

What the History of Childhood Reveals About New Testament Origins and the Psychology of Christian Belief

BENJAMIN ABELOW

In 1732, Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, discussed the connection between childhood corporal punishment and the development of a religious worldview. Mrs. Wesley, who began punishing her children before the age of one, saw the physical inculcation of obedience as a necessary part of the child's *religious* education. She wrote:

I insist on conquering the will of children betimes [i.e., early in life], because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. . . . This [fact] is still more evident if we...consider that religion is nothing else than the doing the will of God, and not our own. . . .¹

In this remarkable passage, Wesley identifies a link between the experience of the child, who is coerced into disregarding his or her own will and following the will of the parent, and the experience of the religionist, who disregards his or her own will and attempts to follow the will of God. Wesley makes the striking suggestion that one who has not, as a child, been coerced into obedience will not develop a religious outlook. Although she did not speak in overtly psychological terms, Wesley proposed that the child's

BENJAMIN ABELOW holds a B.A. in history from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.D. from Yale, where he taught on the clinical faculty. He is the author of a medical textbook. For the past ten years he has worked as an independent scholar exploring the links between childhood and religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. He has presented his work to scholarly conferences in the U.S. and Europe, including the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Historical Association, and the Human Behavior and Evolution Society. Write to benjamin.abelow@gmail.com or visit childhoodandreligion.info on the Web.

experience of enforced submission to the parent provides a necessary psychic foundation for a belief system centered around submission to God.

In our own time, scholars from a variety of disciplines—Jon D. Levenson, Rita Brock, Philip Greven, Lloyd DeMause, Morton Schatzman, and others—have suggested links between patterns of painful or traumatic childhood experience and central themes of Christian theology. In this article, I show that core New Testament traditions form striking thematic parallels with historically widespread patterns of childhood corporal punishment and abandonment. I then draw out the implications of these parallels for the psychology of Christian belief and our understanding of New Testament origins.

Children throughout history have been corporally punished to inculcate obedience. As suggested by proverbs in the Hebrew Scriptures—for example, “he who spares the rod hates his son” (13:24)—the father, in most settings, has been the primary or ultimate disciplinarian. This was certainly the case in the highly patriarchal world of the Roman Empire, where corporal punishment by fathers and those considered paternal surrogates, such as teachers, was widespread; many contemporary sources attest to this pattern.

In fact, the New Testament itself suggests the pervasive nature of childhood punishments during the formative period of Christianity. The book of Hebrews (12:8), probably composed around 65 C.E. and written in polished Greek (thus apparently addressing a Hellenized audience) asserts that *all* legitimate sons are beaten; only “bastards” are not. This basic pattern of patriarchal punishment has been widespread in the West—some would say practically universal—for most of the past two thousand years. It appears that, in general, sons received the most consistent and systematic discipline.

In contrast to corporal punishment, the historical extent of which is generally recognized, it is less well known that the abandonment of children—including but not limited to exposure—was also widespread in the West. The late Yale historian John Boswell, who pioneered the study of Roman and medieval child abandonment, estimated that, of all children born in Rome during the first three centuries of the Christian era, somewhere between 20 and 40 percent were abandoned.² This pattern existed long before the common era and provided part of the New Testament's cultural matrix. High levels of Western abandonment persisted, in many areas, right into the early twentieth century. For example, using numerical data from large European “foundling homes,” historians and anthropologists have shown that literally millions of children were abandoned in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. In many settings, including the Roman Empire, the decision to abandon a child was made by the father.

In addition to outright abandonment, countless millions of children—a substantial fraction of the West's population—were sent away from home as babies or children for a period of years to nurse, work, apprentice, or study. Many of these children were too young to understand that their expulsion was “only” temporary. Even among children living

at home, emotional and physical neglect by parents appears to have been widespread. This pattern apparently reflected factors such as social norms that considered overt expressions of parental affection as “indulgent” or “coddling”; a limited understanding of the psychological needs of children; and high levels of infant mortality (some historians have suggested that parents were unwilling to “invest” emotionally in children until they survived the vulnerable period of early childhood). Fathers, whose prescribed social role emphasized the disciplinary function, appear to have been, on an emotional level, especially distant from children.

Holding in mind these widespread patterns of painful childhood experience, let us consider the writings of the New Testament. Doing so, we find clear thematic parallels with the experiences of children.

