

BAPTISED CHILDREN

“The Marginalised Christians?”

**A STUDY ABOUT CHILDREN AND CHURCH WORSHIP IN THE
ANKOLE DIOCESE OF THE CHURCH OF UGANDA (ANGLICAN)**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	2
1.3 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS.....	3
1.3.1 CHURCH:.....	3
1.3.2 DIOCESE:.....	3
1.3.3 CHILD:.....	3
1.3.4 CLERGY:.....	4
1.3.5 CHRISTIAN:.....	4
1.4 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY.....	4
1.5 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE.....	5
1.6 HYPOTHESIS.....	6
1.7 ENCOUNTERED CONSTRAINTS.....	6
1.8 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH.....	8
1.8.1 SOURCES.....	8
1.8.2 QUALITATIVE METHOD.....	9
1.8.3 A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	9
1.8.4 DISPOSITION.....	9
CHAPTERTWO	11
ANKOLE DIOCESE: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE.....	11
2.1 ANKOLE AS A DIOCESE.....	11
2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION.....	12
2.3 CHILDREN IN ANKOLE DIOCESE.....	12
2.4 ANKOLE CHURCH IN ANKOLE CULTURE.....	13
2.5 THE CHURCH AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS.....	14
2.6 CHILDREN IN THE CHURCH SERVICE.....	15
2.7 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION.....	16
CHAPTER THREE: PRESENTING RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE ANKOLE	
DIOCESE.....	18
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	18
3.2 CHILDREN: THE CASE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.....	18
3.3 CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION.....	19
3.4 CHILDREN AND FAITH.....	20
3.5 CHILDREN: TEACHERS OR MERE LEARNERS?.....	21
3.6 WORSHIPPING JOINTLY WITH CHILDREN.....	22

3.7 CHILDREN’S CONTRIBUTION IN CHURCH WORSHIP.....	23
3.8 CHILDREN’S SEPARATE WORSHIP IN ANKOLE DIOCESE.....	24
3.9 EQUAL BEFORE GOD? : A REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES	25
3.10 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION.....	26
CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	27
4.1 INTRODUCTION	27
4.2 BY FAITH OR DIVINE INNOCENCE?.....	27
4.3 A GOD GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN	29
4.4 SACRAMENTS: CHILDREN IN CAPTIVITY.....	31
4.5 WORSHIPPING AGAINST SOCIAL INTERACTION	34
4.6 THE UNNOTICED TWO CHURCHES.....	37
4.7 UNEQUAL YET EQUIVALENT PARTNERS.	39
4.8 ABLE LEADERS DENIED A CHANCE.....	42
4.9 DEPENDENCE, INDEPENDENCE AND INTER-DEPENDENCE.....	45
4.10 CHILD–ADULT COMMUNICATION: A REFLECTION ON DIALOGUE.....	48
4.11 ADULTS AS ROLE MODELS: THE NATURE OF WORSHIP	50
4.12 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION.....	52
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS	53
5.1 THE CHURCH THEOLOGY: PRACTICES AND BIBLICAL GROUNDING	53
5.2 PREJUDICE IN THE CHURCH	54
5.3 EQUAL CHRISTIANS WITH UNEQUAL SERVICES.	56
5.4 NEED FOR REDEFINING CHILDREN.....	58
5.5 LACK OF WILL, NOT RESOURCES	59
5.6 NEED TO REDEFINE WORSHIP	60
5.7 VICTIMS OF CHURCH DOCTRINES	63
5.8 THE CHURCH’S POSITION ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS	65
5.9 THE CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES	67
5.10 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION.....	69
CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION(S)	70
6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	70
6.1.1 CHRISTIANS OF ONE NATURE.....	70
6.1.2 RECEPTION VERSUS READINESS.....	71
6.1.3 REDEFINING CHILDREN FROM A BIBLICAL POINT OF VIEW.....	72
6.1.4 A SPIRITUAL CHURCH VERSUS A MATERIAL CHURCH	72
6.1.5 AN ALL-INCLUSIVE WORSHIP	73
6.1.6 A MISSION FOR ALL OF US.....	74
6.2 GENERAL CONCLUSION(S).....	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78
APPENDIX I: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE.....	81
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE AIMED AT LAY CHRISTIANS.....	81
APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE	87
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS	87
APPENDIX III: MAP OF UGANDA.....	90

DEDICATION

I, with much pleasure, excitement and appreciation dedicate this academic work to Ms. **Tushemereirwe Faith Fatuma** and the lovely sons **Joshua** and **Joel**. Their existence was, and is, of great moral support and responsibility as well as encouragement to me.

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ABSTRACT

Worship is the core of the Christian Church and Mission. In many Christian denominations, worship is not uniform. Each denomination conducts worship according to the doctrines and dogmas of the church in the respective denomination. While the style of worshiping in denominations may be different, the cause and objectives of worship remain the same within the church universal. The nature of participants as well as the manner in which to participate may also vary from denomination to denomination. The age by which one becomes a Christian also varies within denominations. While in denominations like the Pentecostals and The Seventh Day Adventists one is not brought to baptism until the teen age when one is able to receive baptism by immersion, other denominations administer child/infant baptism and thus, one becomes a Christian from infancy. Though one becomes a Christian from infancy, it is well known that not all Christian values of worship are allowed to one from infancy. Baptised children in many denominations have not been allowed to participate in Holy Communion in its fullest practical sense. The children have also not been allowed to worship consistently with the adults, but instead, separate worship services have been designed for them, or no worship at all.

This study is thus about worship and the children in the Christian church. The Ankole diocese of the church of Uganda, which is the case study, baptises children and therefore it has Christians from infancy. Baptised children in the diocese are not allowed Holy Communion, and often, they are not allowed to worship regularly with the adult Christians. While the church has explained the reasons why children are treated the way they are, the explanations do not satisfy the theological presuppositions in these churches, and thus, the situation appears to many as both contradictory and conflicting. This work intends to consider the actual treatment of baptised children in the Ankole diocese and critically analyse the relationship between this treatment and the church theology not only on the denominational level but also by considering the theology of the church universal in consideration. The scriptures will be used as a tool in this analysis because it is normative for the church. The biblical teaching on children will therefore be a major factor in this work. Also, other doctrinal statements which are relevant for the understanding of the status of baptized children in the Anglican church will be used in the analysis.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The Christian church, wherever it is, is a body of people that come to pray and worship together, and join hands in their spiritual journey. These people for reasons beyond their control always find that they are different. The differences therein are usually natural such as; race, sex, culture, language and age differences. Our differences are not at all a big obstacle to the church; what matters is how we respond to the differences we find ourselves with. As guided by the main topic of this thesis, we shall be particularly concerned with the age differences in the church. Our particular focus and emphasis will be placed on the children in relation to the adult members of the church, specifically in the worship life of the church. The Ankole Diocese, which has been used as the focus in this study is taken as representative for the Anglican Church in Uganda.

This work will be particularly important for the Ankole diocese because it will be the first work which directly deals with the baptized children in the church worship and church theology in the diocese. The only work that has been produced in the diocese has been largely concerning the church projects and the hand-outs on the church mission and evangelism. Research in the diocese is so much limited and by large, this will be the first work which presents a critical study of the church worship that relates directly to the diocese level.

It has become clear over the years that interest groups like women and children in the church have seen some established norms therein as demeaning them or giving them unequal treatment. While we see that feministic theology has retaliated, children have not been able to speak out for themselves. Amidst such a situation, I picked interest in studying about the way children have been or are presently treated in church worship by adult Christians. Are they (children) treated as equal partners in a spiritual journey or as another class below the adult Christians?

The gospels tend to ascribe greatness to children in the Kingdom of God (Mk.10:13-16, Matt.18:1-5). Whether children have been or are treated as such depends on the local church. But in many churches children have become silent members because worship is planned and

conducted merely with adults in view and because children are not allowed to receive Holy Communion. We have to refrain from any temptation to draw any conclusion at this early initial stage. It is however clear to all Christians that children have not been allowed to participate in many church activities. The adult Christians seem not to care about the situation, or it simply appears normal to them. This study is meant to look into the situation basing itself on empirical facts, not on assumptions.

The study mentions “baptized children” and not merely children. This is because not every child is to be assumed a Christian. In the progress of this thesis, any mention of children in church will be referring to baptized children. I do not use the term “marginalised” to mean “un recognised” or “mistreated” in a radical sense. The term is only used to query if one group has been sidelined or denied complete recognition by the other. This study is made possible by the availability of research findings from the research field. I did not force my way into the study, but the area of study seemed to be rich in content, so much to attract me. The Ankole Diocese is highly populated with a big Christian population and a fully fledged Christian establishment. This study is therefore born out of the curiosity of a properly arranged academic and theological exploration.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The identified problem that warranted this research study was the treatment of children in the church worship by the adult Christians as well as the church leaders. Are they (children) treated as equal partners in a spiritual journey or as another class below the adult Christians? After a long and careful observation during church worship and attendances, I have felt that there exists a problem. Children are made to leave the adults and worship separately, sometimes against their will. Occasionally, children are made to sit down on the floor and to give the seats to adults in case there is a shortage. Some sacraments like Holy Communion are not allowed for children. In all this, I intend to find out whether these practices as applied to children are in line with the theology of the church, or whether something has gone wrong. The general concern of this research study is to look into the practices that the church applies to children and then critically analyse on how this affects them as Christians. I will put into consideration the scriptures’

teaching about children. It is only on this basis that the findings of this research study can be analysed within a theological perspective.

1.3 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.3.1 CHURCH:

A church is, by general acceptable standards, defined as a community of believers that often or regularly worship and pray together. The **ecclesia** or **ekklesia** (Greek *ἐκκλησία*) was the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens during its Golden Age (480–4048) BCE. In the New Testament, this term is used to mean the assembly or community of worshippers and believers. Mathew 18:15-17 seems to refer to this assembly. In the modern Christian circles, a church can also mean a house or place of worship where believers regularly meet. In this thesis, the usage of the term “church” will be largely referring to the community of believers.

1.3.2 DIOCESE:

A diocese is a Christian religious community for which a bishop is responsible. It is relatively a big unit of the Christian community in a country. It normally has a cathedral which usually holds the head church “office” of the area. In Uganda’s political setting, a diocese can be compared to a district.

1.3.3 CHILD:

A child (children in plural) can best be defined according to the cultural and legal settings of a given society. Across several societies, a child is one who by virtue of age is dependent on the parents and relatives. According to the United Nation’s convention on the rights of the child 1989, part 1, art.1: a child is any human being below 18 years of age.¹ The constitution of Uganda 1995, defines a child as a person below 16 years of age.² In order to avoid ambiguity and

¹ <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> 22/12/2007

² <http://www.trybunal.gov.pl/constitu/constit/uganda/uganda-e.htm> 22/12/2007
This can be found and verified by the Uganda constitution 2005

inconsistence, this thesis will identify children as persons below 13 years of age.³

1.3.4 CLERGY:

The term “clergy” is used to refer to the priests or ordained ministers of a religious belief especially of the Christian church. In this case, the use of the term will refer to the ordained priests and catechetical teachers in the church.

1.3.5 CHRISTIAN:

A Christian is identified as a believer in the risen Christ, or a follower of Christ. In the Christian theology, baptism has been made a primary symbol for any true Christian, and so it will be in this thesis. The children identified in this thesis are “baptised children”.

1.4 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A general study on the children in the church or in the Ankole diocese is too broad to be covered by this research work. It is for this reason that our focus will be limited to and focus on the children-adult relations in the church worship. We shall deliberately sideline other factors concerning children in the church. While other areas may mix in, in the development of this research study, they will only be used as means to clarify points in the light of children and worship in the Christian church. The study is basically about the treatment given to the baptised children, or the manner in which adult Christians view the little ones in church worship. On this ground, we shall critically analyse the research findings and draw necessary conclusions in response to our main point of contention – whether baptised children are in fact considered as marginalised Christians.

³ In Ankole diocese, children of this age have not yet received church confirmation. They are still not allowed Holy Communion and many of them have not graduated from Sunday school.

1.5 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

My research on children and worship in Ankole diocese is meant to go beyond the frontiers of a mere academic exploration. The major purpose of the study is to produce an evaluation of children's life and treatment in the worship life of the church, for public consumption. Gender issues and issues concerning the ethnic or social sub groups in the church have been studied to some extent in the recent decades, but age related topics have been given less attention. This research study has as part of its purpose the intention of covering this gap on age related matters in the worship life of the church.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention in the literature concerning children and youth theology but the treatment of children and their contribution in the worship life of the church has not been addressed satisfactorily. It is thus the purpose of this work not only to learn about the treatment of children in the church, but also about their contribution in the worship life of the church. This work also has in focus the worship groups of the church like Sunday schools, where children are made to worship separately from the adults. This study has discovered and is yet to analyse the implication of such groups on the theology of the Christian church and the effects they have on the children's full rights as Christians.

Most importantly, this piece of work is meant to create an awareness of some controversial or conflicting doctrines that have been harbored by the church, deliberately or unconsciously. I hope it will serve as a tool with which to extend the church mission to people of different ages. It has become clear that children have in some cases been taken for granted, and to some level looked at as a group that is there to learn all, and to teach nothing.⁴ The objective is not that children are to gain authority over adults, but that their perceived and assumed position in the church worship may be reconsidered.

⁴ This coincides with the Ankole culture which assumes that children have little or no advice to give to adults. It is not acceptable for a child to get involved into confrontational discussions with adults.

1.6 HYPOTHESIS

The research study about children and worship in the Ankole diocese is a project that was not initiated with no established ground. This is an undertaking that was, and is, guided by the researcher's preconceived and demanding general presupposition. From the research field, the data indicates that children may be deliberately sidelined by the church in worship. On the other hand, the research data seems to indicate that the church may be acting the way it does in order to treat children within the means which are convenient to them (children) and therefore for their own good. The underlying principle which the thesis intends to test is that "the church worship has marginalised baptised children for the selfish benefit of adult Christians". This hypothesis is supplemented with the following key questions which guided the data collection, and will also guide the full completion of this research work:

- Are Christian children treated by the church in worship as if they are not full Christians?
- As the scriptures seem to suggest; does the church regard children as a model for the church, and a yardstick by which her faith and humility can be measured?
- Does the church think that children need the fellowship (hand-holding) as well as the guidance (finger-pointing) of the adult members of the church?
- Does the church think that qualitatively speaking, Christian children, like adults, have a truly Christian faith, but that its nature and development may be different according to age?
- Does the church think that children have the ability to take up specific roles or tasks in the church, including forms of leadership?

1.7 ENCOUNTERED CONSTRAINTS

The field research and the data collection process in the Ankole Diocese was so much a demanding experience. By the end of the field research process, much was there to convince me that a great work had been done successfully. The success of the field research in Ankole diocese was not accomplished without costs. Several constraints or problems ranging from practical to theological were encountered. The following are the cases or incidents that sometimes threatened the smooth process of the field research:

- There was a problem of cultural interference in the data collection process. First, defining

who and what a child is became a problem. According to the Ankole culture, one is considered a child or equivalent to a child until he/she is able to live an independent life from his/her parents. Basing on the requirements of the research study, and to maintain its validity, I decided to consider children in the age group that is usually accommodated in the Sunday school. These are persons usually below 13 years of age in the Ankole diocese. Secondly, this cultural belief about children affects the way adults view them in all aspects of life – including church life. The culture demands that children be considered inferior to adults and this affects their relationship in the church encounters.

- There was Suspicion and mistrust. Because of the religious rivalry that has survived in Ankole, especially between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and the most recent Pentecostal revivals, some of whom are defectors from the traditional denominations, people are not readily willing to discuss their faith with those whose mission or objectives they do not understand. It took some time to explain and convince them about my mission before they accepted to cooperate with me. The same suspicion arose when I wished to discuss anything with their children.
- Transport problems were also encountered. The road network in Ankole region is in a very bad state. It is muddy in the rainy season and dusty in the sunny season. Some areas simply have no road connections. Reaching out to some Christians was not simple and I had to walk by foot in case the informants were not connected by any defined road network. Collecting data in such areas took days and in some cases weeks.
- The biggest challenge encountered was in the church establishment itself. Without being biased, and without mincing words, my impression was that the lower clergy appeared very conservative and the higher clergy were both autocratic and bureaucratic. The lower clergy in the rural parishes – especially the less educated, initially showed no interest in discussing “church matters” unless their “bosses” granted them permission to do so. The elite clergy at the diocese level alleged that the topic under study was sensitive, while others excused themselves that they were too busy to respond to the research study. It was after several attempts that I finally got an endorsement from the diocesan secretary to conduct my interviews. Though I eventually got the information I so much needed, suspicion remained visible in the process.

