moltmann's way of interpreting an inclusive perspective.

¹⁵³ I intend to refer to *hokma* as the author in question does. This means a variation in spelling like *hokmah*, *hokmā* and *Hochma*.

¹⁵⁴ Prov. 8:27-31; Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 598.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 597.

Brenner states (in reference to Hegel) that when a woman speaks up in a patriarchal environment, it is open to interpretation. It could mean that the aim is to be inclusive by introducing a female perspective, *or* it could reinforce existing social roles.¹⁵⁷ Shroer, points out that *Sophia* the wisdom, in Proverbs, has striking similarities with the Egyptian goddess of wisdom; *Maat*.¹⁵⁸ And that an interpretation of the wisdom text shows “immense hostility against women”, and therefore both context and content, leads to maintaining the patriarchal values rather than questioning them, and act liberating for women.¹⁵⁹ So, the question on who benefits from these verses and the concept of *Sophia*, is a valid one. Just a female figure, is not alone an argument for the concept to be liberating and inclusive for women.

It is also worth noting that the wisdom literature was written during the post-exile period. During the royal period, the king was responsible for maintaining and constituting the covenant between man and God. During the exile period and beyond, the family became the unit that held the people together and kept the covenant with God. The role of the woman in the family as a unifier and as a mother became not only important for the family but also as a symbol for the people of Israel. The wisdom literature frequently refers to the 'foolish woman' in the context of infidelity. This can be interpreted on a practical level: as advice in the family, in marriage, asserting the roles of patriarchy. But also, on a theological level, where it serves as a reminder to the people of Israel to remain faithful to their God and their people.¹⁶⁰

Again, there is no clear picture of how the text should be interpreted and whether its underlying message is one of hope or of oppression. Elizabeth Stuart argues that *Hochma's* description deconstructs the whole image of God but has gone unnoticed throughout the history of theology. “a female figure that is somehow with the Lord at the beginning, somehow brought forth before creation and somehow coexisting with him like a child or workman, separate and yet intimately connected. Divinity is undone and queered by

¹⁵⁷ Athalya Brenner, “Some Observations on the Figurations of Woman in Wisdom Literature” In Athalya Brenner, (50-66) *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ Silvia Shroer, “Wise and Counselling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of the Personified *hokmâ*.”, In Athalya Brenner, (67-84) *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 68/70. *Maat* – “personified as a goddess, to refer to the cosmic order which came into being when creation banished chaos. The word covers notions such as order, justice and truth, and means the opposite of chaos, evil (*‘isfet’*) and lies. It was considered to be the most important principle of the world.” From www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/maat, retrieved, 20250107.

¹⁵⁹ Shroer, “Wise and Counselling Women in Ancient Israel”, 68.

¹⁶⁰ Shroer, “Wise and Counselling Women in Ancient Israel”, 79.

Hochma.”¹⁶¹ This view has to stand for Stuart. Just as a female figure is not merely enough to be a sign of inclusiveness of women, (as mentioned above), it could also be too much to say that the whole image of God, is altered and ‘queered’, since a female noun is mentioned in the creation story.

3.5.7. Conclusions on the Article.

It should be noted that two of the examples used in the article cannot be described as metaphors in a strict sense. The description of the messianic child from Isaiah presents the child, primarily as a sign. The background image presents a series of contrasting elements, including war and peace, darkness and light, captivity, and freedom. If any element could be considered a metaphor, it would be ‘the metaphor of war’. Or the child represents an antithesis of the ruler who is anticipated. The second example is Jesus' call to adults to "be like children." In this context, the child can be said to serve as a role model, which is a positive trope, but not used in a metaphorical sense.