In the Gospels, the innocent Son, Jesus, suffers according to the will of his heavenly Father—just as countless generations of ordinary innocent children (and perhaps especially sons) have suffered according to the will of their earthly fathers. Jesus laments, “My soul is ready to die with sorrow,” and he beseeches his Father to remove the “cup” of punishment, or pain, from before him. The book of Hebrews describes Jesus’ “loud cries and tears” and his intense “fear.” In all this, Jesus recapitulates the sadness, terror, and desperate pleading of ordinary children faced with impending punishment. And when Jesus ultimately resigns himself to his fate, saying, “Father . . . not what I will, but what you will,” he expresses a posture of filial submission that has long been forced upon ordinary children.³

In the Gospels, we also find parallels to widespread patterns of child abandonment, most strikingly in the cry of dereliction—“Oh, God, why have you forsaken [or abandoned] me!” This cry was taken from Hebrew Psalms and, in the Gospels, placed into the context of a Father-Son relationship.⁴ No longer is it simply a Hebrew lamenting his forsakenness by God; it is a Son crying out over his abandonment by his Father—just as we might expect of countless children abandoned by *their* fathers. Thus, with respect to both corporal punishment and abandonment, we find in the Passion of Jesus the passion of ordinary children.

Parallels with childhood punishment are particularly striking within the salvational structure of Christianity. In childhood, disobedience leads to punishment by the father, whereas obedience leads to benign treatment. Starting with Paul (e.g., Rom. 5:18–19), we find the same pattern within Christianity. Disobedience—Adam’s childlike sin—leads to punishment for all humans, whereas obedience to the Father—the action of Jesus—leads to salvation. The strength of this parallel is made clear if we allow ourselves to apply the term “salvation” to childhood. Then we can say that salvation from punishment, for both the child within the family and the believer within the cosmos, is attained through filial obedience.

These canonical parallels with childhood involve multiple and layered coincidences and, therefore, are not likely due to chance. Furthermore, the canonical themes in question are absolutely central to the New Testament and to the broad Christian tradition. Jesus’s experience of sorrow, fear, physical suffering, abandonment, and filial submission defines and epitomizes the Passion of Christ. The theology of salvation through the Son’s obedience to his Father is a

crucial emphasis in Paul’s Letter to the Romans and is certainly one of the most influential ideas in the history of Christian thought. To find strong parallels with childhood precisely at *these* defining points in the text is remarkable and warrants close attention.

Given that seminal New Testament traditions closely parallel historically pervasive aspects of childhood, what suppositions can we make about the psychology of belief as it pertains to these traditions?

For reasons that will become apparent, I will begin addressing this question by discussing dreams and, in particular, the relationship between dreams and waking reality. Most people would find nothing strange if a friend told them, “I had to give a talk to a skeptical audience and, the night before, I dreamed I was a soldier going into battle.” Although not all persons would infer the same psychological mechanisms, most, I suspect, would explain this dream as an internally generated reflection of the dreamer’s waking life.

In like fashion, painful, frightening, or traumatic events can also be represented in dreams. Let me give one example from a broad literature. In 1976, in the town of Chowchilla, California, a school bus carrying twenty-six children was hijacked. The children were transferred into vans, driven to a prepared site, and buried in a crudely constructed underground chamber. Although ultimately rescued, most of the children thought they were going to die. After their ordeal, the psychiatrist Lenore Terr, a pioneer in the study of psychological trauma, recorded the children’s dreams. Here are the dreams of three different children:

Child 1: I dreamed when the man gets on . . . [and] when we get on the vans.

This first dream is a relatively literal retelling of central aspects of the kidnapping.

Child 2: [I was] in an alligator “hole,” and the alligator bit me.

This second dream is partly metaphoric: the underground chamber, where the children were buried, becomes a “hole” in the ground, and the kidnappers are represented as a vicious alligator.

Child 3: Someone will get me and take me away in the ocean. You’d go down and down with the fish. The shark would eat me.⁵

This third dream is yet more thoroughly symbolic—a “looser” metaphor about the underlying traumatic experience—but still captures the nature of the event and the terror it aroused, a terror no less than what one would experience in a shark attack. (Actually, this third dream is a tighter metaphor than it first seems, for during the event the child had feared that the kidnappers were going to drown him.)