1.8 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

1.8.1 SOURCES.

This thesis intends to employ primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The primary source is the empirical data which I collected during my field research in the Ankole diocese. The information from this source will therefore be key to this thesis, and other sources will only assist in interpreting the facts availed by this primary source. The data from the research field was collected using the questionnaires as well as the qualitative interviews. The copies of the questionnaire and the interview guide will be attached to this work in the appendix. A sample of fifty questionnaires was distributed into the selected parishes of the diocese. Twenty clergy members were interviewed and formal as well as informal discussions were held with the members of the lay Christians. Identification names were used to identify the respondents and informants especially the clergy members who expressed that the study was sensitive both to their work and personality; therefore, they requested to be anonymised in the whole process. The lay Christians who offered to identify themselves, did so on the condition of confidentiality. This work therefore will present the views of respondents while professionally shielding their open identities.

The secondary and tertiary sources will be the information from the already existing related literature, and any other relevant information that could have been drawn from the related literature; modified, but not changed. The internet data will also be used in this thesis as long as this data is relevant and necessary. Unfortunately, literature about Children in Ankole diocese, and specifically about children and worship, are not available for this thesis. Fortunately enough, there is enough literature about children and the church life in general from different scholars. This work may not necessarily talk about the physical life of Ankole diocese from contact, but it is relevant by all standards since Ankole diocese operates on the doctrines and canons of the Christian church, in particular those of the Anglican church.

1.8.2 QUALITATIVE METHOD

The empirical data that will be used in this research work were practically collected within the Ankole Diocese community. Since the thesis will largely rely on this data more than anything else, the method of qualitative interview analysis happens to be the best method to employ in presenting and analysing the research data on children and worship in Ankole diocese. This method will be reliable because it depends on the data which I collected from the research field through questionnaires, qualitative interviews, informal and formal discussions as well as participatory observation.

1.8.3 A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

Alongside the qualitative method, there will be a deliberate theological discourse in line with the topic of the study. The church is a theological institution and so it operates with theological values. It is these values that this piece of work seeks to interpret when using the research data. We can only achieve the objectives of the research study if we are able to interpret the research data in the light of the Scriptures' teaching about children. This means that the scriptures remain my focal point of reference as I expound on the major points of the Thesis. Also, relevant doctrinal canons of the Anglican church, such as the ecumenical creeds, will be used in the theological reflection.

1.8.4 DISPOSITION

This thesis is arranged into six chapters, this being the introductory one. In chapter two I shall present vital facts about the Ankole diocese in a socio-religious perspective. This will give the necessary background material for understanding the Ankole diocese and the cultural setting of my research.

The third chapter will present the field research findings gathered through questionnaires and In-depth (Qualitative) interviews in the Ankole diocese. These will be raw facts as received and observed from the field concerning children and worship in the Ankole diocese. Chapter Four

will mainly give an interpretation of the data gathered from the field research in the Ankole diocese. The chapter will interpret the data from the perspective of the society, the church doctrines and the scriptures. Chapter Five will be a critical analysis of the total findings of the research in light of theological presuppositions, relating to the main research questions of the thesis. The last chapter will contain recommendations and a general conclusion. The last pages of my thesis will contain a bibliography and an appendix with the Questionnaire form and Interview guide which I used in the field research.

CHAPTER TWO

ANKOLE DIOCESE: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

2.1 ANKOLE AS A DIOCESE

Ankole Diocese is one of the Thirty-two dioceses of the Anglican church of Uganda – commonly identified as the “Church of Uganda”. The Church of Uganda is part of the vast international Anglican Communion. The current Diocese of Ankole has reduced in size gradually from the time of its first days by the second half of 20th century. From the national census of October 2002, the population of Uganda was 26.8 million people and 85.1% were Christians. The Anglican church of Uganda was 35.9% of the total population, the second biggest Christian group, with the Roman Catholic Church at the top with 41.9%.⁵ The figures have certainly changed but no census has taken place since then. According to the ‘state of Uganda population report’ 2008, Uganda’s population is now estimated at around 29.6 million.⁶

Ankole diocese is the original name but it was changed in 1976 when the diocese lost part of its area to a new West Ankole diocese. The remaining part was then renamed East Ankole diocese. In 2003, the diocese again lost another part to a new North Ankole diocese. The remaining part took up the original name – Ankole Diocese.⁷ It should be noted that through all these changes, the head offices of the diocese did not relocate, and the cathedral (St.James Cathedral “*Ruharo*”) in the outskirts of Mbarara town was retained all through.

From the reductions on the diocese presented above, one may be tempted to think that the current diocese is very small. However, the diocese is relatively big with Six Archdeaconries (*Kabingo, Kyamate, Rukoni, Rutooma, Ibanda* and *Kinoni*) and for that matter several parishes and churches. Additionally, the diocese occupies one of the most densely populated areas in Uganda. The Christian demographics show that the Roman Catholic membership is slightly higher than the Anglicans, but a sample taken randomly shows an even distribution. This is just to make the

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/religion_in_Uganda. 11/03/2009

⁶ http://www.popsec.org/documents/state_of_uganda_population_report_2008.pdf. 11/03/2009

point that Ankole diocese is quantitatively rich in Christians.

2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Ankole diocese is located in Ankole region which is composed of a large part of Western Uganda. Ankole is a name of one of the several Kingdoms that were on the scene of Uganda's surface until the colonial era by the last decades of the 19th century. Other kingdoms have been reinstated but the people of Ankole have refused to accept any king citing tribal conflicts. The current diocese which is the focus of my study covers the districts of Mbarara, Isingiro and a greater part of Ntungamo. I visited some selected parishes, interviewing both the church leaders and the lay people, as well as the representative personnel at the cathedral or diocese headquarters. I also visited the Cathedral or the diocese headquarters. Ankole diocese lies in the north of Tanzania and south east of Rwanda.

The main population in the area under study is composed of the "Banyankole" and some "Bakiga" and "Banyarwanda" immigrants. There are mainly two languages spoken in the area; Kinyankole (Runyankore) and Kinyarwanda (Runyarwanda), but the most part of the population usually use the former in daily communication. It should be noted that, since I am able to speak both languages, the problem of language barrier did not surface in the process. The Christian denominational distribution in the area is just the same as that of the country as a whole. The Roman Catholics make a slight majority, the Anglicans follow and then the Pentecostals and Seventh day Adventists, in that order. This is thus to say that the population to which my informants belong is relatively big.

2.3 CHILDREN IN ANKOLE DIOCESE

In Ankole diocese as well as the entire Ankole region, children make a good percentage of the total population. The church survey, based both on experience and research, showed that 20% of regular attendants of the Sunday services are children. In some parishes, the number is even

⁷ <http://www.churchofuganda.net/dioceses.php?pid=2> 08/01/2009

more than this.⁸ Many of these children are members of the Christian church because on average, children in Ankole diocese are baptised before their second birthday. Since many of the children that can regularly attend the church worship services are usually above three years of age, this means that we are not talking about children in general, but baptised members.

The church establishment in Ankole diocese, just like the entire church of Uganda, has children and youth programs in its strategic plans. The diocese operates Boys and Girls brigade, training young people with skills in music and foot drills. The church aims at fostering good morals and to provide guidance and participation in church mission programs. Right at the Diocese head offices, the building housing the offices of boys and girls brigade association confirms its existence. There is also a Children's ministry focus which intends to reach out to children for Christ in order to facilitate spiritual learning and growth for Christian witness among children; equipping children workers and children so that they will grow to maturity; developing strategy for nurturing and discipleship of children; and sensitizing the church and community about the role and place of children.⁹ I will further comment on this in my next chapter. All these developments may not necessarily be connected to the worship life of children in the diocese, but they are a manifestation of the fact that the church has a greater number of children among its members and that the diocese identifies children in its mission.

2.4 ANKOLE CHURCH IN ANKOLE CULTURE

The church in Ankole region, like elsewhere in the world, has struggled with the modern contextualisation. Ankole culture has a set of values, norms and customs that govern the daily life of the people as well as the way they relate to one another. As a matter of fact, the way adults relate to children can be linked to these cultural presuppositions. In Ankole traditional culture, a child is inferior not only to parents, but to all adults. This is perhaps related to the respect for age which is central in Ankole culture. A child is not expected to engage an adult in a confrontational dialogue for any reason. And in some families, children are taught not to stare or gaze at their parents or adults for a persistently long time of eye-to-eye contact. This is defined as

⁸ Responding to an interview [18th , July, 2008], one of the lay leaders of *Kisyyoro* Parish church in *Kabingo* Archdeaconry claimed that they are often more than adults on average church worship.

insubordination and an insult to elders.

In most families of Ankole, it is very rare to find a parent, especially the father, in a friendly dialogue with or making a joke to a child. Children are used to commands and instructions, sometimes given to them rudely. Children are in any case supposed to follow the instructions with less or no inquiries. Hence before we present the status of children in the church worship, we must understand how children are viewed in the general culture. While I will refrain from drawing conclusions at this stage, I wish to provoke the possibility that children's relationship with adults in the church worship may be portraying some cultural traits of the society.

2.5 THE CHURCH AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Christian church in Ankole, both Anglicans and other denominations, have been largely involved in fighting for human rights in general as well as for children's rights in particular. The church has fought against early marriages, defilement and child molestations, child sacrifice, child labor as well as divorce. All these notwithstanding, the church in Ankole diocese seems to tolerate subjecting children to adult superiority. In all primary schools – including church schools or church-founded schools, even as early as nursery schools, it is not uncommon to find a teacher caning a pupil or sometimes slapping him/her. Such occurs even in some high schools. The church has only voiced its concern on brutal punishments but not on corporal punishments as such. When and how to identify which punishment is brutal and which is not, remains a point for discussion.

What needs our attention, however, is to note that in this kind of situation, the child is the key victim. Thus, when we talk of children in the church worship, we are talking about the children raised in such conditions. Corporal punishment in its simple domestic application has not been strongly opposed by the church in Uganda. This has been motivated by the use of proverbs 13:24 which expresses that the rod should not be spared so as not to spoil the child. Thus the church has not asked itself critically whether it is possible to administer punishments of this nature to

⁹ <http://www.churchofuganda.net/homepages.php?pid=10> 12/01/2009

our children without coming into conflict with the absolute love with which we are obliged to handle them. As Donald Capps has put it:

Love and cruelty are mutually exclusive. No one slaps a child out of love but rather because in similar situations, when one was defenceless, one was slapped and then compelled to interpret it as a sign of love. This inner confusion prevailed for thirty or forty years and is passed on to one's own child. That's all. To purvey this confusion to the child as truth leads to a new confusion that, although examined in details by experts, are still confusions. If, on the other hand, one can admit one's errors to the child and apologize for a lack of self-control, no confusions are created. If a mother can make it clear to a child that at that particular moment when she slapped him her love for him deserted her and she was dominated by other feelings that had nothing to do with the child, the child can keep a clear head, feel respected, and not be disoriented in his relationship to his mother. While it is true that love for a child cannot be commanded, each of us is free to decide to refrain from hypocrisy.¹⁰

2.6 CHILDREN IN THE CHURCH SERVICE

As I noted before (2.3), Ankole diocese has a well formulated plan for reaching out to children. Whether this plan has extended its mission to children effectively, I shall return to it in chapter Four. Here, however, I shall concentrate on three matters which characterize the children and worship relationship in the Ankole diocese. Firstly, following Christmas day, children have a day set aside for them in memory of the innocent children who were killed by King Herod, following the birth of Jesus. On this day, children are allowed to perform, read the scriptures, and are given some presents. It is indeed one of the rare enjoyable days for them. This may not necessarily be the case for every church. Some churches may handle the day differently, but the day is acknowledged by all the churches. Occasionally, churches also allow children some Sunday services to present what they have learnt from their separate worships. This is rare though and depends on programs of the individual churches.

Secondly, Ankole diocese like churches elsewhere has a Sunday school for children. This Sunday school may operate regularly or occasionally depending on different churches for different reasons. We shall look into this point in chapter four more critically and in details. From the field study, it is clear that every church in Ankole diocese claims to operate Sunday

¹⁰ Donald Capps (1995): *The child's song*; The Religious Abuse Of children. Page.14 Westminister John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, United States of America.

school services for the children. Indeed, all the churches I visited showed interest in Sunday school program. This does not mean that it was in effect. Many of the church leaders lamented that they wished they could do something to have an effective Sunday school for their churches. Because the Sunday school service lacks the basic tools, it may be hard for one to call many services given to children in most of the churches of Ankole diocese Sunday school, without risking ambiguity.

Thirdly, in many churches of Ankole diocese children generally do not worship with adults, unless for special occasions and services. Whereas the Sunday school may not necessarily operate every Sunday, children attend every Sunday. This implies that children are always at the church on Sunday but they are not attended to every Sunday. Sometimes, they are simply sent out. It is very common to hear the voice of the lay leader in the middle of the service, calling for church wardens to take children out of the church building. In fact, in one of my dialogues with children during the data collection process, I was asking them about various aides in the church and one little child surprised me. I couldn't withhold my laughter. When I asked what was important about the ministry of a church warden, the child answered that it is "to beat children, remove them from their seats, and chase them out of the church". This spontaneous response may indicate some of the feelings children have about church wardens, perhaps even also about other ministers.

2.7 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

Reading through the chapter, one gets the picture that Ankole diocese is representative to the entire church of Uganda (Anglican). It is also clearly stipulated that Ankole as a diocese is part of the Ankole society culture and it is more likely that the two constantly interact with each other. The chapter also shows that the Ankole diocese has a well laid strategic plan for children mission in the church. This therefore indicates that if children are not attended to, it is not because there is no plan for them, but rather it may be a result of the weaknesses in the implementation of the very plan. I have also presented the diocese's stand on children's rights.

The very stand of the church on children's human rights may in one way or another be related to the way baptised children are perceived and treated in church worship. Finally, this chapter shows the treatment of children in church worship and the reaction or response of these children. This part of the thesis reveals to us the area under study which by all means makes the rest of this work valid and relevant.

CHAPTER THREE: PRESENTING RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE ANKOLE DIOCESE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

From my collected data in the Ankole diocese, it is possible to identify two balanced attitudes which sometimes tend to freely intermix with each other. In one side, the data shows that children have been marginalized by the church, while in the other; the data shows that the church has sidelined children to serve them appropriately thus, for their own good. Below, I will present the main issues that compose the data collected from Ankole diocese in relation to the study objectives:

3.2 CHILDREN: THE CASE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The status of membership of baptized children in the church as Christians was perhaps the most seemingly controversial issue. The full membership of children was greatly contested by a number of respondents although some members, especially the clergy, tended to give a two-faced response. The majority of the lay Christian respondents emphatically stressed that children are not full members of the church. These respondents claimed that the low cognitive capability of children renders them inferior to adults. Thus, they always need to follow adults in their way of faith.¹¹ According to these respondents, children know nothing as far as the church is concerned unless they are directed by adult Christians. It should also be noted that according to the respondents, children are not a homogeneous group. They (children) are awarded status according to their age. The older the child is, the closer he/she is to the adults. In this manner, adults are pronounced superior to children in the church.

A number of lay respondents noted however that baptized children are in some limited way full members of the church. The research findings show that these respondents are educated, or have acquired a certain level of formal education. These respondents however appeared uncertain on

¹¹ A sample of twenty questionnaires filled by respondents indicates that all of them stressed that children are not full members of the church. A lay leader at *Kisyoro* parish church in response to my interview on 12th July 2008 also

the full membership they ascribe to the baptised children. Eventually, it appears that they acknowledge baptised children as full members of the church on theological and biblical grounds but their arguments showed a sense of conflict with their conscience.

Whereas almost all the interviewed members of the clergy and church leaders said ‘Yes!’ baptised children are full members of the church’, All added a ‘**But**’. They then focused on the weakness of children which is associated with their tender age. When the clergy respondents admitted full membership of baptised children in the church, they based it mainly on theological and biblical foundations. According to all the clergy members who responded to this research study, when one is baptized, one becomes a Christian and a full member of the Christian church. They emphasized however that these baptised children need a constant attention from the adult members of the church if they must remain in the path of faith. This issue of the membership of baptised children in the church seemed to raise curiosity among the respondents as to whether children should be baptized in the first place. I was not at liberty to follow up that point further because it was not part of the research core objectives. None the less, it became a concern for many of the respondents.

3.3 CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communion was also a controversial issue in this research study. This issue divided the respondents according to their level of education. More than half of the educated lay respondents said baptised children should be allowed to participate in Holy Communion. They however stressed that what matters is to explain to the children the meaning of the sacrament. The lay respondents who opposed this issue also did it because they thought that children do not know the importance of the Holy Communion. Therefore, to include them would only be meaningless. They also stressed that many children are below 12 years which is usually the average age for confirmation. According to the respondents, any Christian that is not confirmed should not participate in the Holy Communion.

maintained that children are not full members of the church until they receive confirmation into the church.

