

Child, Church and Protection: A Historical Theology Perspective and Its Implications for Churches in Africa



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ABSTRACT

Children have the right to protection. As a result, all institutions, including churches are expected to take concrete steps to safeguard children. There is a growing interest in the role of churches in child protection. Africa is considered the center of vitality of Christianity and Christian faith communities have become a powerful force in African society. However, recent data revealed that various forms of violence against children such as sexual, physical, emotional and neglect are rife on the continent. Faith communities have a mandate to undertake concrete measures to ensure the safeguarding of children in churches and society at large. Using a chronological approach to historical theology, the paper undertakes critical reflections on the church's child protection efforts across the major periods of church history to obtain insights into the contemporary church in Africa. The paper posits that churches can glean valuable lessons from the church age to inform and reform churches' child protection efforts. The paper contributes to the current discourse on efforts of churches on child protection by shedding light on the fact that during the church age, children were viewed as precious in the sight of God and worthy to be nurtured in a caring and loving environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Child protection is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international conventions and national laws.¹ Despite these conventions, laws and policies on the safeguarding of children, the reality of child abuse and exploitation persists, even within institutions meant to provide safe spaces for children's growth and development. Where child abuse exists, child protection is an urgent and appropriate response.² Consequently, all stakeholders, including churches are expected to take concrete safeguarding measures. The church, as God's people and a sacred institution, has a critical role in promoting child protection and ensuring the well-being of children within its communities.³

¹ Ebenezer Tetteh, Kpalam and Vernon E. Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church's Ministry* (Kinder Foundation, 2020).

² Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam, "Child Protection in the Church of Pentecost in Winneba Municipality, Ghana," *Religion and Development* 2, no. 2 (2023): 197–212, 2.

³ Agbonkhanmeghe E Orobator, "Between Ecclesiology and Ethics: Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 897–915, 894.

Child abuse is a public health concern in Africa. Different forms of violence, such as physical, sexual, emotional and verbal are part of the daily lived experiences of children in Africa. A report from the African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC) revealed that over 50% of children on the continent experience physical violence.⁴ In some regions on the continent, approximately 40% of girls suffer sexual abuse before reaching 15 years of age. The report further presents that more than 80 % of children aged 1-14 experience violent discipline every month.

Christian faith communities have become a powerful force in African society. Africa is considered the centre of the vitality of Christianity and in most African communities, churches are key to the developmental agenda.⁵ However, there is evidence that churches some churches pay little attention to the lived experiences of children on the continent For example, in Ghana, the Child and Family Welfare Policy of Ghana indicates that child protection has multiple players, including children and the youth, families, communities, governments, civil societies, and private organizations. Consequently, churches, are called upon to institute measures to ensure that children are not harmed.⁶

Kpalam and Ahiataku observed that although churches are uniquely positioned to respond to the menace of child abuse, some churches lack concrete measures for the safeguarding of children.⁷ Over the years, the church's response to child protection has been shaped by multiple and complex factors such as historical, theological, and cultural factors.

With a focus on the African context, this article seeks to understand how the historical theology perspective could inform the church's child protection ministry in Africa. Using a critical reflection on the church's role across the major historical periods, the paper aims to equip churches in African with a broader understanding of their responsibilities in safeguarding children and promoting a culture of protection, care, and empowerment. That is, to inspire transformative actions that prioritize the safety, dignity, and flourishing of children within African faith communities and the society at large.

This article therefore explores the historical theology of child protection within the Christian tradition, examining how theological perspectives have influenced the church's understanding of its role in protecting children during the church age. The paper begins with a brief concept of historical theology perspective, then journeys through the historical theology perspectives and finally restates the lessons gleaned from the church in relation to the contemporary African context.