A post-traumatic dream expresses terrible events, and the victim’s emotional responses, in the form of a narrative—usually one that is partly or wholly metaphoric. The Gospel story of Jesus’ suffering according to the will of his heavenly Father is also a narrative. Likewise, Paul’s teaching on salvation is also, in essence, a narrative—for Paul recounts Adam’s sin and its subsequent rectification through Jesus.

To see how readily these core New Testament traditions

can be understood as metaphoric expressions about childhood, do the following thought experiment. First, imagine you know nothing about Christianity. Then imagine that you know a child whose father reared him with especially harsh corporal punishment to inculcate obedience. Finally, imagine that this child had a dream about a divine Child's innocent suffering according to the will of his heavenly Father or a dream about a sin of disobedience being rectified through a divine Child's obedience to his Father. How would you explain these dreams? Many of us, I suspect, would, as a matter of course, explain them as post-traumatic dreams whose particular metaphoric setting is religious in nature.

In considering the Chowchilla school-bus kidnapping, we saw how a group of similarly traumatized children experienced thematically related dreams. These dreams, while using different metaphorical constructs, expressed the same underlying circumstance. This phenomenon, which I call "dream concordance," is well-documented among individuals who experience closely related traumas. One might even suspect that if similarly traumatized minds could somehow be linked—as in some science-fiction scenario—these minds would all share the same post-traumatic dream.

This is much what can happen, I believe, in the case of religious myths. Unlike dreams, which arise as unique and evanescent creations within each dreaming mind, myths are durable and can be shared by the community. Whereas the original formulation of the myth, as with a dream, requires the creation of a new metaphor to portray reality, community participation in the myth requires only a conviction that the metaphor is literally true. This explanation is relevant to Christianity, where the actual, culturally stereotypical dynamic between a human father and his child is transposed into a mythical dynamic between a divine Father and his Child, Jesus. In like manner, the childhood strategy of punishment-avoidance through filial obedience is transposed into a vision of supernatural salvation through the obedience of the divine Son.

To this point, I have focused on the *external* circumstances of the child—that is, what is done *to* him by the parent. But when children are compelled to obey, they undergo a specific *internal* process. Because it is, ultimately, the child's will and "willfulness" that leads to disobedience and, hence, punishment, children reared with corporal discipline learn that, to avoid punishment, they must suppress the will and psychologically disengage from aspects of their inner selves.

What is extraordinary is that Christianity reflects, along with the child's external circumstances, this inner process. Within Christianity, the internal childhood requirement to suppress, repudiate, and negate aspects of the self is expressed in the powerful language of symbolic myth: to avoid eternal punishment, the believer must "die to the self" and be reborn "in Christ." Here, it is important to recognize that the "self" which must die is the *disobedient* self, specifically, the self that is tainted with Adam's primal act of willful, childlike disobedience. Likewise, the Christ, in whom the Christian is said to be reborn, is the Son who, in his relationship with his heavenly Father, is the obedient child *par excellence*.

Once it is recognized that Adam and Jesus mythically exemplify and personify, respectively, filial disobedience and obedience, a key psychological and cultural meaning of

the Adam-Jesus story becomes apparent. In becoming a Christian, the believer metaphysically realigns himself from Adam to Jesus, changing, quite literally, from disobedient to obedient child, thereby avoiding damnation by the Father; in the process, the believer metaphorically but precisely reenacts the childhood experience of subjugating his will—"dying to the self"—to avoid paternal punishment. Put differently, in undertaking the quintessentially Christian act of accepting and identifying with Jesus, the believer voluntarily reenacts, on the level of religious symbolism, an internal process that was *forced* upon him as a child.

In the history of our culture, childhood corporal punishment has almost universally been viewed as necessary and beneficial; and the psychological harm caused by even severe punishments has been at most dimly and inconsistently understood. In such a culture, the situation of children could not be communicated literally because the necessary framework of cultural understanding was lacking. However, a symbolic "language," such as that provided by

"In becoming a Christian, the believer metaphysically realigns himself from Adam to Jesus, changing, quite literally, from disobedient to obedient child, thereby avoiding damnation by the Father. . . ."

Christianity, could fill the gap—expressing endemic childhood suffering without the need for either literal speech or cultural understanding. In fact, in the lands where Christianity was prevalent, New Testament themes, and the myriad Christian traditions associated with them, may have provided the *only* precise, culturewide expression about the "invisible" traumas of childhood.