Only a small number of the clergy respondents stressed that children should not be allowed Holy Communion. The majority of the clergy, especially the highly educated and urban based, emphasised that it would be fair if baptised children could be allowed Holy Communion. All the clergy respondents however stressed the importance of Confirmation to the church and noted that it conflicts with the idea in question, and unfortunately with their views. One clergy member in *Kyamate* Archdeaconry, who responded to an interview on condition of anonymity, stressed that if children are not allowed to have Holy Communion, it contradicts the fact that they are full Christians, a view which he thinks that the majority of the clergy concurs with. Confirmation raised an antagonism in this issue, which went beyond the control of respondents especially the clergy who are expected to abide by the church doctrines. I will deliberately put a comment on this issue in the next chapter.

3.4 CHILDREN AND FAITH

The research findings of this thesis indicate that the majority of respondents believe that children have no Christian faith. The argument therein is that children do not know much about Jesus and the church, they do not believe in Jesus and thus, they have no faith. They however argued that children (not babies), that is, children at the age of attending the church and Sunday school have faith but that it is too negligible to have an impact on their Christian life. This perhaps puts us in another crisis of verifying whether faith can be measured in quantities so as to deny children the full quantity of it. It is however clear that in this case, respondents closely linked faith to cognitive understanding which is more developed in adults than in children. From the words in the work of Bakke, this skeptical view about children's understanding existed as early as the days of the Greco-Roman world, especially with the ancient philosophers like Plato:

In view of the great importance Plato ascribes to true knowledge as a presupposition for correct ethical development, it is not surprising that it is precisely this philosopher who has most to say about the various ways in which children's lack of reason finds expression. He claims that children have little knowledge; they are "gullible" and easily persuaded, they are able to understand only the simplest things, they talk nonsense and make unreliable judgments.¹²

The bigger number of the clergy respondents acknowledged that baptised children have a

¹² O.M.Bakke (2005): *When Children Became People*. Page.16

Bakke tries to give a detailed account of the low status given to the children in the Greco-Roman world from the

Christian faith. These respondents seemed to base their argument on their theological and biblical understanding. It was assumed that since the Holy Spirit can work within any Christian, it would be wrong for the adults to exclusively claim to have faith and not children. Some of the clergy members interviewed emphasized that children can even have a greater faith than adults.¹³ In my opinion, when children are taught, they grasp and believe unlike adults who tend to believe only what they can see. This should not be interpreted to mean that children believe blindly. It rather means that children are able to believe without seeing, which is the core of anybody's faith (Jn.20:24-29).¹⁴ Our demand for evidence as adults in order for us to believe does not make us superior to children; it is our major failure and a block in our path of faith.

For all the clergy respondents however, there was a realization that children tend to forget and can easily be misled. This may seem to be exposing a weakness in children, but it is merely an anthropological fact that may not contest the state of children's faith. The clergy that responded to this research study therefore recognised that baptised children have a Christian faith but emphasised also that adults need to walk with them to keep them in that path of faith. I will shed more light on this need for adults to walk with children in their path of faith in the next chapter.

3.5 CHILDREN: TEACHERS OR MERE LEARNERS?

During my study in Ankole diocese, I discovered that many Christians do not think that adults can learn anything from the Christian children. Without being biased, I came to the conclusion that the majority of lay Christians who responded to this study greatly despised children. This may perhaps be caused by the individual perception about children in the society. It is also possible that the culture influenced the respondents' arguments. As I noted previously, Ankole culture ascribes little respect to children's views, if any. Many of the respondents would laugh at the idea that adults can learn anything from children. The assumption is that children learn from adults and not the other way round. It is assumed that this is similarly applicable to church life.

time of Holmer to that of Cicero.

¹³ A lay leader (Catechist) at *Ruharo* Cathedral (13th July 2008), maintained that from the experience from his confirmation classes, children are eager to learn about God and once they understand, they express a greater faith than adults who are exposed to the world of empirical evidence.

¹⁴ Thomas is rebuked not because he showed no faith in the risen Christ or that he said resurrection was not possible. His weakness was that he wanted to see Jesus physically so that he could believe that He was indeed alive.

This situation is perhaps confirmed by the child-adult interaction in church worship in many of the churches of Ankole diocese, especially in the rural areas. It is not uncommon to see children being chased away from their seats in the middle of the service, sometimes rudely, once there is a shortage of seats for adults in the church. From the research findings, it is clear that the majority of the lay Christians in Ankole diocese do not see that there is much to learn from children in our church.

The clergy members in Ankole diocese see this issue differently. The majority of the clergy members who responded to this study stressed that children are a very big instrument of learning in our churches. Many of these respondents cited events like plays and songs which are usually displayed by children in the church worship as educative. Some of these events, they maintained, touch on the hearts of adult Christians to the extent that some cry and others are pushed to confession. These clergy members also acknowledged that merely by looking at the innocent lives lived by children, adults should observe them as a symbol of humility that is key to our Christian faith. Jesus himself, they stressed, asked adults to “live like children” in order to inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt.18:1-4).

3.6 WORSHIPPING JOINTLY WITH CHILDREN

The interviews/questionnaires indicated further that children are not at all welcome to pray and worship jointly with the adults in most churches of Ankole diocese. All the respondents, clergy and laity alike, noted that young children do not go at the same pace with adults. Basing on this argument, they stressed that any joint worship with children would be a waste of time. The clergy however recommended that children should be partly accepted in the adult worship, and after receiving the blessing, they should leave for their separate worship. The separate worship that is available for the children is the Sunday school.

Some of the children who responded to this research study expressed their disappointment with the separate worship given to them. The majority of them would feel at home if they were allowed to worship together with their parents. From my experience after attending Sunday

worship services in some churches, especially in rural areas, it is perhaps fair to say that the children's disappointment has a genuine cause. Without drawing a conclusion, but deliberately presenting facts without mincing words, many of the churches do not have separate services for children. Children are simply sent out, and nobody seems to be concerned about where they are going. Some of them are seen peeping through the windows. Surprisingly, they are followed out to be silenced in case their noise interferes with the service taking place inside the church. While the argument given by adults that children would just disrupt in the joint worship may hold some ground, if one regards services as they are presently conducted, this may not be the case if, for instance, the worship was conducted as an all-age-service. This and the theological perspective of this argument will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.7 CHILDREN'S CONTRIBUTION IN CHURCH WORSHIP

While the majority of the interviewed Christians in Ankole diocese would not like to worship jointly with children, almost all of them simply accept that children can contribute a lot in church worship. Christians cited events like plays, songs and the readings by children as some of the ways in which children contribute in the worship life of the church. It should be noted however that according to many adult Christians in Ankole diocese this does not mean that they necessarily have much to teach the adults through their participation. Some adult Christians suggested that children may help in the worship but much of their stuff is fun and the church attendants simply laugh it off. This argument by the adult Christians seems to say that children mainly help to pass time in the worship sessions than teaching anything of much value. According to Griggs, children may not participate in church worship because the church does not give them a chance. She thus argues:

Consider occasionally letting a child read one of the scripture passages during the service. If the passage is given to the child ahead of time, and time is spent with the child practicing the reading at home and in the sanctuary (with the microphone if one is used), a child can do a very good job of reading the scripture.¹⁵

Griggs obviously seems to suggest that children should worship jointly with adults wholly or

¹⁵ Patricia Griggs:1986. *Opening The Bible With Children: Beginning Bible Skills*; Page 20

partially, otherwise there is no way that they would read the scripture without their presence being mandatory. In some churches of Ankole diocese, children are offered their special Sundays where they present to the church what they have been learning in their separate worship (usually Sunday school). Some adult Christians genuinely expressed that children's contribution in the church worship is not only pleasant, but also a necessary tool for educating as well as entertaining. "They not only have the message to pass on, but they also entertain us with their performances", one female respondent at *Kiyooro* Parish reacted. All the clergy in Ankole diocese unanimously accepted that children greatly contribute to the worship life of the church if they are given the required instructions. There was a realization however, that children in most cases have been denied the chance to express themselves before the adult Christians.

3.8 CHILDREN'S SEPARATE WORSHIP IN ANKOLE DIOCESE

As I highlighted in the previous chapter, Ankole diocese has got separate special worship services for children and a regular Sunday school policy established. This means that if there exists any weakness in children's worship, it is not a result of lack of a policy on children's worship services. Probably, it would be a weakness in implementation and management. According to most Christians in Ankole diocese, the research findings confirmed, Sunday school services given to the little ones are not solely meant for worship but for drama and games too. For anybody much interested in Christian worship, the basic question would be to ask about the relevance of these games and drama in relation to the worship life of these young ones. The Christians nevertheless seemed not to be bothered at all. Some of them indeed suggested that Sunday schools are meant to keep children busy when adults are worshipping. Some Sunday school services visited by the researcher showed indeed that worshipping is not the core in these services.

Children are often found with no teacher, running and playing around. In some rural churches, children are simply released. Their removal seems to matter more than their placement. They simply play, throw stones, fight and return home with their parents after the service. On a clear observation, the parents and adults in general are not at all concerned about children's worship

and faith, or they even do not imagine that children need to worship. This perhaps has something to do with adult worship itself. The traditional church worship in Ankole diocese rural churches has been hijacked by various projects that are less connected to spirituality and worship. I will shed more light on this point in the next chapter.

Some of the few Sunday school teachers and the majority of the clergy who responded to this study acknowledged that Sunday school is lacking much. They particularly noted the absence of instructional materials like books, pens/pencils and reading texts. In an interview at *Kahaija* Parish, a clergy member lamented that their good plans for their children are hindered by the meager resources of the church. From the various numbers of learning materials as well as bible story print-outs which he displayed, one could easily believe his excuse or at least give him some benefit of doubt. “There is also lack of sufficient shelters to accommodate children and therefore, they study in the open which distracts their concentration”, he added. Parents were also reported to be deliberately shielding their children from attending different children’s church services under trivial excuses.

3.9 EQUAL BEFORE GOD? : A REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

One of the most interesting observations in this research study is the peoples’ response about the kingdom of God. With all their skeptical views about children notwithstanding, all respondents, both clergy and the laity unanimously stressed that all humanity is equal before God. This, they said, does not contradict their prior response which by large almost makes children inferior to adults in the church. In defence of their views, they built arguments which hinge on immanence and transcendence as well as anthropology. This certainly means that children in the church are treated on double standards – being equal and being not equal to adults. If all humanity is equal before God, how fair is it for man to treat another man unequally on grounds of age or other physical differences? I shall elaborate on this point in the next chapter.

The clergy in particular stressed that children are equal to adults in church worship and even nearer to the kingdom of God than adult Christians. This probably does not mean that children

have a free ticket to heaven; it is perhaps objective to say that they may have much a cleaner ticket than adult Christians do have. The clergy cited Jesus' calling for children to be brought to him (Matt.19:14), and Jesus' deliberate move to make children a model for adults to emulate if they (adults) should seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt.18:1-4). Basing on such cases of the scripture, children would be viewed as being equal to adults if not favorites in the kingdom of God. Marcia Bunge in similar terms emphasizes the greatness of children in relevance to the scripture:

There are five main ways in which the significance of children is underscored in Jesus' teaching and practice. He blesses the children brought to him, and teaches that the reign of God belongs to them. He makes children models of entering the reign of God. He also makes children models of greatness in the reign of God. He calls his disciples to welcome little children as he does and turns the service of children into a sign of greatness in the reign of God. He gives the service of children ultimate significance as a way of receiving himself and by implication the one who sent him.¹⁶

3.10 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

All the above arguments give us the facts from the research field, the circumstances around these facts and the necessary environment for the interpretation and analysis of the data. The treatment given to baptised children in the church has been discussed in the chapter. The status given to children by the scriptures has also been clearly brought forward. This chapter not only presents the church perception on baptized children, but also the manner in which children are perceived by adult Christians. This three faced perspective; the scriptural dimension, the church dimension and the adult Christian dimension on children's status in church life and worship is necessary for a clear interpretation of the research data. This chapter is the basic part of my thesis because it is the only base for interpretation and analysis. Apart from being a base for my interpretation and analysis as well as conclusion of the findings, it is also a ground for any other person or the eventual reader of this work to make his/her critical interpretation and analysis. The theological as well as the anthropological aspects of the church concerning baptized children in Ankole diocese have been discussed in this chapter.

¹⁶ Marcia.J.Bunge(Ed):2001; *The Child In Christian Thought* Page 36

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As clearly revealed in the previous chapters, the research in Ankole diocese has given rich and relevant material. As already pointed out, the research findings in this study show a double faced picture in relation to the main question of the Thesis – Are baptised children marginalised Christians? While some points reflect that children are treated with despise, some show that children are sidelined to be given the services appropriate to them and thus for their own good. This double faced perspective however doesn't appear without controversies, contradictions or inconsistencies. In this chapter, we therefore analyse and interpret the research findings in relation to our topic of concern and its objectives.

4.2 BY FAITH OR DIVINE INNOCENCE?

The idea of Christian Faith was one of the research key questions. As we noticed from the previous chapter, adult Christians in Ankole diocese do not think that children have a fully fledged Christian faith. One informant – a high school teacher at *Nyakyera* Secondary School in *Kyamate* Archdeaconry argued philosophically to prove that children have no faith. Faith, he insisted, cannot exist unless there is belief. He seemed to suggest that one has faith in what one believes in, and belief precedes faith. On this note, he insisted that children have no firm stand to believe in something; therefore they cannot have faith in anything. Taking this argument at the face value, this informant seems to have the point clear. I also do believe that believing is important for a grounded faith. I too concede partially that children do not show a firm cognitive ground to insist on what they believe in.

While I concede that children may not show a comprehensive cognitive ground of believing in something, it does not mean that they do not believe, or that they do not have faith. As adults, we believe in what we have learnt or what we have experienced. If we are taught wrongly, we are

likely to believe in wrong things and later have faith in them. I bring in this argument to stress that if children are taught correctly according to the standards of the Bible and the church's creeds, they will believe correctly and thus have a fruitful faith. Faith can be in form of obedience, loyalty, trusting, relying on and coming to Jesus. Children are always better in all these. Unfortunately, reliance or dependence of children has been viewed as their weakness in Ankole diocese. This is also the cause of the vague definition of a child in Ankole culture. A student at the university who is entirely depending on parents is treated more or less like a child. It is clear that children are more likely to believe in a historical fact told to them than adults. As adults, we have become "Thomases" in one way or the other. We regularly want to believe in what we experience with our human bodily senses. If children can easily be told about Christ and accept with no doubt, which other faith are we talking about? Jesus himself stresses that blessed are those who are able to believe without seeing (cf. John 20, 24-29). On this principle, children may even have more faith than adults.

Faith aside, there is another aspect that puts children to a greater status in our church. Children should never be judged by their faith alone, and I suppose that Jesus would not. Indeed Jesus saw something almost greater than faith in children – humility and innocence. This innocence may not be formally divine, but I please to pronounce it that way because Jesus put a stamp on it and recommended it for adults to emulate. In principle Jesus puts it clear that the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like children (Matt.19:4). Who then can deny children the kingdom if the Prince of heaven grants them a place therein? I do not intend to give children a free ride to heaven. Most children have been corrupted by the environment they grow in. They have been abused and taught to abuse others. They have been denied love and filled with hatred at their tender age. So to say, their innocence has been defiled. This still does not put them to condemnation. Jesus seems to be defending them when he maintains that whoever leads the little ones to sin, a big millstone should be tied around his neck and then be drowned (Matt.18:6).

The key question I intend to pose around is whether children are judged by their faith or they should be presumed innocent and thus Godly. Apparently, this innocence has not been recognised, later on used to build our churches. While we may dispute the innocence of children,

many of us deserve to have a stone tied around our necks. The church should not look at children as weak in every way. They are weak physically, not spiritually. The point of concern to the adult members of the Christian church is therefore not to discover how weak in faith children are, but how much the adult Christians are responsible for this weakness. Without doubt, the adult Christians will then recognise that children are perhaps different from how they are perceived in the church.

4.3 A GOD GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN

As I have noted, it is usually possible that the social and cognitive weakness which is often associated with children can be a result of deliberate injustice or negligence. Adult Christians are responsible in any actions as they interact with children both in worship and in other activities. Adults and parents have an obligation to be responsible for children; it is our God-given responsibility to allow children to put their faculties into the right use. Even if we were to assume that children's tender age makes them weaker to adults, this would call adults to be even more responsible for them. By insisting that adults should take responsibility over children, I don't mean that the adults are superior to children. Rather, I mean that they should behave responsibly so as not to mislead the little ones who are under their God-given authority as parents. Thus, they are accountable to God and the children with regard to how they carry out this responsibility (cf. Prov.22:6, Eph.6:4).

According to the Bible, adults and parents are given authority and responsibility to guide their children to a Godly life. Right from the Old Testament, God is concerned with the way children should be preserved and He prescribes some procedures for guidance. Adults and parents are to direct children in the right path so that when they (children) are old, they will not leave this path (cf. Proverbs 22:6). The right path leads to life (cf. Jeremiah 21:8) and to peace (Isaiah 59:8). From the work of Kenda Creasy Dean [et al (Editors)], we learn that in the days of Abraham and Moses, children are part of God's schemes of work for a life of perfection. Dean thus writes:

From the earliest records of the biblical testament, God has called people to show their children a pattern of life that is receptive to God's love. Abraham is charged to teach his children to "keep the way of the Lord" (cf. Genesis 18:19). Moses instructs

the Jewish people that God's way is to be modelled, taught, and discussed with children (cf. Deut. 6:7; 11:19).¹⁷ This not only points out adult accountability to God but also to children, since if adults have not fulfilled their obligation, they have wronged both God and children.