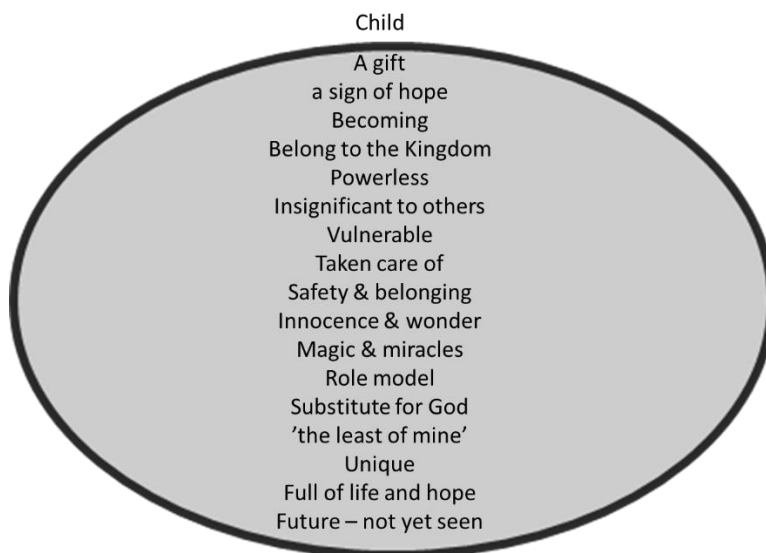
The child is regarded as a gift, as innocent and with exciting potential. Childhood is a natural state that is described as peaceful, full of imagination and magic. It is the responsibility of the parent and other adults to provide security, care, and guidance to the child as they transition into adulthood through education, responsibility, and awareness of morality. Childhood is an ideal state to value, but it also contains feelings of being invisible, inadequate, and less capable than others around them.

The use of the child as a metaphor primarily has two functions: to represent the concepts of potential and care. The relationship between human beings and God is complex and reciprocal. The potential of a child can be likened to the potential of the Kingdom of God. The child is a work in progress, already now and not yet fully human. There is an eschatological parallel here to both the potential of the Kingdom of God and to the potential of the relationship between God and human, which also always carries the promise of something more. The child is also described as the link between God and man: it is by receiving the child, both physically and by receiving the child within us, that a person receives God. And

¹⁶¹ Elisabeth Stuart, Proverbs. In Ed. Deryn Guest et. al. (325-337), *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 327.

the other way around: it is the actions we do towards the child, as one of 'the least of mine', that we do towards God. This could be seen as a sacramental interpretation of the child.

Moltmann makes the point that children can be considered both sons and daughters equally. However, the wisdom *Sophia* is described as 'feminine and childlike'. For a metaphor to be viable and inclusive, it must be able to be applied to all of God's children. Moltmann's discourse comprises several elements of the child as *becoming* and presents a view of the child that can be characterized as a synthesis of a 'bottom-up perspective' – where the child's innocence and need for care are emphasized – and a 'top-down perspective' where the child is simultaneously to be developed and needs to be educated to function in the adult world.



Model 7. Characteristics of children in the article.

3.6. Conclusion - Moltmann and the Metaphor of the Child.

3.6.1. The Child as Hope and Promise.

In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann establish the correlation between eschatology and hope:

Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the

medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.¹⁶²

The metaphor used in Moltmann's article is, that if everything in Christianity is eschatology, then eschatological hope could also be a principle. In the Bible, children are seen as the fulfilment of God's promise. There is also a 'tradition of hope' which Moltmann emphasizes in his article link promise and hope, history, and eschatology. He writes:

From the very beginning, it was part of Israel's traditions of hope. Abraham's experience with God lies at the foundation of the so-called 'historical religions' of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and was marked by departure and hope, exile, and freedom... This promise brought into history an orientation towards the future, replacing the eternal return of the same in nature religions. Children were no longer merely included in the powers of origin through the veneration of the ancestors, but the generations were now aligned towards children as the carriers of hope and as signs of the steadfastness of the God of promise.¹⁶³

Above, I wrote about the theme of the messianic child in the text, where the child is more of a sign to point to the Messiah. A story about a child, where the child is of secondary interest and not particularly used as a metaphor. But when Moltmann takes up the story of Israel and God's promise to Abraham, we have an example of exactly the opposite. In God's promise to Abraham the child is not just a metaphor of hope, but the child is the actual fulfilment of the promise. The link between history and the ancestors, from the descendants, continued through the newborn child and carries hope for the future.

In the last section in his article, Moltmann lists three reasons why "children are metaphors of hope."¹⁶⁴ For one thing – every child is unique and is embarking a life that is 'completely different' from everything that has ever been before. To welcome a child is to stay open to their future to be different from our own life, which is to embrace hope and the eschatological life, a reality not yet seen. "With every child, a new life begins,"¹⁶⁵ holds the idea of God as a creator still present and creating in the world. The difference is emphasized. But of course, there are also many similarities between one child to another, between one human being and another. That similarity should not be dismissed. But this is of course an image filled with

¹⁶² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 2.

¹⁶³ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 597.

¹⁶⁴ Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope", 603.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

hope. Not primarily a hope that is linked to the child, but a hope that derives from the living God.