Much the same can be said of abandonment. As historian John Boswell has pointed out, many ancient myths involve abandoned children. As examples, Boswell lists Oedipus; Ion; Cyrus of Persia; Paris; Romulus and Remus; Telephus; Habis; Jupiter, as well as Jupiter's twin sons, Zethus and Amphin; Poseidon; Asclepius; Hephaistos; Attis; the goddess Cybele; King Sargon of Akkad—all these and more, according to myth, were exposed or abandoned as children.⁶

These myths of abandonment appear to have arisen and persisted because they reflected a pervasive social reality. They made sense in terms of actual, lived experience. These myths typically end happily, with the children ultimately being reunited with their parents and often going on to great things, such as kingship. This happy outcome, of course, is much different from that experienced in reality throughout history by most abandoned children; *their* abandonment typically ended in death or some form of enslavement. Perhaps one can see in the abundance of these myths a form of cultural wish fulfillment, a way to make bearable a terrible reality by holding in mind the image of a glorious outcome.

The Gospel Passion is part of this same cultural tradition. Jesus experiences himself as abandoned by his Father, crying out from the cross, "Why have you abandoned me?"

Yet, like those children in ancient myths who are ultimately reclaimed by their parents and go on to kingship, Jesus is resurrected by his Father and exalted as the head of a great people. Like its ancient predecessors, this portrayal may have provided a mythic compensation, or psychological distraction, from the grim realities of historically pervasive abandonment in the Western world.

Earlier in this article, I stated that Christian parallels with historical patterns of childhood are unlikely to have arisen by chance. However, I did not address the obvious question: How did these parallels arise? The answer, I suggest, is that central New Testament themes were shaped, during their formative period, as a reflection of the painful realities of childhood. Expanding this assertion slightly, I would say that those persons responsible for formulating early Christian ideas, having been reared in the highly patriarchal world of the early Roman Empire, unknowingly projected or mapped patterns of childhood onto a religious cosmos. According to this explanation, canonical themes of innocent suffering, paternal abandonment, salvation through filial obedience, and the like were formed on a template provided by childhood. This explanation is elegant in its simplicity; it also makes intuitive sense in that it conforms to the commonplace notion that religious traditions reflect their cultural milieu. Furthermore, one is hard-pressed to think of alternate plausible explanations for the observed parallels; this is especially true once it is recognized that corporal punishment and abandonment were widespread long *before* the rise of Christianity, precluding the possibility that the patterns of childhood arose primarily as a reflection of canonical themes.⁷

In referring to projection and mapping, I broached the subject of psychological mechanism. Let me continue on this path and say a bit more about the ways in which childhood reality could have gotten “translated” into a system of religious beliefs. This translation mechanism might exist on two levels. The first level consists of internal psychological processes; the second level consists of behavioral and social mechanisms through which these inner processes could have played out on the stage of early Christian history.

As for the first level, at least five psychological mechanisms, or models, come to mind. Each is well-attested and could be discussed in detail, though for our purposes a simple, suggestive list will suffice:

1. Normal modes of metaphoric thought, which are ubiquitously evident in dreams and figures of speech, provide a ready explanation for the creation of religious metaphors about childhood.
2. The phenomenon described as “childhood amnesia.” I here refer to the normal process by which mental imprints from early childhood appear to be “forgotten,” in part because they are stored in a fragmentary manner. Such fragmentary memories might be woven into religious narratives and beliefs.
3. Dissociation resulting from psychological trauma could create a pool of fragmentary memories and emotions, which, like those produced through childhood “amnesia,” could have contributed to religious narratives and beliefs.
4. The process described as transference. In its broad sense, “transference” refers to the interpretation, on both an emo-

tional and cognitive level, of current experiences on the pattern of important childhood relationships. This phenomenon, originally conceptualized in psychoanalytic terms, has more recently been explored on the level of neuroscience. 5. Within the field of cognitive science, the production of nonliteral narratives, as well as a range of other mental phenomena, including hallucinations, has been attributed to the cognitively biased interpretation of sensory information. This biasing is highly sensitive to both conscious and unconscious concerns.

What can we say about these five mechanisms? Were they really involved in the creation of seminal Christian ideas? Because the human mind is a black box, not accessible to direct observation, it is not possible to know with certainty if any of these invisible mechanisms really played a role. But all of these mechanisms are *plausible*. One, all, or any combination of them could have contributed to the “translation” of childhood experience into religious myth.