The Christian mode of responsibility both in church worship and in general Christian life is that of hand-holding (fellowship) and finger-pointing (guidance).¹⁸ This still does not necessarily make adult Christians superior to children. In fact, they stand a big test over their responsibility. It is not enough to hand-hold. There should be love, respect and purpose in hand-holding. This would mean that the one whose hand is held should feel secure and safe in the holder's hand. Finger-pointing too means more than merely doing it. A finger that points in a wrong direction will lead to a wrong destination. In this case, the one who is finger-pointing risks having the millstone tied around his neck as I earlier noted. There should be a reason given to the one who is being directed so that the finger-pointing is followed with little or no resistance. This means that in carrying out responsibility as adult Christians vis-à-vis children, there is need for dialogue. I will shed more light on this note later.

More often, the God-given responsibility is used irresponsibly by adults since it has been used as a justification for subduing children. This is unfortunately the case also in church worship. In Ankole diocese the research confirmed that children are never seen as key participants in worship. When they are given a chance to participate, it is seen as exceptional and they do not go without inconveniences. At one church in *Kabingo* Archdeaconry, children were invited to participate in singing during the Sunday worship in my presence. Pretty as their participation was, it was so disappointing to note that some of the children were invited from outside the church building and there they returned after their participation. I regard such situations as

¹⁷ Dean Kenda Creasy (et al) 2001: *STARTING RIGHT: Thinking theologically about youth ministry*, Page 155. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, United States of America.

¹⁸ Dean. K. Creasy and Foster Ron 1998: *THE GODBEARING LIFE: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, Page 139. Upper Room Books, Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America.

Dean and Foster here use an analogy of a young mother laden with two grocery plastic bags in one hand and gently holding the fingers of her two-year-old toddler daughter with the other hand as they meander across the grass. The mother apparently allows the little girl the freedom of a controlled wandering. The mother would point at different things and the little girl would stop, giggle, point and sound out a word and then move on once more on her self-made path. This is a good illustration of how the church can relate to children in worship both in a friendly yet responsible way.

church manipulation of children. It is true that some children may probably cause some distraction; but not all. Children who are able to appear before the church attendants and participate can be accommodated within the normal church services as long as there is Christian patience, empathy and will. If children are to appear from the outside to be in for a little while and then be out again, they are not treated as fellow Christians, but as subordinates or some hired personnel. If, in contrast, the children had been a natural part of the public worship from the beginning to the end, and if they had been allowed to contribute elsewhere in the liturgy, the worship would also have been their worship.

4.4 SACRAMENTS: CHILDREN IN CAPTIVITY

The Christian church in most denominations believes in and offers sacraments in their various forms. Thus sacraments like Baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist and Holy matrimony are established in many if not all the Christian denominations. The method or style of implementing these sacraments may vary or differ from one denomination to the other, but the purpose and meaning is the same all over. Baptism which is considered the foundational sacrament in most denominations is usually administered first, especially on children/infants in denominations which practice infant baptism. Thus in the Anglican church the practice is as follows: Upon receiving baptism, a child is assumed a Christian and God-parents are witnesses for this. While baptism is offered to infants and children, some sacraments are not at all allowed for children, apparently with a disputed theological foundation and a limited biblical ground. I will shed more light on this point in the next chapter. One of the sacraments that remain in dispute is Holy Communion. Whether children are allowed to participate in Holy Communion or not, it depends on who is talking. Thus, some churches call the children for a blessing in the Holy Communion service. This is though a rare occurrence in many churches of Ankole diocese.

In Ankole diocese, a member of the clergy at *Kiyooro parish* in *Kyamate Archdeaconry* commented; “If we recognize that children are full members of the Christian church, why shouldn’t they participate in Holy Communion? This is my opinion but the Anglican doctrines

do not allow Holy Communion to the unconfirmed”.¹⁹ Certainly, a great number of the baptized children in Ankole diocese are not confirmed and are therefore not allowed to participate in the Holy Communion. The majority of the members of the clergy in Ankole diocese, whom I spoke with, and especially the elite showed their concern over the issue of children receiving Holy Communion, and they said that they only wished they could do something about it, that is, in order to allow them to communion. Whether baptized children should receive Holy Communion, I will discuss this issue in relation to the entire set of the church sacraments. Some sacraments, like holy matrimony, it is logical that children because of their physical development, have to wait for some time, and we do not need any scriptural reference. Because of their age, holy matrimony as a sacrament is not relevant for children. For the sacrament of Holy Communion, there is a sure dispute because one can hardly get any biblical ground to stand on firmly and deny children a right of participation. When Jesus blessed the children (Matt.19:15), when he made them a role model (Matt.18:3) and brought them much closer to heaven (Matt.9:13-15), he was aware of their physical weakness and he never set requirements for them to follow. Of course they were not even baptised. True, Christianity started after the death of Christ and Holy Communion was started by him to strengthen Christians and make them more committed. Jesus himself considered baptism necessary for becoming a disciple (Matt. 28: 20), a follower of Christ. With the love that Jesus showed to children, elevating them to the realms of the kingdom of heaven, it is most likely that he would not keep them away from the meal of the very kingdom which he came to establish.

If there is no principle reason for denying children access to the Holy Communion table, it is right to say that the church has used sacraments to hold children hostages in a sacramental bondage. In Holy Communion, we remember the death and resurrection of Christ (1Cor.10:6), and therefore come to him. He clearly cautions us to let children go to him (Matt.19:14). If we remember his victory over death through Holy Communion, his presence now, and his future coming again, how can we claim to bring children closer to him if they are not allowed to reach near that table of remembrance? In Ankole diocese, many of the informants maintained that

¹⁹ In his response to the qualitative interview July 12th 2008, the lay leader at *Kiyooro* church of Uganda acknowledged that the church should look into the issue of Holy Communion in relation to baptised children. He was however quick to refer to Confirmation citing his allegiance to the church canons.

children do not know the meaning of Holy Communion as a sacrament. Granted, a child on his 2nd or 3rd birthday may not formally know anything about a sacrament. In such a situation one may politely accuse the church of playing double standards. An infant under the 1st birthday is brought to the baptismal font in order to become united with Christ. Does this infant cognitively know anything about baptism? If God-parents are part of the answer, why can't they accompany the children to Holy Communion as well?

Baptism existed even in the earthly days of Jesus but there is no firm evidence that children or infant baptism was carried out. From Acts.16:29-34, 10:44-48 in reference to the Jailer's family and Cornelius' family respectively, one can argue that entire families were baptised and so were children. In my opinion, this is no firm stand because while the scripture shows that entire families were baptised, we are not given the age of those who were baptised.²⁰ It is logical that we can have a family with no young children or infants for this matter. But if so should be that infant baptism is an innovation which later emerged in the church, the readiness with which the church adopted it remains in question. While I will not discredit infant baptism, I will neither assume that in the days of Jesus it was avoided without reason. It appears that the church has always responded to the changing times; thus there is no reason not to do it now in the face of disputed and seemingly controversial doctrines. In principle, the church must define clearly how it stands regarding children and Holy Communion. Otherwise it will appear that baptised children are deliberately marginalised.

According to Bakke 2005:246, we learn from the works of Cyprian that children took part in holy Eucharist in the mid-third century in northern Africa. Though we do not have direct references for children participating in the holy Eucharist in the New Testament, they were always present in worship. In the earliest centuries of the Common Era, churches were organized as a network of communities which, according to Acts 2:42-46, means that the Eucharist was celebrated in Christian homes. While Acts 2 does not use phrases like "the whole household" received holy Eucharist, as is the case with baptism, Bakke maintains that this is not a weighty

²⁰ In 16:33, we are told that the entire Jailer's family was baptised but no details about their number, gender and age are recorded. While it is easy to guess that there could have been children, it is also correct to argue that it is not mandatory that there must be young children or infants in a family.

argument against children's presence²¹ and whether or not the child received the elements or not, he or she nevertheless participated as an integral part of the family/related community. Justin Martyr and Hippolytus reportedly both speak of the Eucharist in connection with baptism. They talk about all candidates receiving their first Holy Communion immediately after baptism.²² In this pattern, it would mean that baptism and the Eucharist are linked together as rituals by means of which an individual is incorporated into the body of Christ and remains in the community of believers. Significant as it is, this very practice seems to support the idea that once one is baptised, one becomes a Christian. It also perhaps disputes confirmation as a pre-requisite for anyone to attend and receive Holy Communion.

From the above, we may acknowledge that from the early centuries of Christianity, Holy Communion seems to have been allowed to children – at least in some parts of the church. We cannot take it for granted that the theology that eventually dropped children from the holy Eucharist succeeded with no contradictions. An Epitaph from the first half of the 4th century in Catania of Sicily shows that children received the Eucharist.²³ A little girl, Julia Florentina, who was one and a half years and twenty-two days old reportedly became seriously ill and received emergency baptism at 2.A.M. Before her death, four hours later, she was given the Eucharist. That this child was given the Eucharist before death is an implication of how important it was viewed. It could also be a sign that children who were even much older were freely participating in the Eucharist. In all this discussion, I not only want to show that the church in later centuries, even up to our times, has somehow held children in a sacramental bondage. I also want to emphasise that by denying children the Eucharist while there is some evidence that it could have been allowed to them in the earliest church, the modern church has deliberately made the Christian life of the little ones ultimately incomplete.

4.5 WORSHIPPING AGAINST SOCIAL INTERACTION

²¹ Bakke 2005:247 associates the holy Eucharist with the Jewish Passover meal. Anybody that was old enough to be physically capable of eating the food in the household took part in it. For Christians with a Jewish background, it is possible that they inherited traits of the Passover meal and applied them in Holy Communion, automatically allowing children to take part in it.

²² Justin Martyr, 1 Apol. 61.10-12; Apost. Trad. 21.23-28.

²³ E. Diehl, ILCV 1.1549

According to the research findings from Ankole Diocese, the absence of children in the church Sunday worship is of no real concern to anyone. Whether children go out to worship, to play or to do nothing, the concentration after their departure is inside the church house and not outside. It is not uncommon after the service to see a child bleeding or with a swollen body and this is of course not from worship, but from fighting with fellow children outside the church. The point of contention in this is whether the church should always work on the assumption that the absence of children from the church worship means that they are also worshipping. The experience from Ankole diocese shows that few adult Christians, if any, can contemplate on where the children are going and what they are going to do there. While I may not say that Sunday school in Ankole diocese is inefficient, the research findings do not have any strong reason to say that it is sufficiently meeting the worship needs of children. I may understand the excuse of lack of facilities; but has the church tried all possible options for including and involving the children in worship? What about the option of conducting several consecutive worships, thus allowing more people to attend, including the children?

The church today risks upbringing children who are rich in social interaction but gravely poor in spiritual content and worship. At various parishes in Ankole diocese, there was a cry over lack of facilities to use. From the research findings, even those with facilities only teach children to read, write and draw – entities that can also be taught in any heathen formal education classroom. In modern times, the church ought to make Sunday school a worshipping place and not a mere place for formal education instruction. Why should a child know how to read the Bible, write words and draw interesting pictures but not be able to say the Lord's Prayer? The little ones must feel the presence of God in their worship life; they need to experience the spiritual presence of Christ in their lives.

According to Evelyn M. R. Johnson and Bobbie Bower, children need to know who God is. This means that they should often be allowed to pray with adults and experience the same Holy Spirit who is always at work among all the Christians. Learning the art of mere reading and writing does not enrich children spiritually. Johnson and Bower thus recommend:

Studying God's word will provide foundational knowledge and experience through which the Holy Spirit will enable children to know God. However, God is more than an idea to be learnt about. Children must have opportunities to know God in the

Hebrew sense – to experience the omnipresent I AM. They need to develop spiritual disciplines to draw near to God. They need to learn the language and practice of worship.²⁴

The excuse for the exclusion of children from joint worship in Ankole diocese is almost the same in all its churches. It is assumed that children will distract the concentration of worshippers in the service. While the argument holds some water, the adult worshippers as well as their leader in the service are guilty of failing to fellowship with fellow Christians (baptised children) in an appropriate manner. Neither all adults nor all children are of the same age and most ages can very well be accommodated in a joint worship. It is not only weird but it also puts the church mission at a risk, if a child celebrating his 10th birthday is to be sent out of church every Sunday. This is perhaps the reason why many children today graduate from the Sunday school into the secular world, and not into the joint church worshipping community as it should normally be. This situation is caused by a long period of social interaction which for long was regarded as or mistaken for ‘worship’ in Sunday school.

In such a situation, Patricia Griggs emphasises the need for great involvement with children in worship, especially by the pastor or church leader. In possible cases, children should be given bibles which they will use every time they attend the service. Of course, Griggs assumes and suggests regular participation of children in a joint worship. Griggs advises that when the scripture is being read during the service, one should take time to tell the congregation (even though it is listed in the bulletin) what the scripture passage will be and then allow time for persons to find it before the pastor begins to read. This, Griggs continues, will encourage the children to use their bibles during worship and will help them to remember and understand the scripture passage because they can see as well as hear the words; Griggs 1986:20.

Like Griggs, I also believe that the only way the church can substitute mere social interaction with worship is through making children active participants in the worship.²⁵ When children

²⁴ Johnson and Bower 1992, *Building A Great Children’s Ministry* page. 43
Nashville Tennessee, United States of America. Abingdon press.

²⁵Griggs 1986:20; emphasises children participation in worship by drawing examples. In many churches for instance, Advent or lantern candles are lit and the scripture is read. A child can be able to do these. She also argues

have been an entity of distraction, it is because they have not been catered for in worship. In fact, the selfish chauvinism of adult Christians in church worship has been the major cause of distraction, not the children themselves. Children may be slower than adults, but not all. Christians need to live by the scriptures which call us to wait for one another (1Cor.11:33). Children should actively participate in various items of worship. Griggs further recommends:

Consider occasionally letting a child read one of the scripture passages during the service. If the passage is given to the child ahead of time and time is spent with the child practicing the reading at home, and in the sanctuary (with the microphone if one is used), a child can do a very good job of reading the scripture.²⁶

4.6 THE UNNOTICED TWO CHURCHES

As we have noticed above, a joint children's worship would be good for their strength in worship. By having a separate grouping, they are missing out on a great service especially as far as Christian fellowship is concerned. The main risk in arranging separate worship services or groups meant for children is that the church that Jesus built on a hard rock is in danger of being divided by the church established authorities. Good intentions are seemingly yielding disputable results that are not healthy for the mission of the church. As we have noted, the separate child grouping is occupied with much social interaction as compared to the adult grouping which is much involved directly in worshipping. As a result, the church harbors two distinctive groups, seemingly with the same objectives, but unfortunately using different methods. The outcome of the one is definitely different from that of the other.

In Ankole diocese, any ordinary Christian will tell you that adult Christians are dominating Sunday prayers with no concern for the children's fate. I have already pointed out that formal education instruction is dominating Sunday school at the expense of spiritual experience and worship. Simply because the Sunday school is continuously different from the main adult worship, and because the adults assume that children are also worshipping while they (children) are not, I am at this point tempted to conclude that two churches are unnoticeably operating within one church. The separate worship of children without the church concern and systematic

that special activity sheets related to the worship service can be prepared for children to use during the service.

²⁶ Ibid

follow-up, results into what Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster call “The one-eared Mickey Mouse”. The “Mickey mouse” is the main church and the “one ear” is that small child group that is loosely attached to the main church. Dean and Foster of course are of the view that what happens in the main church worship is less similar to what happens in the small children group – if not different.²⁷

From Dean and Foster’s presentation, we may not deduce that they are advocating for a joint worship of adults and the young ones. It is however clear that they concede that any separate grouping of these young ones without a carefully established procedure monitored by the church leadership is disastrous both to the young ones and to the adults in church as well. Besides, we have to concede that adults can learn something from children. Building on the small percentage of respondents in Ankole diocese who acknowledged that adults can learn from children, I want to maintain that children are a useful resource that the church has failed to utilise for its advantage. This simply clarifies that the separate worship affects both children and adult Christians. Much as children need the fellowship and guidance from adults, adults also need the insights and experience of children. Besides, baptised children are Christians and the Holy Spirit can use them to worship in and build the church. Denying this fact is to dispute the power of the Holy Spirit and by all standards, to render the baptism given to children useless. According to the report from the general Synod Board of Education (Church of England), the basic principle for adults to worship with children is to be good listeners with the recognition that each of us is a leader as well as a learner. The report goes on:

For everyone therefore involved in learning together, the skills of communicating and listening are important, and everyone is both learner and leader. The children need the experience and wisdom of the adults. The adults need to learn from the children who can lead them into enriching experiences and enjoyable skills. Are we to deny adults the insights of children? Dare we impoverish our own growth and continue to arrange for children to ‘learn’ in Christian family?²⁸

²⁷ Dean Kenda Creasy and Foster Ron

*THE GOD BEARING LIFE: The Art of soul tending for youth ministry.*Page.30

Upper Room Books, Nashville Tennessee, U.S.A

Dean and Foster use this “One-eared Mickey Mouse” to explain a youth ministry that is loosely or vaguely attached to the main church. I am using it similarly to explain the child ministry in the church because it is more or less the same. In Ankole diocese, some of the children in the Sunday schools can as well be called youths, by both their mental and chronological age.