Secondly – “the reign of peace and justice is given a new chance”¹⁶⁶, Moltmann writes. The advent of a new generation is therefore crucial for the realization of God’s reign on earth and the eschatological vision of the future. This underscores the continued hope that God places in humanity. Moltmann closes his article, by pointing out that if children are a metaphor for hope, they are also “a metaphor for God’s hope for us,”¹⁶⁷ the humanity. We – as people, society, humans – should see every child as a gift with a promise and a “transcendent expectation.”¹⁶⁸

3.6.2. What does the Metaphor of the Child say about God?

Now, let me summarize the characteristics that belong to the child from Moltmann’s texts. Whether they are drawn from ‘children in the world’, from Jesus as ‘the Son of God’, or from ‘child as metaphor of hope’. Then the list can be completed with corresponding actions and characteristics that forms our image of God. Now, we can argue that these characteristics does not become valid as true descriptions of God. Not as a theological theory, or as a statement of faith. That is true in one aspect. But they will stand for the underlying assumption and the desired response that the metaphor of humans as ‘Child of God’, holds. And as such, they say maybe not what we think we believe, but what we actually believe. Not what we write as theological thoughts but how we interpret them.

¹⁶⁶ Moltmann, “Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope”, 603.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Characteristics of the child	Parent – Adult		Desired response from God
Unrealized potential			Omnipotent
Basic trust			Trustworthy
Needing closeness			Providing closeness
Lack of will			Supportive
Lack of knowledge			Guiding
Lack of faith			Believing
A sign of hope			Resource of hope
Becoming			Being
Belong to the Kingdom			Lord of the Kingdom
Powerless			Powerful
Insignificant to others			Significant
Vulnerable	→	←	Untouchable
Taken care of			Caring
Safety & belonging			Providing safety and inclusion
Innocence & wonder			Creator
Notice magic & miracles			Making miracles
Role model			Inspiration
Substitute for God			Acting through the child
'the least of mine'			Almighty
Unique			Universal
Full of life and hope			Eternal
Future – not yet seen			Realizing eschatology

To deconstruct, is to shed light on the pieces that make the whole image. From the list of traits connected with the child we can sort out those significant to the source domain of the child as metaphors. Our image of God will take form, not in either a theological sense or as a doctrine of faith but in my own interpretation. This image will correspond with my presumptions on how a good parent should be, how we should live as humans and adults – whether parents or not. As the adult alters between the roles of ‘parent’ or human or caretaker and ‘child of God’. Being associated with two different sets of characteristics, that constantly contradict one another.

4. Critical Perspectives.

In the closing chapter, I aim to synthesize the theoretical perspectives presented in the dissertation. How does Moltmann employ and conceptualize children and childhood as theological metaphors? How the image of God and the view of humanity that underlie these metaphors are assessed and their capacity to offer hope and liberation can then be evaluated. The analysis will then be concluded by posing critical questions of the material with the help of Lee Edelman's dystopian book *No Future* and Natalie Carne's beautiful essay on *Motherhood* as an image for God's care. Are metaphors about children, which vary according to reader and context, useful in describing the eternal, describing relations between man and God?

4.1. Hope as Metaphor.

To provide context for the analysis of Moltmann's writings on hope, it is helpful to present the contributions of other theorists in the fields of sociology and theology. In *Eschatology and Hope*, Anthony Kelly argues for a deeper understanding of hope and its manifestations in different contexts.¹⁶⁹ The eschatological perspective on hope, has less to do with God making all things new, and is more a way of expressing something that has never been seen and could not yet be imagined. When the whole society is without hope and “tends to make peace with hopelessness,”¹⁷⁰ Kelly argues that the Christian vocation to persevere in the face of overwhelming adversity is more pressing than ever. The liberation theology offers inspiration and meaning, providing motivation for those seeking to understand and engage in the vocation of “solidarity with the suffering other.”¹⁷¹

In *Reasons to Hope*, Jeanrond emphasizes that hope is not optimism.¹⁷² Optimism is an expectation that everything will work out, based on past examples or of one's own ability. “genuine hope is always ‘against hope.’ It begins when optimism reaches the end of its tether. Hope stirs when the secure system shows signs of breaking down.” Hope is founded upon the

¹⁶⁹ Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*.

¹⁷⁰ Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 220.

¹⁷¹ Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 32.

¹⁷² Jeanrond, *Reasons to hope*.

conviction that God remains an active presence, accountable for the promises God has made and capable of establishing a relationship with humanity. Jeanrond proposes that hope is inherently relational, hope is inclusive.¹⁷³ Hope is defined as a connection to something outside of the self. Hope the result of an intimate and dynamic connection between God and human beings, between divine and human love. The termination of this relationship leads to the dissolution of hope, hopelessness and despair are the dominant emotions.