Let us now look at the second level of mechanism. As I noted, this level involves processes through which psychological mechanisms, of the sort just described, could have played out on the stage of early Christian history. This second level is superimposed on, and incorporates, the first level, and for this reason we can think of it as comprising “higher-level” processes of religious formation. I will offer two plausible scenarios, both of which involve processes that appear to have played a key role in the development of Christian traditions. Specifically, I will discuss revelation, such as that described by Paul in his New Testament letters, and the oral transmission of narratives, a process often said to explain how early Jesus traditions became available to the Gospel writers.

Because revelation can occur within the individual mind, it provides an obvious route for producing metaphoric portrayals of reality. Specifically, religious revelations could arise from internally generated expressions about one’s own experiences, including one’s own childhood. This process truly is a kind of revelation, but not in the usual, supernatural sense. It is instead an unrecognized form of *self*-revelation.

One reason certain types of self-awareness might be experienced as divine revelations is that the information comes from parts of the self that are not normally accessed and not normally thought of as self at all—for instance, “forgotten” memories from childhood or dissociated experiences of trauma. This information, because it is not integrated into the individual’s sense of self, may be perceived as coming from *outside* the self. The psychiatrist Morton Schatzman has described spiritual “revelations” that reflect the content of childhood traumas occurring decades earlier. Schatzman explains this revelatory process as follows: “Experiences that arise from regions of one’s mind of which one is not ordinarily aware may appear to have extraordinary sources and qualities.”⁸ Schatzman’s work suggests that many seeming delusions, including idiosyncratic “revelations” about a presumed spiritual or supernatural realm, are actually akin to post-traumatic dreams, consisting of metaphoric expressions about patterns of childhood trauma.

In an ideal universe, revelations of this sort would come packaged and labeled in a way that tells the recipient how to understand them. Applied to the Christian context, such labeling might say: “This communication comes from with-

in yourself. It is not about a divine Son of God or an otherworldly salvation. It is about your own childhood.” But lacking such labeling—especially in a culture with limited psychological understanding—the recipient of the revelation is likely to mistake the message for a literally descriptive, here-and-now communication from a transcendent realm.

Something like this may have occurred during the formation of Christianity. Religious seers such as St. Paul—whose revelations helped shape early Christian ideas—may have been perceiving symbolic information about their own early life experiences. Their minds were, so to speak, painting the ambiguous canvas of the universe with unremembered, unrecognized, suppressed, or dissociated memories of their own childhoods. Because their childhood experiences were part of a widespread, culturally normative pattern, their revelations, which reflected this pattern, were relevant and meaningful to wide segments of the culture. One might even say that these individuals provided a specialized service to other members of their culture, dreaming the post-traumatic dreams of an entire culture and making this “waking dream” available to the community. This “dream” took the form of a religious myth about a divine Father, his innocent Son, punishment and abandonment, and myriad variations on themes of filial obedience and disobedience.

In contrast to revelation, which can arise from the individual mind, oral traditions could have provided a *social* mechanism for shaping religious myths on the pattern of childhood. Oral traditions, which are thought to have played a central role in the spread of early Christian narratives, can change during the transmission process. As one scholar describes it: “There is an important feature of oral tradition that demands our attention—namely, its fluidity. Oral tradition is typically in a continuous state of evolution, as it absorbs new experiences and adjusts to new conditions and needs within the community.”⁹

This quote, with its reference to “evolution,” suggests a mechanism by which religious parallels with childhood could have developed and intensified over time. Because this mechanism has specific parallels to Darwin’s theory of evolution, it is useful say a few words about Darwin’s ideas.

Although it is sometimes forgotten, Darwin’s innovation was *not* that species evolved. Many before Darwin believed in evolution. Darwin’s particular insight was that evolution might occur by a simple and specific mechanism, termed natural selection. According to Darwin, random variations in physical or behavioral traits that produce a better “fit” with the environment—that is, traits that better enable an organism to survive—tend to be preserved in the species. The traits are preserved, Darwin believed, because the individuals who possess them are more likely to reach reproductive age and to pass the traits to offspring. After relatively few generations, even traits that impart only modest survival advantages may begin to spread within the population.