²⁸ The National Society (Church of England) for promoting Religious Education. 1988

In some Parishes and churches of Ankole diocese, the two churches in question do not even co-exist. While the adult Christians meet to worship every other Sunday, children often go around without any Sunday school teacher and are at the same time not accommodated into the main church worship. The site of loitering children around the church house reminds the unconcerned passers-by that it is Sunday. In such a situation, the one-eared Mickey Mouse is even better. I do not intend to dramatise the situation in Ankole diocese, but my findings in the area show that children's fate in church worship is of little concern to the church. In *Rukoni* Archdeaconry, I attended the Sunday worship and scores of children could not get seats. The church was small and one cannot blame the local Christians: In its rural setting, the church does not have enough resources. As the lay leader led the church through various stages including fund raising for different church projects, the ministry among children, in my opinion, should have been among the issues to be addressed, but that was never considered. As their voices from outside the church submerged the voice of the lay leader, he only ordered the church warden to silence the children. In such circumstances, I would not consider the excuse of limited resources as convincing enough. It is rather the lack of will to consider children as important in the church worship and other church programs which has made them a second class of Christians – obviously considered as a lower class.

4.7 UNEQUAL YET EQUIVALENT PARTNERS.

Reflecting on the tender age of children, any genuine individual would but accept that children are not equal to adults physically. Their weak body makes them vulnerable to the environment in which they live. This weakness gives the adults the mandate to control, protect and defend them. This control is based on the assumed inferiority of children in every aspect of life. Robert Choun and Michael Lawson use some bible texts to show the scriptural reflections on children. Proverbs, 22:15 declares that “foolishness” is one of a child's characteristics and suggests the use of the “rod of correction” over the child. Mark 9:20-21 describes a child with deep spiritual problems. Hebrews 5:11-14 compares new believers with young children – unable to distinguish

between good and evil. Ephesians 4:14 pictures some adult Christians as children who can be easily misled by cunning, crafty and deceitful teachers.²⁹ All this reflection and reference on the scripture seem to suggest that children are by large inferior to adults. Paul in 1 Cor.13:11 also seems to despise children regarding their understanding and logical standards. It is not clear however whether Paul's analysis extends to the spiritual arena. Personally, I would say it does not. By human and physical standards we can say that children are not equal to adults without any reservation.

However, the scriptures do not give adults a license to despise children. Psalms 34:11 invites children to learn to fear the Lord. This is by no means a point to use in despising children. Both adults and children need the revelation of God in their ministry and no one is an expert in this naturally. Romans 9:11 clarifies that children can, and do, choose between evil and good and scriptures are known to them from infancy (cf. 2 Tim 3:15). This may not necessarily stress that Paul is controversial – many think he is. It perhaps testifies to my suggestion that Paul by lowering children on logical standards did not mean that they are spiritually inferior. Just like adults, children are able to recognise sin as well as salvation. Because they do not inquire from them, adults simply assume that children know nothing. It is perhaps correct to say that our assumptions in sheer arrogance over children have been our major failure as adults in our relations with children as fellow Christians. If we reflect on the work of Catherine Brekus, we may develop an idea that children are not aliens to the knowledge of salvation. Brekus writes about Jonathan Edwards, the pastor of the congregational church in Northampton Massachusetts in 1735. Edwards was summoned to the house of a four-year old girl named Phebe Bartlet. According to her parents, Phebe had undergone a remarkable religious change, apparently influenced by her eleven-year old brother who had recently been 'born again'. Phebe had reportedly begun to disappear into her closet to pray and weep for salvation. "I pray, beg, pardon all my sins," she was heard loudly crying to God. After a long time of Phebe behaving as if she

London, England.

²⁹ Choun Robert and Lawson Michael 1998: *The Christian Educator's Handbook On Children's Ministry (2nd Edition)* Page.19, Baker Books House Company, Grand rapids Michigan, United States of America. Choun and Lawson try to show children's weakness while presenting a similarity with adults. While children may easily be misled, Choun and Lawson suggest that both children and immature adults shift in their thinking. It is obvious that most of us usually shift in our thinking, sometimes making wrong and stupid decisions.

was in severe anguish of spirit, she finally managed to put her fears into words:

“I am afraid I shall go to hell!” she wept. After another bout of crying, however, she suddenly fell quiet. Turning to her mother, with a smile, she proclaimed; “mother, the kingdom of heaven is come to me!”. In the hours and days afterward, Phebe seemed to have become a “new creature”: she carefully recited her catechism, wept at the thought that her unconverted sisters might “go to hell,” and, like Augustine, repented for stealing some fruit – a handful of plums – from a neighbor’s tree.³⁰

While Edwards later uses this experience to stress that children are not only children of grace, but also of wrath, and are therefore not born sinless, I wish to assert that Phebe’s experience is a manifestation that children too understand salvation. It may not be made to justify that children are not innocent. It rather testifies that once children are received and allowed to share in the church mission, they are able to grasp the church teaching, and it can cause an impact in their lives. Phebe’s experience is an example of the fact that the Holy Spirit works within children, a fact less recognized by adult Christians. An encounter with children in Ankole diocese clearly shows that children do acknowledge the presence of God. The only difference is that while Phebe was attended to, the plight of children in Ankole diocese is not of much concern to the adults. The key point of contention in all this is that just like Phebe, children are able to confess. Confession is a key element in Christian faith and in this respect adults are often weaker than children Christians. If children are able to confess with no reservation, they are no less Christians than adults their cognitive understanding in dispute notwithstanding, since the word and will of God are not merely to be understood, they are to be obeyed also.

So far I have argued that children are not inferior to adults in the church worship. Just as in Ankole diocese, the problem lies not within children, but with the adults. The church dogmas and doctrines have over time given adult Christians more of a say in church than children both in worship and otherwise. This does not necessarily mean that children are not capable of executing duties in our church. The practices of our church remain a challenge to us in relating to children. Difficult as it may be to change or modify the established church traditions concerning worship, doing so would be an important step towards the unity of our church. Yet through the baptism given to our children, the church allows them to be Christians with ability to share in the spiritual

gifts. Thor Strandenaes advances the same point thus:

Children cannot be accepted for baptism without also being admitted into the growing and nurtured life of the baptised Christian community. As baptised members of the church they have received the Holy Spirit – and thereby also spiritual gifts, in all their variety, to be shared and cherished by the entire community of believers, and to be used for building up the church (cf. Rom 12, 4ff; 1 Cor. 12, 12ff; Eph, 4,7ff).³¹

Tim Sudworth (et al) 2007 using Pulse – a monthly youth worship event stresses the need for our modern church to modify its ways to meet the mission objectives of various groups:

One of the great challenges of being church in the twenty-first century is to present the unchanging truth of the gospel of Christ in a new way to a fast-changing world. We need to do church in new ways, and to design a model that fits the mission of the particular mission context. Pulse is a prime example of doing a new thing, taking risks and seeking to build unity in the mission of the church.³²

4.8 ABLE LEADERS DENIED A CHANCE

As I have already noted, children and adult Christians are unequal but equivalent partners. In fact before God, they are ultimately equal. This was unanimously held by all the respondents and informants during my research in Ankole diocese. Despite this consensus, we only see adults share in the leadership of our modern church, be it in the worship or otherwise. I don't think and neither do I suggest that baptised children should be allowed to be church pastors, deacons or bishops. This would appear inappropriate and crazy, since they lack proper training and the skills for this. On the other hand, children should not only be under adult leadership in all the church matters. This would be institutionalised dictatorship in the church. With their tender age in mind, children should absolutely be responsibly guided by Christians. But in this guidance, adult Christians must understand that the Holy Spirit also works within children and this is no field for

³⁰ C. Brekus(Bunge Marcia (Ed) 2001. Page 300

³¹ Strandenaes Thor 2004: *Dialoguing With Children On Liturgy And Worship: The Swedish Missiological Themes* VOL. 92, NO. 3, Pages 490-491.

³² Sudworth Tim (et al) 2007: *Mission – Shaped Youth:*

Rethinking young people and church. Page.47

Church House Publishing, Great Smith street, London

Mark Russell eagerly encourages the church to bend towards the young people, and to reach an extra mile of taking risks in order to serve all Christians. Though Sudworth's work is largely aimed at youths, this is more relevant in Ankole diocese where some age group pronounced as children can freely be called youths. "Young people" is the preferred phrase because it combines both children and youths.

their guidance. Adults cannot claim to be the only experts on the Holy Spirit, and for that matter, children may well develop special qualities by the favour of the Holy Spirit. One lay leader at *Kisyoro* Parish had this to say; “There is a child that you see participating in the worship and you really accept that he is a talented and gifted child”.³³ I won’t simply say that “there is one child”. There are many baptised children who are able to impressively participate in church mission and worship but who are denied a chance and therefore never discovered.

If we can borrow a leaf from the early church, we shall discover that children were actually responsible leaders in church worship not only to their fellow children but to the entire church community. Children could participate in singing particular responses in liturgy and also singing in the choir. According to Bakke, children also functioned as Lectors, responsible for reading the sacred scripture.³⁴ Reading of the sacred scripture was a central element in synagogue worship (cf. Luke 4:16ff.; Acts 13:15) and it maintained its importance in early Christian worship (1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3; Justin Martyr, 1 Apol.67; Tertullian, Apol.39). Tertullian is perhaps the first to use the noun *Lector* for the one who reads the scriptures aloud (Praescr.41). The lectors were previously appointed by the bishop who handed them the book because they were not ordained.³⁵ From the mid-third century, the Lectors seem to have been ordained and formed a specific order among the clergy. From the fourth century, the Lectors took on the task which was at the time assigned to the deacons – of washing the hands of the presbyters and the bishop in the course of the Eucharist celebration.³⁶

The presentation above clearly shows how the position of a lector was not only important but remarkably prestigious in the church worship. Children were indeed honored to hold such a title. Cyprian, one of the earliest patristic authors tells us that a boy, Aurelius from Carthage, was appointed a lector.³⁷ Aurelius was appointed without following the customary procedure – of

³³ In a qualitative interview on 14th July, this lay leader emphasised that some children show abilities which may even be lacking in adults.

³⁴ Bakke. O. Magne 2005; Page. 251

³⁵ Apostolic Tradition 12

³⁶ *Quaestiones veteris et novi testament* 101, following Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and children in the Roman empire* (London: Routledge, 1989), 187.

³⁷ Cyprian, Ep. 38.

consulting the laity, for they believed God had already “cast His vote”. According to Cyprian, the character and faith of Aurelius depicted God’s will to use this little one for the mission of the church. Aurelius had apparently refused to deny Christianity under persecution. Cyprian asserts thus: “Tender in years he may be, but he is far advanced in glory for his faith and courage; though junior in terms of natural age, he is senior in honor”.³⁸ A reflection on such response to children’s faith in the early church is a lesson if not a challenge to our modern church. Children in the early church were indeed faithful servants of God to the extent that they were equally viewed as a threat by the church persecutors. When Victor of Vita tells the story of persecution of the catholic Christians in northern Africa by the Arian Vandals, he writes that among those who were exiled were many lectors who were little children. He also tells of a child lector whose throat was pierced by an arrow and died just as he was about to sing the Easter alleluia verse.³⁹ Popes Zosimus (417 – 418) and Simplicius (468 – 483) are said to have remained lectors until they were twenty or thirty and they were admitted to a higher order. Severus, an innocent lector reportedly died aged thirteen while others died at twelve or fourteen.⁴⁰

From the above detailed account of children’s church life, one can conclude that children at this early time of the church were not mere observers that we have today, but formal participants in the church affairs. Here we have two questions to answer: Were children in the early church cleverer than children of the modern church? Again; have children today showed no charismatic ability to participate formally in the church? The answers to these questions will depend on who is answering. My own answer to the first question is ‘no!’ If these young lectors could read scriptures often, it probably means that they were trained right from early childhood by adults with a spirit devoid of selfishness. I, just like many would think, suppose that children today at an early age do not often show a remarkable ability to lead in the church. This is partially caused by the modern environment that keeps children on low profiles under the assumption that they know little about the church. One may arguably say that leaders are born. But since all leaders need training at some stage, then the environment makes or shapes leaders. The early church created an environment that enabled children to fully utilise their God-given gifts to serve the

³⁸ Epitaph 38.1.2

³⁹ Victor of Vita, *De Persecutione Vandalarum* 3.34, following Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 187

⁴⁰ ILCV 1280; 1283; 1273; cf. Wiedmann, *Adults and children in the Roman Empire*, 187 – 188.

Church. Our modern church has ultimately failed in this field in many countries.

Following the example of the early church, we can identify that children's faith has been retarded by our modern church. One would argue that it makes no significance to train children in the art of church leadership when there is plenty of adult Christians. I do not think that the early church lacked potential adult Christians. The difference is that the early church had the will to reveal the faith and theology of the church to children at an early age while the modern church has deliberately ignored this development. If the church in our times has ignored the fact that children can share in the leadership of church worship, we cannot blame the children for being weak in what has been hidden from them. On this ground, we can conclude that since children could lead in the early church, they will still have this ability to lead today. Children in our church have therefore remained an untapped resource and thus, unnoticed or unutilised able church leaders.

4.9 DEPENDENCE, INDEPENDENCE AND INTER-DEPENDENCE

In order to consider the fate of baptised children without bias and yet without unnecessary favour, we first need to analyse their status and mode of participation in the church worship. For those who look at children as weak and less efficient, as was the case for most adults in Ankole diocese, complete dependence of children on adults would be the best option. For those who view children as full entities, independence would then be suggested. There are others who feel that children are indeed Christians but that their limited age and physical differences from adults makes it necessary for children to remain under close adult supervision. What is needed, however, is an inter-dependence or mutual cooperation. Thor Strandenaes presents a fully fledged explanation that sums up my argument. According to Strandenaes, there are three modes of dealing with children when preparing for and celebrating church worship: *For children*, *By children* and *With children*.⁴¹ While he presents all these approaches in details, I will only refer to them to explain my points clearly.

⁴¹ T. Strandenaes (The Swedish Missiological Themes vol 92, no.3: 2004. Pages 502 – 507.)

In the first approach – *Preparing worship for children*, Strandenaes suggests that since all adults were children at some stage, they can reflect on their childhood experiences and use them to enrich children’s life in the church worship. By their mature age, adults are also presumed to have a higher cognitive insight and experience. They may also be familiar with the church history, fundamental church documents – Scripture and creeds as well as the church’s theological developments through the ages. Seemingly, these are strong points enough to justify the adults as interpreters of the Christian life for the children. I absolutely concede that in some areas – especially those which need the experience and knowledge of the church traditions, the children should be shown the way by adults. But just as Strandenaes could not forget to put across the weaknesses of such an approach, I strongly stress that adults can only role-play the scene of children. The children’s deep insights can never be expressed by adults. In cultures like in the Ankole region and for that matter the Ankole diocese, where adults are exceedingly superior, there is a danger if adults in such an environment were to “act” on behalf of children. It is even worse for this approach if acting on behalf of children is executed with no reservation. Adults in this case risk becoming gods over the little ones. Since we are followers of Christ, adults should refrain from a situation that may make anybody their follower. This therefore means that where children should be given a hand, adults must create a situation where the child should understand that the adult himself is acting on someone’s behalf but he is not the sole authority.

The second approach is that which gives children more rights to act on their own – *Worship by children*. For anybody that is a human rights activist, this approach would be seen as the best. Children are allowed to put across their voices as well as their feelings and opinions. In this approach, there is no fiction, role-play or duplication. We have the real actors in a real action on stage. This approach needs selfless encouragement of children by the adults because often the self esteem of these young ones has been hurt or distorted. Children’s participation in worship automatically means that they attend and contribute to the service. An adult accepting to be administered to by children is also a sign of humility which is so desired in our church. This can perhaps also improve the relationship between the adults and children in our church worship and reduce the bad feelings of children about adults such as the ill-definition of a church warden which I wrote about earlier (2.6). In short, if the church can allow children to do specific duties more regularly in church worship, we can be sure that the church is bringing up committed and

experienced Christians. This approach however should not be defined to mean that children have become an independent congregation. I don't intend to give the adults a free ticket to interfere with the roles performed by children but they must intervene when necessary, as I have said, responsibly. Children should be given independence in their faith but because adults have a God-given responsibility, the choice and actions of children should be monitored by adult Christians lest children are allowed either to mislead the church or to fade away or disappear.