Jeanrond mention that Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, is 'dated' but still one of the most influential publications on theology and hope in the time past WWII. Jeanrond posits that Moltmann attains hope from within the context of faith, considered in the context of eschatology. The future is inherently discontinuous, as it is not yet imaginable.

"For Moltmann, hope is not so much a virtue than a call for eschatologically motivated action in the arena of this world. Moreover, his emphasizes reconciliation between God and human beings as a central focus of hope."¹⁷⁴

Hope must be based on the divine promise and originate from the omnipotence and benevolence of the divine entity, according to Kelly and Jeanrond. How can a child be included in this metaphor? Moltmann either replaces God's promise with the child or equates the child with God's promise. Moltmann sees the child as a symbol of the promise in the Old Testament, in family and society, and in the future. The child has the potential to hope for the future. When the child is seen as *becoming*, with the potential to evolve into an adult, the 'top-down perspective' is at use. But from this perspective, it is never humanity that brings hope. Hope is always founded on a living God who cares for God's creation. Hope is always founded upon the promise of God.

4.2. The Downside of Hope.

From a unique perspective, Lee Edelman, in his book *No Future*, criticized the privilege of children as hope. Arguing from a queer theoretical perspective, not everyone is a parent. Not everyone can be. Not everyone wants to be. Therefore, children are never promised to anyone.

¹⁷³ Jeanrond, *Reasons to hope*, 198.

¹⁷⁴ Jeanrond *Reasons to hope*, 50.

This is even more obvious to a queer person or a queer couple.¹⁷⁵ The assertion that children are a gift and a source of hope for the future is predicated on a heteronormative assumption that procreation is the primary objective of reproduction. This implies that those who are able and willing to have children are fulfilling the dominant reproductive goals and contributing to a higher sense of purpose. It is important to emphasize that children represent human capital that will ensure the future prosperity of our whole society, not just their own parents. It is also important for Edelman, to not diminish those who are unable or unwilling to be parents.

For Moltmann the child as a symbol of hope and the future. Edelman may prompt a critical examination of the apparent link between children and a promising future that Moltmann has established. The placing of all hope in the child as the future, or the placing of all hope in God's promise, can be indicative of the utmost hope and trust, or alternatively, an act of procrastination. Such affirmations, while encouraging, may be perceived as a means of transferring all expectations to another party, to the child, to the future, or to God. The expectation of a particular outcome confers power upon the individual. When one places all their hope in an external entity, one simultaneously relinquishes the capacity to act. The assumption of a lack of agency regarding the future divests responsibility and transfers the locus of empowerment to an external entity, whether conceived as God or the child.

Ignore, that is, how quickly the spiritualizing vision of parents “nourishing and growing . . . small bodies and . . . small souls’ gives way to a rhetoric affirming instead the far more pragmatic (and politically imperative) investment in the “human capital... essential to the health and wealth of our nation.” Ignore, by so doing, how the passage renominates those human “souls” as “capital” without yielding the fillip of Dickensian pathos that prompts us to “cherish” these “capital”-ized humans (“small” but, like the economy in current usage, capable of being grown) precisely insofar as they come to embody this thereby humanized “capital.” Ignore all this and one’s eyes might still pop to discover that only political intervention will “allow,” and the verb is crucial here, “parents to cherish their children” so as to “ensure our collective future”—or ensure, which comes to the same in the faith that properly fathers us all, that our present will always be mortgaged to a fantasmatic future in the name of the political “capital” that those children will thus have become.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Edelman, *No Future*.

¹⁷⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, 112.

Edelman raises objections to the one-sidedness of adopting a position that is aligned with the interests of children. He refers to it as a rhetorical Möbius strip. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that there is only *one* side to the argument: that it is always beneficial to be on the side of the child, no matter what.

If this is the case, Edelman's critique of the one-sidedness of the child-centric approach is not that children are inherently worthy of our care. Rather, this approach functions as a heteronormative agenda. It links children, family and traditional values and associates them with any political idea, merely by mentioning children as a 'password'. However, if we are unable to challenge the notion of children as a symbol of hope, and future, then we can never come to terms with the underlying motivations. A clear parallel to the discussion above on wisdom, *Sophia*, not necessary being beneficial for women for selling the agenda spoken with a 'female voice'.