The concept of natural selection is useful when considering the ideas presented here. Individuals who have had traumatic upbringings can, I believe, experience powerful subliminal resonances when they encounter religious teachings that express themes reflective of their own childhoods. Such resonances tend to render a religious teaching engaging and believable. If a pattern of childhood trauma is endemic in a culture, then these resonances will be widespread; as a

result, the religious teachings would have, *à la* Darwin, a good fit with their cultural environments. The teachings would seem relevant, emotionally powerful, and hence worthy of communicating to others; and, like a favorable genetic trait, they would spread within the culture. Within the highly patriarchal world of the Roman Empire, teachings about an innocent Son who suffered obediently according to the will of his Father would resonate powerfully; the same can be said of Paul’s teachings on salvation through filial obedience. Perhaps such resonances might even provide the ultimate basis for the subjective experience of religious faith.¹⁰

Although Darwin observed random variations within species, and recognized that natural selection could explain why some traits became prevalent in the population, he did not understand how the variations arose in the first place. It is now known that trait variations arise primarily through genetic mutation; this mutational diversity provides the substrate upon which natural selection acts. Analogizing to religion, we can say that oral traditions tend to mutate rapidly, and that those variants with the best cultural fit are selected for survival. According to the thesis presented here, emotional resonances with childhood function as a primary selection criterion during the evolution of a religious tradition. Thus, like the process of “revelation,” natural selection among variant religious traditions provides a plausible mechanism through which cultural patterns of childhood could have shaped the canon.

In this part of my presentation, I have suggested that central New Testament traditions arose as reflections of endemic childhood punishment and abandonment within the patriarchal Roman world. I based my argument on strong parallels between patterns of childhood and canonical themes. When two sets of phenomena are correlated or associated, as with the parallels we are considering, this fact does not *in itself* indicate a cause-and-effect relationship. However, additional factors are present here. First, the parallels appear to be too numerous and precise to plausibly be accounted for by chance. Second, the explanation I propose is elegant in its simplicity and requires little in the way of ad hoc clarification. Third, the explanation is intuitive and consistent with the commonplace notion that religious traditions reflect their cultural milieu, especially their milieu of origin. Fourth, the explanation is plausible in terms of both underlying psychological mechanisms and higher-level processes of religious formation, such as revelation and oral tradition. Fifth, it is difficult to conceive of plausible alternate explanations. Taken together, this constellation of factors strongly supports the presumption that patterns of childhood deeply shaped central New Testament traditions.

Let me conclude by noting that aspects of my thesis are relevant to other religions, myths, and cultures. The inculcation of childhood obedience by physical coercion has been historically prevalent cross-culturally. It therefore should not be surprising that many religions and myths—including many that are not cognate with Christianity—portray similar themes to those found in Christianity.

Notes

1. Greven, Philip, ed. *Child-Rearing Concepts 1628–1861: Historical Sources* (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock, 1973), p. 48.

2. Boswell, John. *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 135.

3. On the Passion as expression of the Father's will, see, e.g., Mark 14:36 and parallels; Rom. 5:18–19, 8:31–32; John 1:29, 3:16, 12:27–28, 18:11; and (strikingly) Acts 2:23, 4:27–28. For “My soul is ready . . .” see Mark 14:32 and parallels. For “loud cries and tears,” see Hebrews 5:7.

4. Psalms 22. Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

5. Terr, Lenore. *Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 210–14.

6. Boswell, op cit. pp. 76–77.

7. Corporal punishment of children was normative also in first-century Jewish culture, both in Palestine and the Diaspora, and this suggests additional, more specifically Jewish, pathways through which patterns of childhood could have shaped early Christian traditions. However, for a variety of reasons, including the pervasive

and highly explicit nature of Roman patriarchy and the apparent absence of child-abandonment in first-century Jewish culture, I suspect that Roman culture provided the dominant influence, although it is certainly possible that this Roman influence was partly mediated through Hellenistic Jewish culture.

8. Schatzman, Morton. *Soul Murder: Persecution in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1973).

9. Lindberg, David C. *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 6.

10. In presenting this evolutionary model, I do not use Richard Dawkins's “meme” terminology, because Dawkins envisions the meme as self-replicating or self-copying. I believe this formulation is inaccurate, except as a figure of speech, and distracts attention from the developmental and psychological factors that determine a religious teaching's “fitness.” ◆