The third approach suggests togetherness, mutual sharing and accountability of children and adults – *faith and worship (together) with children*. This can be related to inter-dependence. In this approach one would attempt all-age worship. As I presented earlier, this approach may also substantiate that children are either equal or equivalent to adults in the church worship. According to the 2002 Ecumenical Considerations, guideline 22, dialogue is not about eliminating differences. It is rather about building confidence and understanding one another in our differences.⁴² Unless children are considered as fellow equal partners in the spiritual journey, cooperating with adults, we cannot be the “holy catholic church” which we recite in the Apostles’ Creed. This approach also allows Christians to be each other’s “brother’s keeper” because they are near to each other and in constant cooperation. The basic principle in this approach is that we listen and we are listened to; we respect and we are respected. Respecting a child in this sense does not simply mean honouring him/her. It rather means listening to him/her and valuing his/her opinions without the preconceived bias against his/her age – a bias which most adults harbour. This approach may seem to be all percent effective. But it is not. There is a danger of attending to individual matters within the groups in “partnership” and eventually forget the worship which is the core of the very partnership. I also see another danger of one group either being slowed or strained by the other. Since it is an obvious fact that children and adults tend to go at different pace, this approach needs consistent patience and the will to wait for one another. By all standards, this approach is the most appropriate to the church’s mission if it is implemented in good faith for it caters for the spiritual cooperation of all believers.

⁴² http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/12462_world_council_of_churches_ecumenical_co... 08/04/2009

This guideline stresses that the dialogue is informed by the context and this context caters for all our differences; cultural, racial, gender, ethnical and generation differences. It further maintains that we should not run away from our differences, but we should build trust and confidence in our differences.

4.10 CHILD-ADULT COMMUNICATION: A REFLECTION ON DIALOGUE

In the previous discussion, we have stressed that one of the approaches to adult-child relationship in worship is to work cooperatively with children. This cooperation and togetherness with children leads us to another essential factor – dialogue. When we mention dialogue, be it conducted in Christian or secular circles, we ascertain as a matter of fact that there are two or more parties involved. It is presumed that for a meaningful dialogue to take place, the parties involved must be on an equal or equivalent footing – or at least they should see themselves to be so. In reference to children and adults, it may not be easy to regard this relationship as being an equal footing. Indeed, if we consider the physical factors we shall discover that a child and a grown up adult may never be equal in that sense. I wish to stress that in a dialogue, the age or appearance of individuals does not matter so much. What matters is that there is a reason for the dialogue or that there is a dispute or challenge to be settled. If the parties involved measure themselves on the principle of mutual need and benefit, the ultimate cause of the dialogue enforces equality.⁴³ Equality does not mean that differences do not matter. Differences are essential for they might be the real cause for the dialogue and they must be addressed throughout the process.

In areas like Ankole diocese, where children are culturally inferior, a dialogue between children and adults may be assumed difficult or impossible. But it is not. In the opening paragraph of Strandenaes' presentation on dialoguing with children on Liturgy and Worship, he asserts that a dialogue with children is not impossible.⁴⁴ It has either been ignored or untried. This argument seems relevant in Ankole diocese because children have not been given a hearing. Every Sunday, the adult Christians are only occupied with matters that concern adults and the physical growth of the church. Children are rarely mentioned, and if they are, it comes as a by-the-way among

⁴³ http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/12462_world_council_of_churches_ecumenical_co... 09/04/2009

The world council of churches guidelines for dialogue 2002 emphasise on mutual empowerment. Guideline 18 discourages mere negotiations over the conflicting interests but rather encourages the parties involved to be empowered in mutual respect for a constructive action for the good of all.

⁴⁴ The Swedish Missiological Themes 2004. Page 489. Strandenaes maintains that through experience he came to learn that dialoguing with children is possible but that the church and the Christian community have not given dialogue much of a chance. He thus gives guidelines, content and form of such a dialogue.

other matters. Developing an atmosphere for adult-child encounters may not be easy but it is unfair to assume its difficulty without trying it. In order to dialogue with children on worship, we need to consider the content, form and celebration of the worship and liturgy. In a situation where children come to church only to be sent out, and in a situation where if they are allowed in they are supposed to only act as onlookers to celebrations like the holy Eucharist, we cannot assume that children are not missing something. If we imagine that they are missing something, we should go ahead to explore their expectations, longings and feelings and then see what the impact of these are. This will be a dialogue in its initial stages.

Because of limited age, and physical development and weakness, children may not be initially able to put forward their feelings towards the church worship unless they are asked for it. For a dialogue, there must be an initiator, and in this case, adults are in a better position to take this role. This does not mean that adults become superior. According to the baptismal ritual, all who are baptised have received the Holy Spirit. Since the children in question are baptized, it goes without saying that Christians are in dialogue with Christians irrespective of sex and age differences. For areas like Ankole diocese, the basic principle for a dialogue is awareness, empathy and willingness to enter into dialogue. As Christians, we should refrain from observing our church only with naked cultural eyes. Children may be subservient to adults culturally but not so in the church and its worship. Committed Christians will compromise culture for their faith but not the other way round. This is the attitude I am proposing. Because adults must often lead in various church affairs, dialoguing with children may not mean agreeing a fifty-fifty percent ratio. It rather means that the issues that are raised over time in our relations with children in worship should be addressed in consideration of children's own views and needs. Whether adults receive more than the children in the end, this does not matter as long as children's due rights are addressed. As adults, if we feel that we have given all that the children need, the dialogue may be assumed as successful. If we feel that we have deliberately withheld anything that we should have given out, we are guilty of hypocrisy in our dialoguing with children.

The dialogue that I am proposing is not merely enflamed in my own words and opinion. It is also

biblically and theologically rooted. As I presented early in the chapter, children are identified by Jesus as favorites in the Kingdom. Jesus warns against placing road-blocks against children on their way to him. He even stresses clearly that “the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (cf. Mark 10, 13-16; Matt 19, 13-15; Luke 18, 15-17). Hence, it is a blessing to be in constant communication with children. Happy are the adult Christians who strive to enter into a dialogue with these “Christians favoured by God”. Jesus gives the child more theological importance than he does to adults. He maintains that by receiving a little child in Jesus’ name, it is Jesus himself one receives, and God by whom Jesus was sent, in that order (cf. Mark 9, 33-37; Matt 18, 1-5; Luke 9, 46-48). I don’t intend to make children divine or to have Godly attributes, but I wish to emphasise on how Jesus deliberately gave the child a theological significance both as a model and object of service. In our ecumenical creeds, we do not stress our status or age. In the Apostolic Creed, each member of the congregation pronounces “I believe” and in the Nicene Creed, “We believe”. In both cases, reference is made to the entire congregation of believers without stating any differences. Since in these creeds we jointly confess belief in the holy Catholic Church, the Holy Spirit and in one baptism, both adults and children are spiritually united. Acknowledging that dialoguing with children is possible, and conceding that children and adults are equal on biblical and theological grounds, we can deduce that dialoguing with children in preparing and celebrating our church worship is one of the dire options that the church must consider. The church must therefore reconsider the implications of its theology for children and engage with them in dialogue as our fellow Christians.

4.11 ADULTS AS ROLE MODELS: THE NATURE OF WORSHIP

In most of the above discussions, I have mainly focused on how the adult Christians and the church congregation have treated baptised children in church worship. I shall now put our attention on the nature of adult worship itself. I may appear to be accusing adults of denying children full participation in worship; but do they themselves practice worship in its fullest sense? If not, can this be regarded as their initial step in failing to recognise the true meaning of joint and worship and the Christian community relations? Most often, only adult Christians have been involved in building the church infrastructure and catering for the individual needs in the Sunday services. This perhaps pushes us to an intense struggle to define what should be involved

in worship. Is everything that is done on Sunday in the worship room part of worship? A careful observation indicates that some events that take place at worship on Sunday cannot be considered as elements of worship. In a situation where praise, singing, prayers and confessions are limited in favour of other activities, it is hard to say that genuine worship has taken place.

In Ankole diocese for example, I observed that Sunday services are not necessarily meant only for worship. At one of my research visits in the diocese, I attended a Sunday service at All saints church *Kabuyanda* which happens to be my home church.⁴⁵ Just like many other churches in the diocese, on entering one is met by a list of the names of church members with the amount of money they are supposed to pay, of those who have paid, and of those who have failed. After a simple opening prayer, the lay leader spent much of the time reminding the congregants about the church projects and how urgently their payments were required. He went ahead to assign the leaders of church sectors to visit Christians in their homes and urge them to pay. Next on the agenda were contributions and fundraising for the church projects; long after, it was the time for offerings. The offerings in form of solid materials and agricultural produce were then sold typically in a manner similar to the story of Jesus versus the temple merchants (cf. Mark 11, 15-16) – only for a different purpose. While the church intentions are good, the method seems to be embarrassing to Christians with low income. I could see those who had failed to pay feel uneasy, sitting with their heads down. Throughout the session, I could witness that the day's worship did not lead people's hearts to their God.

The nature of adult worship in Ankole diocese may not directly relate to the adult-children relations in church worship but it may be a signal that worship altogether is in a crisis. Of course, in a situation where adults no longer mind about the core entities of spiritual worship as a spiritual event, it is ultimately hard for them to know what the little ones are missing. Church economics have overtaken spiritual worship in Ankole diocese. Individuals who contribute a lot in the church have taken the place of God – they are praised regularly in the Sunday service. This is why the church maintained the excuse of meagre resources as the cause of slow progress for

⁴⁵ This was on 20th July 2008. I could hear people grumbling from their seats accusing the Anglican church of being money minded and exploiting them. Some of them complained that the lay leader was humiliating them by listing them inside the church as debtors as if it was a loan given to them.

the Sunday school. For anyone tied in the bondage of economics, it is hard to understand that Faith and Will, not economic resources, are essential in serving God. This, I contend, is the key problem of the church in Ankole diocese. The early church was far more limited in resources when compared to our modern church but I don't think the modern church is better-off spiritually. The experience in Ankole diocese, if allowed to represent a wider picture of the modern church, reveals that baptised children have become victims of a failed worship pattern. Before we guide children and cooperate with them, we perhaps need to contemplate the purpose of worship and about the way we conduct worship. Otherwise how can adult Christians know what can go wrong or right with their neighbours if they themselves have gone astray (cf. Matt 7:3-5)?

4.12 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the status of children in church worship has been clearly discussed in relation to theological presuppositions, church dogmas, scriptures as well as the anthropological relations. We learn that the status of children in church worship has not been the same through ages, and it is possible that children in the early church shared in many aspects of church worship like participating in Holy Communion. We also learn that children could lead in crucial parts of the worship especially in reading the Holy Scriptures. It is also clear in the chapter that children are treated differently from adults in church worship and they also have separate worships which are different from the adult worship services. This difference according to some scholars has thus created the unnoticed two churches. The chapter also acknowledges that adults and children may not be equal on anthropological considerations but they are equivalent on theological and biblical standards. Being somehow unequal, adults have a God-given responsibility over children and they should use this responsibility in relating to children including initiating any meaningful dialogue.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 THE CHURCH THEOLOGY: PRACTICES AND BIBLICAL GROUNDING

From the previous chapters, one can say that the theology and practices of the church have sidelined children in many activities of Christian worship either in the interest of protecting their integrity or for the purpose of implementing the church canons and doctrines. On this ground, it becomes factual that baptised children have not been treated by the church on equal terms with adults. This unequal treatment is manifested in the denial of Holy Communion to children and to some extent in separate worship given to them. The main point I intend to raise is whether this treatment given to children has got any biblical grounding. Let us consider the case of Holy Communion. Is there any verse in the holy bible which anybody can firmly rely on to deny children holy communion? Also consider both the biblical and popular meaning of this sacrament in the Anglican Church. Does the theological understanding give us any reason for denying children any involvement? When reflecting on the scripture, we can see that Jesus commands the disciples to “always do this” in remembrance of him (cf. Luke. 22:17-19). If we take ‘disciples’ to be understood as the identity of the followers of Christ after the apostolic times as well, it is not stipulated anywhere that persons of a certain age shall be excluded.

Paul the apostle refers to the bread we take in Holy Communion as the “body of Christ” and he also often refers to the Christians in the church as “members of the one body”. If there is a relationship between the body of Christ in Holy Communion and the body of Christ of which we are members, every Christian should be allowed to share in this one body. Excluding children in this case means that the body of Christ is at a risk of being separated. According to Montgomery, the Holy Communion is part of being a Christian. He illustrates thus:

Moreover, we have to take into account the fact that the term, “the body (of Christ)” used in connection with the communion in 1 Cor. 10:16, 11:27, 29 is also used by St. Paul in several places of the church, in this Epistle, e.g., “members of the one body” 12:12), “we were baptised into one body” (12:13). Accordingly, “the body of Christ” is also a type of another body of Christ, figuratively represented by the bread in the

Communion, that is, the church.⁴⁶

The above argument puts it clear that the church seems to lack any biblical ground for denying baptised children holy communion. This perhaps means that the denial is a creation of individual churches and denominations through their various canons and doctrines. In Ankole diocese for example, this research study learnt that the church has not made use of any biblical reference for denying children Holy Communion. The only response I received from respondents, both the laity and the clergy, is that children do not understand the meaning of the sacrament. Our interpretations as Christians and church leaders may be vague if we do not refer to the Bible when we are interpreting events that derive their origin from the Bible itself. Indeed, the majority of the clergy members who responded to this research study conceded that the issue of Holy Communion and children needs a reinterpretation by the modern church theology.

At this point, I will say that baptised children have been denied their right of participation in Christian rituals and celebrations. In the Holy Eucharist service, some churches take a step to call children for a blessing but fall short of completing the whole process of including them in the full Eucharist meal. Also in Ankole diocese, children are rarely called for this blessing – I have never witnessed it. To me, this practice prompts an awareness that children should participate in the celebration. If the church lacks the biblical ground to deny children the Holy Communion and yet only sometimes calls them to participate in it merely through the blessing, it is equivalent to mocking them. I may then accuse the church of hypocrisy. For any reason, good or bad, denying baptised children Holy Communion has a loose biblical ground and therefore, they have been unjustly marginalised by the church.

5.2 PREJUDICE IN THE CHURCH

Reflecting on one of the key questions of the research study – whether baptised children have faith or not, I discovered that the society interprets children's behaviour with cultural prejudice and stereotyping. Children are presumed to be ignorant and by some individuals, as empty

⁴⁶ Hitchcock Montgomery 1928: *The Holy Communion In The New Testament*.
The Church Book Room, Dean Wace House, Wine Office Court,
E.C.4. London.

vessels.⁴⁷ My experience in the field however proved otherwise. Many adults were intelligent in society affairs but not in church affairs. In fact, most children of the school-going age expressed more knowledge of the church matters than adults who are simply church goers. As I tried to talk to children, some adults laughed at me and others thought perhaps I had a problem. They wondered how a normal person can expect to get anything sensible from children. The problem with the church is that some adults become church leaders with this cultural prejudice. It sometimes provoked me when I would hear the lay leader arrogantly commanding the church wardens to take children out as if they were a nuisance. What is usually forgotten is that the baptism children receive makes them equal to adults. Paul suggests that all of us are sons of God because all of us were baptised into Christ and have clothed ourselves with Christ (Gal.3:26-29).⁴⁸

The basic Christian ideal for the church should be to acknowledge and accept that children too have faith. This is because faith can be interpreted with many features and children possess some of these features. According to Johannes Borgenvik, Faith in form of an object depends on conviction – what I believe in (*fides quae*). This means that Faith can mean “believing”. This applies to our Christian Creeds (I believe in.....). Faith in form of a subject refers to the “act of believing” (*fides qua*). Faith in this form means trusting or having confidence in someone or something. As Christians, we show this faith by trusting and entirely depending on God, and children are able to trust and depend on. Considering the sources of Faith, one acknowledges that children also have access to it. Borgenvik gives two sources of faith. The first one is the human nature and ability. Man has the ability to acquire knowledge and conviction and to have trust and confidence in something. Secondly, there is the divine source or revelation. This presupposes that the source of divine knowledge is God’s revelation. Borgenvik maintains that “God reveals himself through his divine word. The word represents the divine means of communication. God is verbalising divine realities. The word of God is a living, oral word”.⁴⁹ God therefore reveals himself through the written word of the Holy Scriptures as well as through the Holy Spirit to

⁴⁷ In an interview with one teacher at “Nyakyera” secondary school in “Kyamate” archdeaconry on 24th July 2008, he described children with crude words. He asserted that children are ignorant, stupid and simply helpless dependants who contribute nothing to the society growth. Most of the fellow teachers had the same thinking.

⁴⁸ Paul in verse 28 asserts that there is no Jew, no Greek, no master or Slave but all of us have become one in Christ. If infant baptism had been practised at the time, perhaps he would have added; “no adult and child...”

whoever believes. The above arguments clearly indicate that faith is not only by our human efforts to understand and believe, but largely by God's will, providence and revelation. God's will and revelation is not reserved for only adults, but also accessible for children. This confirms that children indeed have faith.