The unwillingness to place all hope in the future, in the child, leads to denunciation as having a 'death drive' by those associated with the heteronormative collective. Edelman formulates the word *sinthomosexual*, a mixture of 'sinthome' and 'homosexual'. With the definition: "One who, because of his or her own (non-heterosexual, therefore non-reproductive) sexual orientation, has no personal interest in the future of humanity"¹⁷⁷, a critique of Jacques Lacan and the concept of the 'sinthome'.

I've already defined this child-aversive, future-negating force, answering so well to the inspiriting needs of a moribund familialism, as *sinthomosexuality*, a term that links the *jouissance* to which we gain access through the *sinthome* with a homosexuality made to figure the lack in Symbolic meaning-production on account of which, as Lacan declares, "there is no sexual relation".¹⁷⁸

Edelman does not align with the heteronormative agenda of child-parent-family-hope-future. From a theological perspective, this is especially interesting, I find. If one refuses to hope, to long for the future and for 'what is not yet seen'. Then the metaphor of a child as hope is empty. The metaphor of man as child of God is challenged, and the theology of the child needs to be questioned and adapted. Edelman shows with impressing clarity, that the

¹⁷⁷ Wordsense.eu "Sinthomosexual". from wordsense.eu: <https://www.wordsense.eu/sinthomosexual/> (Retrieved 01 May 2024).

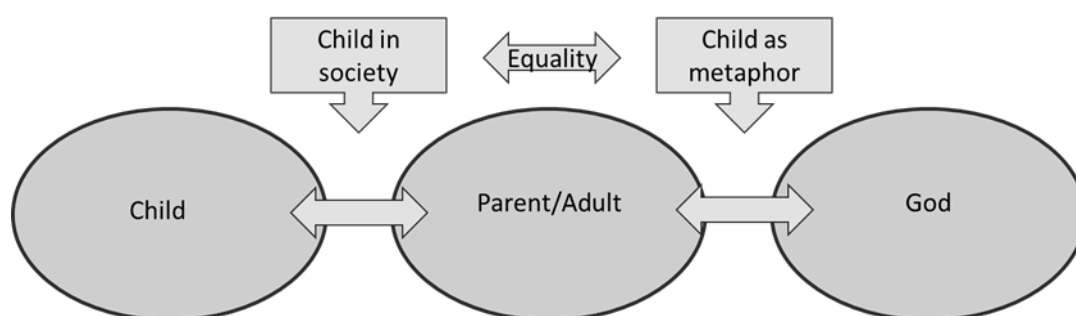
¹⁷⁸ Edelman, *No Future*, 113.

metaphor of the child, when used in theology is not self-evident, unambiguous, and therefore needs to be carefully interpreted.

4.3. God as Mother. Mother as God.

Natalie Carnes, in *Motherhood – A Confession*, uses the metaphor of motherhood as a bridge between man and God, a concept that inevitably raises questions about children and childhood. Despite the proximity in time between the texts, there are notable differences in the portrayal of parenthood and children, particularly in comparison to Moltmann's perspective. It is then essential to examine the hope conveyed through the metaphors employed by Carnes.

“A beautiful companion and challenge to Augustine’s *Confessions*. This book will be a gift to those hungry for literature the truth of women’s relationship to the divine in our creaturely bodies and a theology of motherhood that reflects a lived experience.”¹⁷⁹ The essay is both personal and theological in nature, exploring the concepts of motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship as a parallel to the relationship between God and humanity. The text is written as a pendant to Augustine's *Confessions*. Carnes addresses the same topics, follows the same chapter structure and is in constant dialogue with Augustine's text and his world of thought. She employs a similar yet distinct approach.



Model 8. Reciprocal relations in 'Child as metaphor.'

¹⁷⁹ Natalie Carnes, *Motherhood - A Confession*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), Book cover, quote by Jessica Messman.

Carnes and Moltmann both use the relationship between children and parents as a metaphor for the relationship between man and God. They illustrate this with examples and an introspective lens to enhance the metaphor and provide a more compelling account. It is important to note the distinction between the two approaches. Moltmann employs the child or the child as a metaphor with greater frequency and progresses in a more circumscribed manner along the chain. The child can teach us adults how we should act towards the child, towards one of God's least, and this also becomes an image for how we can relate to God and how we can think about being a 'child of God'.