METHODOLOGY

Several approaches have been espoused for surveying the past to grasp what beliefs were held and practiced by the ancestors. According to Smith, the past can be studied in three main ways: the chronological, confessional and the case study.⁸ This study adopts the chronological approach, which focuses on surveying the ideas of significant scholars of the past concerning a particular topic. This method usually organizes the significant theological ideas in the different periods as well as analyzing their development across history. Allison refers to this method as the diachronic approach because it examines the development of Christian thought about doctrines across the entire history of the Church.⁹

The chronological method examines the views of significant scholars of the past concerning a particular topic was chosen. This implies that the journey begins with the fathers and moves through the major periods in theological history. This method usually organizes significant theological ideas from one period to another. This approach is suitable for a study in which the researcher is interested in obtaining adequate insight on a particular topic from all significant scholars across theological

⁴ African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC)., "African Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Annual Report," 2021, <https://endviolenceinafrica.org/>.

⁵ J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Pentecostalism in Africa: Experiences from Ghana's Charismatic Ministries* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2020); Babatunde A Adedibu, "The Changing Faces of African Independent Churches as Development Actors across Borders," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018).

⁶ Children and Social Protection. Ministry of Gender, "Child and Family Welfare Policy," 2014, 22.

⁷ Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam and Eva Ahiataku, "An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 9, no. 7 (2023), 309.

⁸ S. Smith and R. Perkins, "Community Violence and Its Impact on Studentachievement and Engagement," . . *Journal of Educational National and Psychological Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 120–138, 143.

⁹ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Zondervan Academic, 2011). 30-31

periods.¹⁰ However, the chronological approach is laborious and time-consuming. Consequently, in this study, a brief survey of the notion of child protection across the major theological period was conducted.

Historical Theology Perspective

Historical theology is a critical aspect of our theological inquiry. It is primarily concerned with the way and manner in which the ancestors have interpreted and applied the will of God in their context. According to Pelikan, historical theology is the “genetic study of Christian faith and doctrine”.¹¹ This means it is important to recognize that many of the beliefs and practices in the Ghanaian Christian community today are only properly understood when there is an adequate understanding of how they evolved.¹² Allison notes this point when he shows how historical theology makes it possible for churches to appreciate how their beliefs and practices have evolved across different periods to the current state, consequently revealing the continuity as well as the influence of centuries and cultures on those beliefs and practices.¹³ Thus, the past is important for the quest to understand the present and shape the future.

The historical perspective conveys the idea that God has revealed the meaning of his truth not only in the present era but also in the past. Consequently, in an attempt to discern the will of God and restate its implication for contemporary society, it is important to survey what church fathers believed and practiced.

Historical theology like any other discipline evolved through different stages. Gunton opines that the development of the discipline has its roots in the Bible itself.¹⁴ That is to say, Scripture is about God and therefore it is theology, but theology is applied to different periods and contexts of divine revelation. Bromiley observes that historical theology is not synonymous with history or history of theology, but it is theology in its own right and by all standards.¹⁵ Smith opines that theology entails discerning the will of God and restating it to convey the contemporary implication of what is written in Scripture.¹⁶ This is the heart of post-canonical historical theology. Consequently, there have been some significant changes in the development process of restating the implications of Scripture to the Church and Christian living over time. Smith observes that historical perspective implies our theological predecessors have some lessons to teach regarding discovering God’s will for today as today’s Christians engage in theological discourse.¹⁷ Over the years, historical theology has helped churches to gradually attain and practice sound doctrine.

The Historical Theology Perspective on Child Protection

This section presents the results of applying a historical theology approach to child care and protection across the major periods in Church history. It covers insights from periods such as the Apostolic, Middle Ages, Reformation, Eighteenth Century and beyond.

a. The Apostolic period

The first period in Church history is that of the apostolic fathers, covering the late first century and the second century. The Church in this era found itself in the world of Hellenistic culture. In this culture, family life was an essential part and children were considered a blessing. Children, especially male children, were needed to inherit properties and continue the paternal line.¹⁸ On the other hand, the rate of poverty and the extent of dowering of daughters resulted in a situation where children were not

