

# Beginning again with Jesus

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My essay will develop aspects of questions 3.4 and 3.5 of the seminar. The title, 'Beginning again with Jesus' is intended to convey a) the *teaching* of Jesus about children is vastly to be preferred to the teaching of the rest of the Bible about children: b) the *teaching* of Jesus about children is vastly to be preferred to [most of] the teachings of the tradition about children: and c) the *meaning* of Jesus, as interpreted by the classical, Trinitarian faith of the church, must be the basis of any contemporary theology of childhood. In all three areas much 'un-learning' needs to be done, and a new beginning, 'with Jesus' (as described above) made. The two chosen questions are:

**1. "How are children presented in the Bible?"** The contrast between the teaching of Jesus about children, and the teaching of the rest of the Bible about children (e.g., child sacrifice, corporal punishment in OT; enforcement of obedience, dismissive attitudes to children in the epistles) will be developed. The patriarchy of the Bible and of Christian doctrine will be problematized and addressed. Criticism will be made of the religious use of 'father', 'mother', 'son', 'child', 'family', "Abba", etc., which marginalizes real parents, children and families. I call this the '*adultization*' of the Faith.

**2. "Which insights about children can we gather from Christian doctrine and tradition?"** a) Much first needs to be 'un-learned' from Bible and tradition (e.g., children and original sin, the *limbus puerorum*, gender essentialism, ignorant paternity theories, etc.) b) A new approach to children from classical Christian doctrine will be developed, based on e.g., God-the-Child; the universality of Christ and of the rights of children; the location of parenting within the Relations of the divine Trinity; God beyond 'fatherhood'; and taking seriously the teaching of Jesus about children.