In contrast, Carnes' approach is more concerned about how a relationship with God has an impact on the way motherhood is conceptualized and understood. And how the relationship between God and humanity serves as a model for the formation of the relationship between parent and child. From the moment of conception, the mother's identity is inextricably linked to that of her child. The mother becomes the fetus' entire universe, the entity she creates from her own body. She offers her own blood and body to the child to ensure its survival. This act is not a mere choice, but rather a fundamental necessity for the continuation of life.¹⁸⁰

It could be a huge problem to write a book where the author compares her role as a parent with God as creator and life giver, without clear hybris. "For you are not my creation but God's gift to me, and as a gift, you are a source of sweet delight. May I know you as a gift from the Creator, a sign of divine love."¹⁸¹ But Carnes does it with humility and a clear starting point in the difficulties, that she succeeds despite the challenging comparison.

Carnes describes various scenarios in which the mother is compelled to subordinate her personal desires and well-being to prioritize the needs and best interests of the child. This phenomenon occurs in purely physical terms as well. During pregnancy, the mother's bloodstream undergoes adjustments to ensure that the child receives essential nutrients before the mother does, if there is not sufficient supply for both. She provides a detailed account of the changes in calcium deposits in the female body during pregnancy, as well as the long-term residence of fetal cells in the maternal organism. It can be found in particularly high concentrations around wounds or cancer cells, where the baby's cells assist in the healing

¹⁸⁰ Carnes, *Motherhood*, 12f.

¹⁸¹ Carnes, *Motherhood*, 24.

process of the mother's body. This is an illustrative example of *kenosis*, or the exhaustive love demonstrated by Jesus on the cross, as described in the second chapter of Ephesians. The child, as both a creature and a metaphor, can serve as a source of guidance for adults in the act of self-sacrifice for the benefit of one's neighbor. There is a significant distinction between a biological process that is initiated automatically within the mother and allowing the same priority to apply on a volitional level. This distinction is particularly evident when the exhaustive love is extended beyond one's own child to a broader circle of individuals, including the stranger, one's neighbor, and those whom God refers to as "the least of mine." As illustrated in "The Case of Christ," this love is to be extended to every human being on Earth and throughout all of history. Such an action would undoubtedly be challenging to perform. However, it is not challenging to comprehend the role of the child as a metaphor and catalyst, as well as the theological implications of maternal love, through the multitude of metaphors presented by Carnes.

In a beautiful and honest scene, the daughter is carried to baptism in the Catholic Church, to which she and her father will belong, while her mother, born a Protestant, will participate in a separate way. The entire group of co-parents who carry the daughter to baptism and through life is mentioned. The analogy may be extended to encompass the child as a member of a larger familial community and as a constituent of the Kingdom of God, in which the divine is also represented as a co-parent." We want godparents who will pray for you, care for your soul, nurture you in your life with God. We want their faith to stand in for yours and assist your own faith of coming to maturity."¹⁸² As an image of 'the chosen family' discussed both in relation to Matt. 12, above, and for that matter, a more inclusive family concept aligns with queer theology theories.

The maternal bond is analogous to the divine love of a deity for their progeny. This love does not exist based on the child's inherent perfection; rather, it is a love for the child as a being in and of itself. A delicate and vulnerable entity, endowed with intrinsic worth and value. A human infant requires maternal love in an infinite quantity. It can be argued that without this love, the human child would not be able to survive.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Carnes, *Motherhood*, 31.

¹⁸³ Carnes, *Motherhood*, 43.

While Moltmann focuses on hope and future, Carnes' excels in discussing the problem of suffering. Her daughter, like all newborns, is born with an unawareness of her privileges as well as the injustices and evils of the world. The mother in the text is responsible for determining when and to which extent her daughter is exposed to these injustices. This presents the problem of pain. The child can be kept in the dark, where the unaware can be said to be happy. However, this also means that she has no capacity for empathy or care for others. For empathy and care to be established, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the injustices and evils that exist in the world.¹⁸⁴ This augmented awareness entails a broader scope of individuals who become the focus of care. In the case of the young child, the mother represents the entirety of the universe. Subsequently, this expansion occurs to the immediate family. The maturation process entails the expansion of this circle to encompass a wider social network. The question of who constitutes one's neighbor is a significant one. This is a significant question that can be answered by extending the circle of consideration to encompass an ever-wide group of fellow human beings.

This contributes to the perpetuation of existing privileges and reinforces existing inequalities. This constitutes a component of the developmental and maturational process that occurs in parallel with a child's transition towards adulthood. It also represents a dimension of personal maturation within the context of the Kingdom. I think Carnes presents a profound insight. One might posit that this phenomenon bears resemblance to the concept of divine permission of suffering in the world. It may be the case that humans require exposure to the reality of suffering to develop empathy and a broader understanding of their fellow humans and those in need of assistance. If such an entity did not exist, would we become entirely devoid of empathy and understanding if we were unable to recognize and comprehend the nature of suffering? One might suggest, that the issue is not the existence of suffering itself, but rather the dearth of empathy and agency.