¹⁰ Smith and Perkins, “Community Violence and Its Impact on Studentachievement and Engagement.” 143-144

¹¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014). xii

¹² Tony. Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*. (New York: T & T Clark, , 2006); M Ratnapalan, 1. “Engaging Theology in History: Problems and Prospect,” *Situations* 6 (2012): 12–29.15

¹³ Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*.30-31

¹⁴ D. Farrow, “Ascension and Atonement ,” in *The Theology of Reconciliation.*, ed. C.E. Gunton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 67–92. 6

¹⁵ Geoffrey W Bromiley, “Historical Theology: An Introduction,” 1987., 27.

¹⁶ Smith and Perkins, “Community Violence and Its Impact on Studentachievement and Engagement.” 11

¹⁷ Smith and Perkins, “Community Violence and Its Impact on Studentachievement and Engagement.” 143

¹⁸ William A Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 157.

always considered a blessing. So although large families were cherished, the result was that many children were rendered homeless. The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 744 contains evidence of female child exposure.¹⁹ In response to these large numbers of homeless children and babies, adoption and orphan care became an essential practice.²⁰ However, adoption was hindered because for a child to be adopted, the consent of the father was required. Consequently, many more were left on the streets without homes.

There is adequate evidence that the post-apostolic Church, especially its leaders was actively involved in the care of orphans and the adoption of homeless children.²¹ ancient Greek world usually met death, slavery, prostitution, or Christian adoption. So, it was not uncommon to find children abandoned in places where adults would locate them and provide them with housing and care. In a letter to the church at Smyrna around 110, Ignatius wrote the following: “Now note well those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the oppressed, none for the prisoner or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty”.²² This is an indication that the Church fathers believed that Christians should take action to address those suffering in society. Today, the most vulnerable, needy, and hurting group in societies are children.²³

In the writing of Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), it is noted that after the early Church observed the Lord’s Supper, the rich donated generously to the church. The money collected was given to the bishop for “care of the orphans and widows, and all who are in need”.²⁴ It can be observed from this that the post-apostolic Church had a regular practice of gathering resources to care for the children in need, and this practice significantly was associated with a very important ordinance of the Church (the Lord’s Supper).

The leaders of the early Church were commanded to “show compassion to all, visiting the sick, and not neglecting widows and orphans”.²⁵ The charge to the leaders not to neglect orphans was critical since the Church found itself in a culture that was replete with orphans and homeless children. The believers were described by Aristides about A.D. 125 as people who love one another, and “deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly”.²⁶ This description of the people of God in the early Church again indicates their care of orphans, including by adoption. It is observed that the effort of believers to ensure that children are protected from harm is a Christian mandate.²⁷

According to the Epistle of Barnabas, written between A.D 100 and 130, those who do not know the truth and persecute the good are those who ignore the orphans; they do not work towards relieving the oppressed as observed.²⁸ Child protection was considered a sign of righteousness and knowledge of the truth. Another important document called “Didascalia Apostolorum,” contains criteria for choosing presbyters. It states that one of the requirements is that the person should be considered a “father to orphans”. Also, for those considered for the office of the bishop, the person should be “a lover of orphans”.²⁹ Similarly, it was observed that some of the post-Constantine burial inscriptions contained information about church leaders who were actively involved in the care of orphans and children that were exposed.³⁰ During the fourth century, the ‘Apostolic Constitutions’ recount that Christian children who became orphans should be adopted by one of the believers.³¹ It noted that

¹⁹ John Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges,” *Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary*, 2011. 1

²⁰ Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church* (T & T. Clark, 1883),186; Byron Klaus, “Historical and Theological Reflection on Ministry to Children at Risk,” *Transformation* 14, no. 2 (1997): 15–18,

²¹ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2.

²² Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2

²³ Dan Brewster, *Child, Church and Mission* (Colorado: Compassion, 2011), 3.

²⁴ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2

²⁵ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2

²⁶ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.”