This gives me the impression that both children and adults have weaknesses and strengths especially concerning faith. Much as adults in Ankole diocese maintain that children have no faith or have loose faith, I insist that no one is an expert in faith. The mistake we often make as Christians is to look at faith as solely a result of our own efforts, forgetting the divine role through providence and revelation. Faith develops and it can as well decline. The report from the general synod board of education of the Church of England elaborates clearly on developing faith:

One of the experiences all Christians identify is that their faith grows and changes. Nor is this true of Christian faith alone. There are times when faith feels strong and sometimes when its weakness is the most obvious quality; sometimes faith seems easy and at other times it can be difficult. The events and experiences of life have a vital influence on these different stages of faith, as do the people with whom we come into contact. We need to remind ourselves that the same sorts of things are happening to children. The process of growth in faith is common to children and adults.⁵⁰

5.3 EQUAL CHRISTIANS WITH UNEQUAL SERVICES.

Basing on the data which I collected from the research field, children are to be assumed as being equal to adults as Christian believers before God. While many of the lay Christians would maintain that children are not of the same status with adults in the church, the majority of the clergy members maintained that baptised children are full members of the Christian church. Since all the respondents and informants unanimously conceded that all humanity irrespective of age and gender is equal before God, denying baptised children their full membership of the church is to go against God's will. Paul in 1Corinthians affirms that we have all been baptised into Christ's body by one spirit and we were all given one spirit to drink (12:13). From 2 Cor.

⁴⁹Johannes Borgenvik 2002: *Basic Christian Faith*: Stavanger, Norway.

⁵⁰ General Synod Board of Education Church of England 1988, Page 38.

5:17 and Rom. 6:6, we discover that one becomes a new creature after baptism.⁵¹ In my opinion, baptised children are full members of the church sidelined by human cultures as well as the church doctrines. In Ankole diocese, children have been made to believe that not until they are confirmed by the bishop, they are not full Christians. This has somehow affected the young ones spiritually because they look at confirmation as the sure way of becoming a full Christian with no consideration of the spiritual requirements. Confirmation is standing a risk of becoming a mere ritual or rite of passage just like many rites of passage in African culture without sufficient basis in a biblically based theology on the meaning and significance of baptism.

If we accept that baptised children are full members of the Christian church, we must consider the worship services given to them. By all standards, the Sunday worship service which is usually attended by adult Christians is much better than the Sunday school given to the young ones as this does not include worship and sacraments. As I noted in the previous chapter (4,5), Sunday school in Ankole diocese involves some entities of formal education like reading, writing and drawing which may only indirectly develop their spiritual life. These seemingly unequal worship services remain a challenge to the church in Ankole diocese. This reflects on one of my objective questions – are children Christians of today, tomorrow or both? A critical analysis of the church relations with children in Ankole diocese shows that children are more understood as Christians of tomorrow than of today. Because of the inefficiency and limitations of Sunday school in many churches of the diocese, some parents find it convenient to leave children at home on Sunday – either looking after the cattle in the fields or doing other household chores. At my own parents' home, my little brothers were told to remain at home on Sunday and when I asked to know why, I was informed that going to church would be wastage of time since nobody would attend to them.

While the church is doing little to improve the Sunday school or try joint worships, parents are even making the situation worse by substituting worship with household chores. In such a situation, I want to assert that both the church and parents have sidelined children in church

⁵¹ See Ben Witherington 1951: *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology Of Baptism*; Page 84. Baylor University Press, United States of America.

worship. Another area of concern is the Sunday school teachers provided to children. While the main church worship is led by trained personnel in church theology, the church in Ankole diocese does not mind about the theological knowledge of individuals selected to teach the young ones on Sunday. Hence some of the Sunday school places I visited behaved more like classroom lessons with no aspects of worship. The difference in both the worship services and the qualifications and attitudes of leaders confirm the unequal treatment given to equal Christians. If eventually it is discovered that the main adult worship is more fully catered for than the children worship, it would be right to conclude that baptised children have been marginalised.

5.4 NEED FOR REDEFINING CHILDREN

As I earlier stated in the first chapter (1.3.3), this work considers children as persons below thirteen years of age. According to the United Nation's convention on the rights of the child 1989, part 1, art.1: a child is any human being below 18 years of age.⁵² While the definition of children by the United Nations is vital for the protection of children's rights, it may create ambiguity in relation to the work among children in the church. Even the thirteen years of age, which is usually the confirmation age in Ankole diocese, seems to be too general in classifying children in the church. I earlier stated (4.2) that children can be presumed innocent because Jesus put a stamp on their innocence by recommending adults to emulate them. The question remains on which age Jesus considered for one to qualify as a child. It is more certain that the cultural definition of a child in Ankole society is vague compared to what Jesus meant. Still, the thirteen years of age considered by the church in Ankole diocese does not seem to reflect the concept of a child as presented by Jesus. Without considering the biblical teaching on children, the innocence which I strongly took note of becomes disputable if we put emphasis on thirteen years. Actually, children of thirteen years cannot be presumed innocent. Juridically they cannot be held responsible for their conduct, but their lives nevertheless reflect human sinfulness.

The above creates the need for redefining children in our church in order to give them appropriate services. It is unprofitable and unfair to a child of twelve years of age if he/she is to

be classified with the two-year old children. In Ankole diocese children of ten-twelve years are considered premature in the church but they are considered mature at home. They are made to look after cows and goats out in the fields as well as fetching water and firewood from long distances. Averagely, children of thirteen years in Uganda have completed their primary education and are in their first year of secondary education. Unless the church acknowledges that children at this age are already mature for a full church life, it is leaving them for another alternative – the secular world. Indeed, children have been abused and made pregnant at thirteen years by crafty and cunning adults. If persons who can do all domestic chores and attend a secondary school are to be assumed too young for a full adult worship, the church mission certainly needs to be reconsidered.

5.5 LACK OF WILL, NOT RESOURCES

From Ankole diocese, I discovered that the clergy members conceded that the Sunday school in the diocese has many loop holes. This is, according to them, caused by lack of enough resources and funds. While I agree with the church leaders that the Sunday school has lacked enough funding for a long time, I disagree with the idea that the church lacks enough funds. It is rather the lack of will to fund micro projects like the Sunday school which has affected the church mission in Ankole diocese. On occasions like Christmas festivals, local churches collect huge amounts of money but all this ends at the diocese head offices with negligible returns. It is so annoying to hear the lay leader lamenting that the church lacks money to buy mats for children to sit on just a week after collecting huge sums of money. The local churches always fundraise for various projects but they rarely remember Sunday school. In my view, the church in Ankole diocese does not lack resources to cater for the Sunday school but the fate of children in the church has not been considered as a priority. This, then, equally reflects that the status of children has not been given the adequate assessment which it deserves on the basis of a biblically based theology.

This lack of will in Ankole diocese is coupled with a decline in spirituality and the growth of materialism in the church. Formal education has been prioritised and every church has a church

⁵² <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> 22/12/2008

nursery school. Why then has it been easy to run a daily school system and not a Sunday school that operates once a week? The answer is that the formal education provided generates some income for the church. The same parents who are paying the fees for the children at the church school would be able to pay some little money for the Sunday school if they were contacted. While the diocese has the boys and girls brigade in its formal system, it does not offer much beyond its headquarters. In primary schools where it was much active some years back, it has diminished steadily over the years. While I shall refrain from categorically criticizing the use of the church economics in Ankole diocese, I do not concede that economy is an excuse for not facilitating the children worship. The only problem is the lack of will. There is a need for the church leaders to cater for the spiritual growth of the church while developing its economic growth. Since the church has deliberately prioritised other church projects while ignoring children, one is right in concluding that children have been somehow marginalised.

5.6 NEED TO REDEFINE WORSHIP

I earlier pointed out that worship in Ankole diocese has been hijacked by other activities that are more related to the church economy than spirituality. While I will not go into a detailed definition of worship, I need to stress that singing, praising, thanksgiving and scripture reading are key elements of worship. It also includes the sacraments and gifts of thanksgiving. The Archbishop's council 2002 partly defines worship as a joyous moment when Christians interact with God, thus; "worship is a door open in heaven. We lift up our hearts, listen in to what God is saying, join the angels and archangels and all the saints in heaven in praising God's eternal holiness. We are there and he is here".⁵³ Excluding children therefore is to keep them away from the presence of God. The council also encourages Christians to freely discuss about worship for the benefit of all. Christians need to always reflect on this question; "how does worship meet the needs of the elderly, children of different ages, the disabled, those who find reading difficult, those who need to be stretched intellectually?"⁵⁴

In Many local churches of Ankole diocese, Christians have misinterpreted some parts of worship

⁵³ The Archbishop's council 2002: *New Patterns for Worship*. Church House publishing, church House, Great Smith Street, London U.K. Page 27

such as giving the offerings. Actually, when you talk to many Christians, the giving of offerings is considered as being the most important – not that they are interested in giving God but because, according to them, it is the sure way of being in good relations with the church leaders.⁵⁵ The church in Ankole diocese must teach Christians what worship is before they actually enter into it. Is the person who gives much in the church the favourite in the kingdom of God? It would seem so to many of the Christians in Ankole diocese. This is perhaps why it is common to hear people boasting of giving much to the church. In my opinion, the will to give is more important than just giving (cf. Mk.12:41-44). In the modern church that participates more fully in the world economics than ever, we risk raising up children who cannot identify the place of money in the church. In my own view, the church should use the world economy and not vice versa.

With adult Christians who are lacking an understanding of worship as spiritual, we cannot expect to have children that are better. There should be a difference between “going to church” and “participating in worship”. According to Donald Bloesch, true worship in a biblical perspective is that which is done in spirit and in truth. He emphasises the unity of the word and the spirit, thus:

Biblical religion endorses not any kind of worship but only that which is done “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24 REB). True worship is directed not to the finite but to the infinite, who nevertheless meets us in the finite – in the spoken word and in the sacramental ritual. Worship that glorifies God is animated by his spirit and informed by the truth of his revelation in Jesus Christ. True worship is grounded in the paradoxical unity of logos and pneuma.⁵⁶

In Ankole diocese, a parent may be criticised by others for not sending children to church. But in practice, children who attend church spend all their time running around in the church compound until the service is over. The church leaders must therefore make it clear for Christians, both

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 26.

⁵⁵ On Sunday 6th July 2008 I went out from the church before the end of service and I met one Christian coming to church. When I joked that he was late, he asked me; “Are the offerings already given?” I answered “No”. He then said he was not late because that was the most important. I spent days reflecting on that statement.

⁵⁶ Bloesch Donald 2002: *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*. Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, United States of America. Page 118.

adult and young, that worship means more than just going to church, although attendance is an important first step. In my local church, *Kabuyanda* all saints church, there is always a kind of fundraising for completion of the church building. The building has occupied not only the mind of the lay leader, but of all Christians as well. As the church struggles to construct a modern church building, it has failed to recognise that there is an urgent need for spiritual reconstruction and renovation in the same church. Israel was always condemned by God and sent to exile despite the presence of its great temple (2 Kings 25: 8-21). This should serve as an example for us to uplift our spiritual worship, where worship, according to Jesus, is regarded as “worship in spirit and truth” (Jn.4:23).

In all the above explanation, I wish to say that as adult Christians, we must remove barriers on our way that may stop us from helping the young ones. The spiritual redefinition of worship for which I am advocating is only complete if worship can be done with children in consideration. Our spiritual relevancy as a church is only realised if we fellowship with baptised children as fellow Christians. From the general synod board of education, Church of England, we learn that the frequently heard, and painful, criticism of the church as ‘out-of-touch’, suggests among other things, a lack of the ‘Christian experience’ element in the nurture we offer. Our children must remain in touch with the daily worship experiences in our church. The general synod board thus notes:

Do our children get real experience of what being a Christian is all about? Christianity is a way of life, it is about the everyday, but everyday experiences and the issues and problems of life seldom figure in our worship or in our children’s groups. It is noticeable when our church families meet together how few adult Christians engage with the young members to share experiences, views, ideas or stories. It may also be noted how few of our ‘groups’ – house groups, study groups or prayer groups – have the courage to include the children, and how few of the published Lent courses, for example, acknowledge the possible presence of children.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The general synod board of education; Church of England 1988, page 47.

5.7 VICTIMS OF CHURCH DOCTRINES

In order for any church to function, it must have specific doctrines and canons that direct its spiritual life and the methods of work. While these doctrines are essential for the existence of the church, some of them have conflicted with the theology of the church universal especially in consideration with the scriptures. The extent to which children should be allowed to the liturgical worship of our church has now become one of the issues which seem to attract the attention of church leaders and theologians. In Ankole diocese, just like the entire Anglican church of Uganda, children are not allowed Holy Communion before confirmation. While it may somehow be justified from a human developmental perspective, I maintain that there is a limited justification for it if we argue on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. 1 cor. 11:27-29 may be used to prevent children from participating in Holy Communion because they may not be able to examine their spiritual life before taking part in the celebration. In Ankole diocese however, this carries little meaning since adults normally participate in Holy Communion just because they were confirmed often without self examination. Without judging them, I am sure many of them are eating and drinking their own judgment according to Paul's teaching.

An encounter with the Anglican order of Holy Eucharist seems to make this unworthiness to take the Holy Communion invalid. The Elizabethan book of common prayer of 1559 (based on the 1552 book), which has undergone some changes and revisions, remains a key tool for a dominant Anglican sense of the Eucharist. Among the prayers drawn from this prayer book is the prayer that seeks to ask for God's mercy over us sinners, the young and the old alike. In this prayer, we acknowledge that we are not worthy and we pray to be purified by the body and blood of Christ. Since this prayer is for all the Christians, it is unreasonable to exclude children from it and the celebration of the Eucharist. And if children are excluded from this purification which is much desired by all Christians, it is no doubt that they are marginalised. This prayer which precedes the Holy Communion thus reads:

We do not presume to come to this thy table (O merciful Lord) trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We be not worthy so much as to gather the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore (gracious Lord) so to eat the flesh of thy dear son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made

clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.⁵⁸

In a church that is bent towards culture, controversial issues are always part of its life. In Ankole diocese for example, men living in a polygamous marriage have been allowed to wed with one of the wives while maintaining all of them in full marital and conjugal affairs. Such people are allowed Holy Communion. Are these people worth more than the baptised children? If this is not hypocrisy in the church, it is at least playing double standards. If the church can tolerate polygamy which is out rightly opposed to the New Testament teaching, why can't it also tolerate children's full participation in worship rituals, something which is not in direct conflict with the Scriptures? The church doctrines and interpretation in Ankole diocese may not be irrelevant but, in my own opinion, they seem to be vague. Just after confirmation at thirteen or twelve years – because some of them deceive on their age, children are allowed to act as God-parents for those seeking for baptism. Is confirmation enough for one to be a God-parent? These are children that have graduated from the troubled Sunday school I have repeatedly mentioned. Are these children ready to give the necessary spiritual guidance to the new Christians for whom they are God-parents? This may imply that confirmation as a sacrament in Ankole diocese is only a ritual for one to be allowed an opportunity with little spiritual implications, a formal ritual rather than one that has a profound spiritual meaning.

The baptism of children in Ankole diocese is another issue that seems to be victimising them. My argument here is not against baptising children but against the *manner* in which it is carried out. In my local church for example, the parents of the child must go and work at the church or else pay some specified amount of money if the child is to be baptised. This is not done by mere persuasion but in the style of an enforced law. After baptism, the parent must pay for the baptism card lest it remains under the custody of the church leader. To many parents, this is simply inconvenient. In this manner, children are thus victimised before becoming Christians and also after. The guide is not theology but economy and church legislation or practice. Though this is a small amount, the manner in which it is demanded may be stressful and becoming a Christian becomes a financial struggle. Some children have been disallowed on the baptism day because the parents refused or failed to pay. Should people buy their way to Jesus? If He says that we

⁵⁸ Cummings Owen 2007: *Canterbury Cousins: The Eucharist In Contemporary Anglican Theology*, page 9. Paulist Press 997 Macarthur Boulevard Mahwah, New Jersey, United States of America.

should let the children come to him, and the church leader blocks the way to him simply for economic reasons, isn't that church leader disobeying a divine command? The treatment the church gives to children when they are Christians is therefore related to the readiness and way with which the church received them. Ankole Diocese exemplifies this.

The church in Ankole diocese must also be flexible in order for its doctrines and dogmas to relate to the present, historical and cultural situations. Apart from the treatment of children in our church worship, I suggest that there should be a general sympathy and appreciation for children in the church as such. It is common in Ankole diocese for the church not to bless the burial of an infant that died before baptism. While conducting such a blessing may be in conflict with the procedures of the church, not doing so may create a negative impression on the church, especially in the modern world of critical theology, where infant baptism itself is an issue under debate. One of the reasons given by the Anglican Christians who have joined the Pentecostal churches is that the church of Uganda is so conservative and traditional. With the Pentecostals who baptise only adults and freely bless the infants, both dead and alive, the church in Ankole diocese must revise not only the attitude to and practice of worship but also other issues like baptism, the cost and the manner in which baptism is carried out. In order to treat children appropriately in worship, the external family and cultural issues must be harmonized with the local church setting.