Carnes establishes such a sophisticated foundation and employs such elegant language, yet she utilizes it solely to examine the relationship between God as a mother and a mother as God. While Moltmann presents a comprehensive and expansive conceptualization, Carnes establishes a robust pedagogical metaphor as a framework but only mentions some of the theological implications that could be derived from it.

¹⁸⁴ Carnes, *Motherhood*, 67f.

The expansion of empathic circles is intricately connected to the issue of suffering and the development of empathic maturity in humans, as discussed by Carnes. As previously outlined, she provides an illustration of a child's involvement in a demonstration for civil rights for the Black community, organized by the Civil Rights Movement. It is pertinent to question whether it is appropriate to allow the child to comprehend the atrocities endured by Emmett Till and Jesse Washington.¹⁸⁵ The exposure to narratives of global injustices, human suffering, and the capacity for cruelty fosters a sense of aversion and empathy. By examining the experiences of individuals engaged in efforts to promote the equal value of all people and to advance justice and peace, we can identify role models who can serve as sources of inspiration and as examples of the diverse forms of engagement that constitute our collective responsibility to one another. An imperative to advocate for the well-being, living conditions, and rights of those who need protection and assistance.

The process of maturation and becoming that occurs during childhood is a phenomenon that can inspire and inform the actions of any individual. This represents the path of the child, a metaphor for empathetic maturity and inclusion that can be followed by all. The consequence of such an interpretation is the conviction that it is never too late for positive change. The aspiration for a superior global order is not the exclusive province of children and is not confined to the future. The hope is contingent upon an enhanced level of engagement, a heightened awareness of the suffering of others, and a maturation of empathy that strives to encompass a broader demographic within the conceptualization of one's neighbor. The child's process serves as a model for all: adults, parents, sinthomosexuals, children and children of God, alike. The child, growing in empathy and love, stands for hope in this time, while God holds the eschatological hope, of the future. It would be beneficial for us all to adopt a more childlike perspective. The child serves as an inspiration, initiating a process we all can engage in, while Christ represents the ultimate target image.

4.4. Discussion and Conclusions.

Child as metaphor of hope, and child as metaphor for humanity as 'child of God', is found in Moltmann's theology. He provides illustrative yet dated analogies. A change in the view of

¹⁸⁵ Carnes, *Motherhood*, 67f. Till and Washington, where both young African American boys, victims of brutal lynching murders.

children that is significant, even though we have only moved decades in time and marginally in theological, social, or ecclesiastical context. If the child is innocent and pure, we need a God of protection and education. On the same time, our possibility to interact and be co-workers with God to establish the Kingdom here and now are limited. If humans, child of God, on the other hand holds hope, potential and power to participate in the world, then we need to recognize the same capability in the children of our time. Even if Moltmann, Edelman and Carnes are not too far from each other in time and context, they still provide vastly different perspectives of the underlying characteristics associated with the child.

Even decades after Moltmann's texts were written, it is necessary to challenge the image of the child that forms the basis of his metaphorical use. The concept of children must be expanded to encompass children from diverse geographical regions, with varying socio-economic circumstances and familial relationships. Child with or without parents, with aspirations and hope for the future, or children who are homeless or struggles with poverty or illness. Those who live in refugee camps, those who will not live until adulthood.

From queer theology, a new perspective on humans, on children, can evolve. When children are seen as a heterogeneous group their varied perspectives can be embraced, and their distinctive characteristics and experiences can be taken seriously. The child is thus considered a human *being*, unique and individual. The queer theological perspective allows us to broaden the concept of the human being beyond the dualistic male-female (adult) perspective. Encompassing all individuals regardless of gender and age. This approach also facilitates the recognition of the rich diversity of life stories and characteristics that enrich the concept of the human being as the image of God, *Imago Dei*, and the theological thesis of being a 'child of God'. Consequently, it encourages the development of a more expansive and inclusive image of God, capable of embracing the full spectrum of human diversity.

The concept of hope, as conceptualized by both Kelly and Jeanrond, is comprised of two key components. Firstly, the absence of a mandate precludes the possibility of hope on an individual basis. If the desired situation is within one's own ability, it is about the resources, such as will or time, that are needed to achieve it. However, when one's own abilities are insufficient and one's own mandate is inadequate, hope takes over and one hopes for external intervention. It is also implicit that the future reality will be superior to the present one. In both these senses, hope can be said to be eschatological. It is tied to God's action and is

beyond human ability to realize. The ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God contains such positive expectation and potential, which ‘no eye yet has seen.’