²⁷ Brewster, *Child, Church and Mission*, 4; Miles Glenn and Josephine-Joy Wright, *Celebrating Children: Equipping People Working with Children and Young People Living in Difficult Circumstances around the World* (Paternoster Publishing, 2003), xv.

²⁸ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2

²⁹ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2

³⁰ William W Cobern, “Worldview Theory and Conceptual Change in Science Education,” *Science Education* 80, no. 5 (1996): 579–610., 427.

³¹ Aloisi, “Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges.” 2-3

adoption of and caring for vulnerable children were the practices and traditions of the post-apostolic Church. Uhlhorn records that during this era Christians took care of vulnerable children and raised them for achieving an honorable life, while unbelievers also took vulnerable children but raised them for prostitution and to become warriors.³²

b. The Middle Ages

The next period is the Middle Ages. This era continued with intentional efforts to care for vulnerable children. Miller observes that Christians established many health facilities to provide care for orphans and widows.³³ These facilities were spread across both east and west. Some of them later on specialized in the care of orphans and some also became orphanages. In addition, the Christian churches supported monastic schools that took care of children who were neglected.

It was reported during the eighth century that Emperor Leo III required the bishops to look after all the children who were neglected in their locality.³⁴ Also, Mckena (n.d) reports that the monasteries raised large numbers of orphans, and one such orphan became the bishop of Rome, namely, Pope Sergius II, in the ninth century. These monasteries provided refuge and care for orphaned and children who were abandoned. Also, during this period, the church developed Canon law, which included regulations for protecting children from abuse.³⁵ Although, child abuse and neglect were ripe, these laws provided guidelines for the church leaders in handling child abuse cases.

c. Reformation Period

The Reformation period was characterized by paradigm shifts in the social context. This was due to wars that created unstable social structures, consequently putting more children at risk.³⁶ During this era, there were still indicators of efforts by the Christian Church to provide care and protection for children. Martin Luther maintained that although God gave children to their parents to educate and protect them, Christians have a responsibility to care for children at risk.³⁷ Luther argued that personal faith in Christ Jesus puts an obligation on one to serve one's neighbor, especially those at risk to maintain social stability.³⁸ Aloisi notes Luther's belief about and practice of caring for vulnerable children.³⁹ For example, he adopted four children who had lost their mother and later adopted seven other children of his relatives who lost their lives.⁴⁰

John Calvin was reported to have shown commitment to caring for neglected children.⁴¹ It was reported that he took the responsibility to provide care and protection to several children who became fatherless due to a tragedy.⁴²

Another significant person who contributed to the role of the Church in caring for vulnerable children was Augustus Francke. The prolonged war, which ended in 1648, rendered large numbers of children poor and marginalized as a result of the destruction of social structures like the family.⁴³ Francke believed that it was the responsibility of the Church to care for all the poor and exploited children.

He argued that caring for vulnerable children is a mark of godly people. Consequently, he rallied his church to build a home for marginalized children. He believed that the prayers of the poor

³² Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church.*, 186

³³ Mary Brydon-Miller, Davydd Greenwood, and Patricia Maguire, "Why Action Research?," *Action Research* (Sage publications, 2003). 174-175

³⁴ Timothy S Miller, *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire* (CUA Press, 2003). 127

³⁵ Richard H Helmholtz, "Children's Rights and the Canon Law: Law and Practice in Later Medieval England," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 67, no. 1 (2007): 39-57., 39

³⁶ Klaus, "Historical and Theological Reflection on Ministry to Children at Risk." 15

³⁷ Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (Fig, 2013), 1483-1546; Elmer L. Towns, *A History of Religious Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 107

³⁸ Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.*

³⁹ Aloisi, "Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges." 3

⁴⁰ Roland Herbert Bainton, "Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy," 1971, 30.