The metaphorical use of children has such positive connotations that it is challenging to identify any problematic aspects. The same can be said of other words such as co-determination, humanity, and peace. In his book *No Future*, Edelman demonstrates how the child can be deconstructed as a symbol of hope and future. By posing the critical question of whether children are a future and a hope for all and whether this image is entirely positive, that must be considered before using the child as a metaphor for the relationship between man and God in an unreservedly positive way.

My own interpretation of the child as a metaphor, and the greatest potential I find in that image, is informed by Carnes's insights on the child's development of empathy through the acquisition of knowledge about the human condition and the evils of the world. The image has the potential to facilitate growth in both children and adults. For children, it offers the possibility of developing empathy and emotional intelligence. For adults, it provides a pathway for deepening their capacity for empathy and care. This can lead to a strengthening of the bonds between individuals and the divine as children of God, as well as a more sustainable relationship with the divine for realizing the Kingdom, already in this world.

Does the child function as a metaphor of hope? Indeed, the child, like the eschatological future, represents potential for growth and development. The presence of hope is contingent upon the recognition that the child is not yet a complete human being. Or, rather, has the ability to change its own future and characteristics. Because there is still time. It is this quality of incompleteness that allows for the possibility of continued maturation and change. Humanity is the eventual state to which the child will evolve. From an eschatological perspective, the idea of ‘already here but not yet’ can be applied. It is the not-yet-realization that gives potential and carries hope. However, this simultaneously presents a limiting and a hopeful aspect. But at the same time – this is something that is a reality to all humans. In age, as in gender, the more fluent, queer perspective can be helpful. To realize we are all beings. The dualistic approach that we are either ‘child’ or adult, either *being* or *becoming*, is to simplify reality too far. We are constantly changing, constantly moving, with the capacity to grow and gain more of the characteristics that we associate with *either* children or adults. We can become humbler, more in contact with fantasy and ready to notice miracles. More

dependent on others, more inclusive, more responsible, more empathic, more hopeful – all the way through live. It is never too late. Never without hope. I think this view, more than anything, holds the potential of hope and liberation.

Is the metaphor of the child a metaphor of hope? I think the only thing one can say for sure, when engaging in deconstructing metaphors is that a metaphor is absolutely necessary for talking if the reciprocal relation between human and God. And that metaphors are worthless as describing relations, such as the relation between human and God! The reality that provides the characteristics for the ‘source domain’, is constantly changing and evolving, for instance if the metaphor is the child. Then it can never be used as a metaphor for describing an eternal entity, such as God. But if the metaphor is deconstructed, challenged, and problematized – then the metaphor becomes transparent and can as such serve as a metaphor anyway. Because we show ourselves and others, just how we interpret the metaphor of the child. The metaphoric language then is filled with hope, as it lets us reach from the concrete to the transcendent.

The child is not a concept. The child serves as role-model, as sacrament, as deputy God, as a sign and as a manifestation of Gods promise, a link between history and future. The child is eschatology in a way of ‘not yet seen’. the child is the least among us and therefore urge us to act towards them with all the love and care that we would give or receive from God. Therefore, the child is always present in the midst of humanity. And therefore, can theology of the child never be either without interest or a completed task. The discussion must be ongoing and evolving, because the children evolves and mature, and society with them.

Axel Honneth wrote on his theory of recognition, on solidarity.¹⁸⁶ The thought that one group at the margin, the *other*, needs to be recognized in solidarity, because then we not only include them, and honor their rights. We recognize that we, the large group, those privileged of belonging, can learn a new perspective on life, society and of ourselves, from ‘them’. A perspective that we could not get from any other sub-group, or from ourselves. I think this theory can be applied on child theology. If we recognize the child in the world of theology, we will see to their rights. We will engage in the discussion on how children can be included. We will recognize what is specific about being a child, and where theology needs to be rewritten

¹⁸⁶ Axel Honneth, *Erkännande – Praktisk-filosofiska studier*. (Göteborg: Diados, 2003), 109.

or adapted to meet the child. But most of all, we will learn something unique from the perspective of the child, perspectives we could never be aware of otherwise. Child theology is then a necessity in the field of theology. Child theology concerns children but broadens theology for the whole humanity.

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