⁴¹ Calvin John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Forgotten Books., 1901), 1509-1564

⁴² Richard Stauffer, "The Humanness of John Calvin," 1971. 85

⁴³ Klaus, "Historical and Theological Reflection on Ministry to Children at Risk." 15

fatherless children, who are being cared for by the church, serve as a fortress and wall that defend the land from invasion by adversaries.⁴⁴

d. The Eighteenth Century and Beyond

The eighteenth century and beyond also saw the Church's involvement in the care of vulnerable children. George Whitefield, a very famous evangelist of the Great Awakening, took in several homeless boys for care, protection and training in the fear of God.⁴⁵ It was reported that during his years of ministry, he concluded every sermon by appealing for funding to take children in his home called the 'House of Mercy'.⁴⁶ Further, Whitefield wrote in his journal that some of the children have been called of God, and are receiving effective training in relation to the call.⁴⁷

Another prominent Christian, George Müller (1805–1898), established five houses to take care of children at risk after his conversion to Christianity. He believed that he could support these children through total reliance on God in prayer. In all, about ten thousand children were housed and cared for for close to sixty years.⁴⁸

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) challenged his congregation to do something for the Lord in 1886. The entire congregation supported the idea and homes were established by the Metropolitan Tabernacle to care for homeless children.⁴⁹ Whenever Spurgeon visited the homes, the children would welcome him with resounding noise and form a crowd around him as a way of expressing their joy. Another important feature was that he organized the children in smaller family units with caregivers assigned. In addition, the spiritual development of the children was paramount. For instance, there were Bible quotations written over the beds, and all the children joined Sunday worship services in the Metropolitan Tabernacle as well as other churches in the communities.⁵⁰ Spurgeon also challenged the opponents of the gospel of their inability to institute programs that help the poor; and pointed non-Christians to the several programs by the evangelical Christian communities to help the vulnerable in society.⁵¹

In the Church history surveyed, it has been shown that the vulnerability of children in societies has never been uncommon. Right from the era of the post-apostolic Church to date, many children have been neglected and rendered homeless. As a result, Christians have made conscious efforts to respond to the plight of vulnerable children. This is to ensure that children grow to become mature and fulfilled Christian adults.⁵²

It has been demonstrated that during the Church age, care and protection of vulnerable children have been promoted by many of the Church's leaders. They clearly interpreted Scripture to support a theology of children that saw them as precious in God's sight and worthy of being nurtured in a loving, safe environment to become mature Christians and productive and valuable members of society. This historical theology concerning children, especially those at risk, is consistent with scripture and strengthens the case that churches undertake a concrete child protection ministry. This is in support of the argument that the community of people called the church has ethical imperatives to respond appropriately to the lived experiences of abuse and dehumanization of children in societies.⁵³

Implications for the Contemporary Church in Africa

The lessons gleaned across the various ages of the church point to the biblical, moral and civil responsibility placed on the church to undertake a ministry of child protection and care in the light of alarming incidences of child abuse, neglect, labor, and exploitation, especially in African societies.

⁴⁴ Frederick Eby, *The Development of Modern Education* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1975), 247.

⁴⁵ G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 1714-1770.

⁴⁶ Aloisi, "Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges." 4-5

⁴⁷ Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, 404

⁴⁸ Aloisi, "Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges." 5

⁴⁹ Arnold A Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 126.

⁵⁰ Lewis A Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Kregel Publications, 1992), 427.

⁵¹ Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*. 130

⁵² Vinay Samuel, "Some Theological Perspectives on Children at Risk," *Transformation* 14, no. 2 (1997): 27–28, 27.

⁵³ Oroborator, "Between Ecclesiology and Ethics: Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society." 894.

Firstly, churches should be aware of the problem of child abuse and neglect in society, especially, in the communities they serve. It was observed from the historical reflections during the church age, that churches were conversant with the situation of abuse in their society. This contributed to the practical measures undertaken to respond to the menace of abuse. In the contemporary context, the church could obtain an understanding of the contextual issues of abuse, dehumanization and vulnerabilities of children through observation and research among relevant institutions such as police, departments of children and other civil society organizations such as UNICEF. Kpalam & Light relate there is a need for churches to develop a strategic plan for gathering relevant information and appoint researchers, with clear expectations and deadlines for this task.⁵⁴

Secondly, churches need child theologies that are grounded in scripture and contextual. Kpalam and Ahiataku opine that child theology is faith-seeking understanding concerning children.⁵⁵ It points to seeing children through the eyes of God as revealed in Scripture and corroborated by social science. It was observed from the historical-theological reflections that, the church interpreted scripture to support the view of children as precious in the sight of God, and the need to be nurtured in a safe and loving environment. Some churches in Africa, especially in Ghana lack a clear theological statement on children even though concrete ministry interventions are focusing on children. Articulating and holding a view of children that is contextual and consistent with the Christian understanding of God could influence a ministry.

In addition, churches in Africa should adopt their child protection policies. Kpalam and Ahiataku opine that a child protection policy should contain a set of guidelines that direct a coordinated response to child abuse in a particular context.⁵⁶ The contemporary church needs comprehensive guidelines on child protection that are contextual. These policies among other things provide for background checks of volunteers working with children in the church, disclosure of and reporting of abuse, and periodic training of those with regular contact with children. Additionally, such policies should make provisions for the sanctioning of church leaders and members who perpetrate abuse of children. It could be argued that a child protection policy will provide ethos for a church's ministry that ensures the safeguarding of children in the congregation and the community at large.

Finally, churches should seek to establish and maintain strategic collaboration with state agencies and other organizations working for the promotion of child protection and the general well-being of children. Given the fact that child abuse is a public health issue on the African continent, several government and non-governmental organisations are pursuing the safeguarding of children. Kpalam and Ahiataku observe that child abuse is a complex situation and multi-faceted phenomenon that requires a multisectoral approach.⁵⁷ For example, in Ghana, there are state agencies such as the Department of Children, the Department of Social Welfare, the Ghana Police Service, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection pursuing the safeguarding of children. On the other hand, there are non-governmental institutions such as UNICEF, Compassion International Ghana, Plan Ghana, World Vision and Child Rights also pursuing the same agenda. Churches' efforts at working alongside these agencies for the safeguarding of children in societies is in line with the critical role churches play in the development agenda in communities. UNICEF reports that churches are its strategic partners in child protection because child protection began with faith communities way before the commencement of child protection by UNICEF.⁵⁸

It is recommended that church leaders should work with their congregations to identify child abuse and vulnerabilities in their context, and should develop context-specific child safeguarding measures. In this vein, churches could partner with governmental and non-governmental agencies to adequately promote child protection. Further studies are required with regard to church and cultural context-specific child protection ministries.

⁵⁴ Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church's Ministry*, 70

⁵⁵ Kpalam and Ahiataku, "An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response." 312

⁵⁶ Kpalam and Ahiataku, "An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response." 312

⁵⁷ Kpalam and Ahiataku, "An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response." 313

⁵⁸ Department of Social Development, *The South African Child Support Grant Impact Assessment: Evidence from a Survey of Children, Adolescents and Their Households* (Pretoria: UNICEF, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The paper has undertaken historical theological reflections on child protection. Using the chronological historical approach, the paper briefly surveyed efforts of churches on child protection efforts across the major historical periods such as the Apostolic Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation Period, and the Enlightenment and beyond. The findings have demonstrated that during the Church age, care and protection of vulnerable children were championed by many of the Church's leaders, who rallied their congregations to institute concrete measures to protect children in the church and society. Also, the churches interpreted Scripture to support a theological understanding of children that saw them as precious in God's sight and worthy of being nurtured in a loving, safe environment to become mature Christians and productive and valuable members of society. The church today cannot be passive in the wake of the increasing rate of child abuse in the church and society at large. The church as a family of God is strategically positioned to undertake a caring ministry that ensures the protection and wellbeing of children.

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