5.8 THE CHURCH'S POSITION ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The culture of Ankole society allows parents to administer corporal punishment on their children as a way of correcting their behavior. These corporal punishments are sometimes so excessive that they inflict bodily injuries on the children. With this cultural suppositions coupled with lack of awareness on universal human rights, the result is that the rights of the weak, and especially of children, are abused. The church which in such circumstances is supposed to be the voice of the abused has thereby displayed observable weaknesses. While the church uses the Scripture to support parents on using the rod to correct their children's behaviour, it is well aware that parents have used this correction method to abuse the rights of children. The church has succeeded in fighting against gross human rights abuses like enslavement, forced labour, arbitrary arrests, but

it has failed to fight the abuse of violence in the families which is the first institution where the child is nurtured.

This may imply that the major weakness of the church in Ankole diocese has been the failure to fight injustice and abuse right from where it starts. Similarly in the church, I would call the failure by the church to give the children what seems to be theirs theologically an abuse of their rights. This abuse may have been institutionalised consciously by the church or the church may be harbouring it without an awareness of it. Children have a right to fellowship; they have a right to share in church singing and praise and to the sacraments. They should also be allowed to listen to the word of God being read directly to them from the pulpit. Since as adults we have preserved these events as our own disregarding children, well aware that they are not getting similar services, we must accept that the baptised children's Christian rights have been abused.

Unlike in some churches where children are somehow involved even before the service starts⁵⁹, children in many rural churches of Ankole diocese are not even part of the worship programme of the church. Every time we meet in the Christian worship, we renew our commitment and faith to our lord Jesus. If through baptism children become Christians, denying them the chance to renew their faith is to despise the baptism they received. During baptism, it is pronounced that the children have been equipped through the sign of the cross to fight the devil to the end of their lives. While the God- parents may assist in upbringing the child in a Christian faith, they may or may not become agents of the Holy Spirit for these children. The first step to appreciate the Christian rights of baptised children in our church is to accept that just like adults, they are Christians by being united to the body of Christ, and not through any human mediation. In my own opinion, the church may succeed in fighting for the children's rights on the socio-economic scene, but as long as there is no effort made to look into the possible limitations imposed on children within the church, the church will have achieved little. This is so, because while other social organisations can fight for children's rights socially, the church has the sole responsibility of reforming itself according to a biblically based theology.

⁵⁹ In the Roman Catholic Church in Ankole region, children are allowed to help in lighting some candles at the start of the service. In Stavanger, the Stavanger International Church allows children to light candles, and a song relating to them is often sung before they are led out. Having no culture of lighting candles and any other event to beautify the worship, children in Ankole diocese rarely get reasons which attract their involvement.

5.9 THE CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

From the earliest times of the Christian church, several controversial issues emerged but many of these were put to rest. Right from the early years after the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, we see Paul and Peter conflicting on eating with Gentiles (cf. Gal.2:11-16). In these circumstances, we see Paul opening a new gospel to Peter, a gospel that breaks the barriers of cultural bondage. Throughout all the Pauline work in the New Testament, we find many controversial yet crucial issues that Paul had to address if the church was to succeed, especially in the gentile world. One of the issues that would sound controversial to many Jews is justification by faith, not by law (Gal.3:21-25). In reality, Paul seemed to sacrifice his culture as a Jew more than any other apostle would have done at the time. This is perhaps why he did an amazing work in establishing the churches in the Greco-Roman gentile world. In my opinion, Paul sets an example of how the church may need to break the ties of rigidity and conservatism if the situation warrants so.

I am not saying that Paul sacrificed the gospel. In all his flexibility, he maintained the core of the gospel – the grace and salvation given freely through Jesus Christ. Indeed, Paul was blessed in his work and this is seen through the wonders and miracles which the Holy Spirit allowed him to use in proclaiming the power and glory of the risen Christ (cf. Acts.28:1-9). In the early centuries of the church, major doctrinal and dogmatic issues also arose. The most notable of them are; the nature of Christ – divine or human? and the issue of trinity – one or three Gods? In response to the above issues, we see that the council of Nicea addressed the nature of Christ, and that the council of Constantinople addressed the nature of Trinity. In most cases, controversies in these issues were raised by contemporary church leaders or theologians.⁶⁰

The major problem of Ankole diocese, just like the rest of the Anglican church of Uganda, has been failure to adapt to necessary changes or to learn from the other denominational churches where necessary. In all the parishes I visited in my research, the clergy leaders acknowledged

⁶⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea

Arius a popular presbyter contested the divinity of Christ and insisted that he is just part of God's creation.

that there are urgent changes needed in the church with regard to reconsidering the state of baptised children as *Christians*. None of them, however, showed interest in opposing the church's current position on baptised children in *church worship*. All they answered was that this was the doctrinal and dogmatic establishment of the Anglican Church and as church leaders, they had to regard it as the right procedure. In a situation where people accept that something may be wrong or disputable but ignore any attempts to find any solution, it is right to say that there is no vision. What makes the church in the modern times so special when compared to the early church when it faces such challenges?

In recent times, we have seen feminist theology and liberation theology formed in response to specific situations or otherwise in protest to what is seen as unfair treatment. If children had the capacity to respond, we would perhaps see a children's theology based on children's own authorship. In the modern theological circles, one can hardly find any theologian who has no question over the treatment of baptised children in our Christian church worship. While some conferences have been convened and some literature published about the fate of children in the church worship, no universal declaration has been made concerning children and church worship. Denominational churches treat children slightly differently but hardly any gives them their full Christian involvement. If we must admit that children are full Christians, then we can say that all Christian denominations marginalise baptised children in varying degrees.

To sum up this point, I wish to state that the treatment of children in church worship is an issue which the church must address urgently in order to remain one body that equally shares the fruits of the Holy Spirit and God's Grace. With the popular culture, gross moral questions as well as science and technology, the modern church faces even greater challenges than Paul or the church shortly after him faced. If the early church found it necessary to address emerging issues in the church, there is no reason why the church cannot do the same today. If Paul found it necessary to sacrifice some of his cherished cultural values for the sake of the cohesion of the church, there is no reason why for example, the Ankole diocese cannot break through its cultural and dogmatic conservatism for the sake of theological sincerity. Paul could have sought some scriptural

Some church leaders were in support of Arius. These included bishops Theogris of Nicaea and Maris of Chalcedon.

literature to deny Gentiles equal rights with Jews but he never did. Similarly, one can look for biblical texts to deny children equal rights with adults but nobody should do so. The ultimate fact is that the church is not static but changes some features over time and it will perhaps continue to change. And, when church attitudes and practices are in conflict with theological presuppositions in the Bible, it is not the Bible which is to be accommodated to these attitudes and practices, but the attitudes and practices which need to be reformed in accordance with biblical standards. Addressing the contemporary crises in the church, including the treatment of the baptised children in church worship is the best way to face this reality.

5.10 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

This chapter clarifies that the treatment of children in church worship may not necessarily be an adult-children problem. It may be a wider problem affecting the general church worship and spirituality. We therefore learn that redefining worship is much necessary because children may be victims of failed worship patterns in the church. We also acknowledge that there is a need for redefining children. What we call children today may be mature Christians who have not been recognised and therefore not served appropriately. The chapter further informs us that the church has passed through changing times and each time had its own challenges which were addressed appropriately. The treatment of children in our church worship may be the challenge of the church today and it must be addressed. The church doctrines and dogmas may also be in conflict with the scriptures on the nature and status of children. This therefore creates a need for a wider definition of children's status in church, a definition that goes beyond the confines of the individual church dogma and doctrines. This perhaps suggests that children may be treated the way they are in worship depending on the church theology but not necessarily with a firm biblical ground. A constant reconciliation between the church theology and Holy Scriptures is therefore necessary, especially with the former making the latter a point of reference.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION(S)

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The content of this thesis from the first chapter shows that children in Ankole diocese have been allowed the chance to become Christians but limited on some aspects in church worship. While there are positive motives by the church to provide due and relevant teachings to children, considering their tender age, such limitations tend to conflict with some aspects of the Anglican church theology as well as the theology in the church universal. Bearing in mind that the church has good intentions for the children despite some conflicts with its theology, I wish to make recommendations on six areas concerning the church worship in the face of cultural, doctrinal and dogmatic conflicts with the general church theology. These are based on my experience from the field work as well as on my own subsequent analysis of the material.

6.1.1 CHRISTIANS OF ONE NATURE

In its daily worship life, the church, whether in Ankole diocese or elsewhere, Anglican or ecumenical, must understand that it is united in the body of Christ and that it is one. Christians are also one in Christ. We can never have different natures of Christians; half versus complete, premature versus mature Christians. If the church makes any effort to separate the congregants along these lines, we are at the risk of being reduced to *churches* and not being the one church. It is true that some Christians may be weaker spiritually and others junior in terms of the duration of the church membership or age differences. These differences, however, do not provide us with the right to judge or victimise our fellow Christians. We have an obligation to help our fellow Christians who are having problems with their Christian faith and the best way to do it is to pray jointly with them, to worship with them. As the church leaders in Ankole diocese conceded, denying children full equality in church worship has been largely depending on anthropological considerations and not on theological and spiritual dimensions. But we need to remember that the classifying of Christians are subject to the standards laid down by Jesus himself (Matt.19:28-30, Mk.10:29-31).

6.1.2 RECEPTION VERSUS READINESS

The church in Ankole diocese accepts Christian converts from other faiths as well as Christians from other denominations. Child/infant baptism is also practiced and the little ones are brought to Christ at a very tender age. This is in line with Jesus' teaching that nobody should block children from getting access to him. Bringing little ones to him is therefore the best way to respond to that call. While the church receives children into the Christian faith, the question remains on how ready the church is to accommodate them into its daily worship life. Some elements of church worship such as Holy Communion, which is denied to children, seems to be a contradiction of the fundamental church theology. From the general notes of the Holy Communion (Order One) of the Church of England, of which the church of Uganda derives its origin, we learn that the Holy Communion should be allowed to all people gathered for worship. Using this order of worship to exclude children may therefore indicate that children are not regarded as worshippers, an act that would mark the apex of despise and neglect given to baptised children as Christians. The order thus notes:

Holy Communion is celebrated by the whole people of God gathered for worship. The ministry of the members of the congregation is expressed through their active participation together in the words and actions of the service, but also by some of them reading the scripture passages, leading the prayers of intercession, and, if authorised, assisting with distribution of communion.⁶¹

By denying children full benefits of Christian worship, the church simply presupposes that they were received before their right time for a full Christian life. This is the point that has been used by the rival denominations like Pentecostals to discredit infant baptism. How can the church open the gate way for children and at the same time block some ways without contradicting itself? I would rather recommend that baptised children be either embraced into a full Christian worship life or baptism be denied to them altogether. My experience has taught me that many of the children in Ankole diocese do not know their God-parents, something which may indicate that they have never met them. While I will not here enter into a discussion about infant baptism, it is a crucial issue since it marks the reception of children and tests the readiness of the church,

⁶¹ The Archbishop's council, 2000: *Holy Communion Order One: Common Worship* (Services and prayers of the church of England), General notes- iv. Church house publishing, church house, Great Smith street, London, United

including parents and God-parents to take the full consequences of having accepted them.

6.1.3 REDEFINING CHILDREN FROM A BIBLICAL POINT OF VIEW

While Jesus puts emphasis on children's role model position and instructs us to emulate them, few of us have obeyed the instruction. He also insists that "the kingdom of heaven is for such as these" (Lk.18:15-17). In Ankole diocese, children are not at all considered to be role models. Actually, an adult who behaves foolishly is considered to behave like a child. Being meek, obedient and humble as a child would be seen as a sign of weakness in Ankole culture, especially for a man.⁶² I recommend that beyond the frontiers of cultural and age superiority, we need to redefine the understanding of children just as Jesus did. Children are normally innocent and in cases where they have become contaminated by sin, our cultures and socio-economic environments have played a big role. As adults we are always responsible for what children become, not only for the positive but also for the negative effects. The church similarly should always seek the biblical interpretations in its daily work. Different denominations may possess different dogmatic approaches and interpretations which may help the growth of the denomination but may come into conflict with the mainstream fundamental theology. Seeking a biblical point of view of children will provide the church with checks and balances, and this is also necessary in Ankole diocese. Here church theology may have a critical role against traditional cultural values by re-evaluating Christian children to what they really are.

6.1.4 A SPIRITUAL CHURCH VERSUS A MATERIAL CHURCH

I noted that worship services in many of the churches in Ankole diocese have been dominated by other activities which develop the church economically but not spiritually. The church leaders have put much effort in acquiring property for the church as well as for themselves. The conflicts which emerge every time a new bishop is elected are key indicators of how materialism has

Kingdom.

⁶² Ankole culture presupposes that a man is strong mentally, emotionally and physically. He is not expected to break down in tears anyhow. He is expected to defend and protect his wife and children under any circumstances. In general being rough is part of manly features. Being shy, meek, humble and soft are features associated with women and children.

engulfed the entire church of Uganda.⁶³ Prayers and fellowships outside the Sunday services are not at all considered necessary to attend by Christians. In my local church; *Kabuyanda* All Saints church, there is a weekly fellowship every Wednesday. With around three hundred members, only less than 2% are interested to know what fellowship is about and less than 1% regularly attend. This is quite normal because prayer meetings and fellowships apart from Sunday services are rare occurrences in Ankole diocese. Children brought into Christianity in such an environment are likely to gain little spiritually. This situation coupled with the ineffective Sunday school leaves the baptised children in a spiritual vacuum. Developing a more spiritual worship in Ankole diocese will create an awareness of what our children are lacking, and the need to include them in the church worship and fellowship.

6.1.5 AN ALL-INCLUSIVE WORSHIP

A joint worship, hard as it may be to implement, is the best way to fellowship with the baptised children. The church can no longer work on the church leaders' untested assumption that children disrupt joint worships. All-age worship means that the worship should put all Christians into consideration. From the diocese of Worcester, we learn that all-age worship is not "an adult worship to which children are invited". It is neither "a service for children with adults present", nor is it "an opportunity for the children to perform". It is "an act of worship in which all participants have a role to play, which is relevant to all and in which each person can make a valued contribution to the whole experience".⁶⁴ If children disturb, it may be an indicator that the worship did not cater for their presence. We need to prepare worship services with consideration of the child's point of view. Carolyn Brown advises on this point:

Some texts seen from a child's point of view offer insights that enrich everyone's understanding of the text. When adults read about the healing of Naaman, they tend to focus on the seven baths in the muddy Jordan River as God's chosen means of healing. When children read the story they are delighted by God's choice of a little slave girl as the bearer of the critical piece of information that enables the cure. They

⁶³ <http://www.ulii.org/ug/cases/UGHC/2003/27.rtf.05/04/2009>

There was a conflict involving two rival clergy men over who would become the bishop of *Muhabura* diocese. It turned out to be a bloody conflict and both property and lives were lost until civil courts had to intervene. It started in 2001 and ended in 2007 when a new bishop was consecrated. In *Rwenzori* diocese, clashes were also reported and in 2007 Clashes almost erupted in Ankole diocese when two brothers became candidates for the new bishop. Both of them were later dropped and Dr. George Tibesigwa elected the new bishop.

⁶⁴ http://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/work_of_the_diocese/wcw_all_age_worship.php 22/4/2009

are pleased that her mistress and master take her information seriously and act on it. The story promises them that God takes children seriously and that children can make important contributions now.⁶⁵

The church must also learn to categorise children appropriately because children do not only vary in age but also in behaviour. Our children are growing up in the time where the press and the media influence their behaviour. Children who are always in front of the television sets watching, or on radio listening to secular presentations, imitating and reciting, should be assumed to be ready to sing and recite the Christian faith with the rest of the church worshippers. The parents spend little time with children at home and almost no time with them in worship. This is disadvantageous because the parents may end up losing touch with their children's change in behaviour and development of their faith. Children of all ages may not be accommodated in the joint service regularly but the church should strive to incorporate the children into the general church life at an early age and as often as possible, inclusive in worship.

6.1.6 A MISSION FOR ALL OF US

In ancient Ankole culture, just like in many African societies, a child would be brought back to order by any adult of the society. This general moral responsibility has somehow dwindled with time but is still significantly relevant and much active for close relatives. It would be positive for the church if the Christians in Ankole diocese employ this joint responsibility in Christian mission. Though my main theme is on church worship, a more touching worship for a child is best done at home. As parents, if we pray, sing, praise and confess together with our children in our homes, we would be making the work easier for the church also in its worship life. I have visited homes where children are requested to lead in prayers and have succeeded in making relevant and touching prayers. This does not remove the fact that the church worship tends to sideline children in church worship but it serves them right also if they have home experience. As partners in mission, the church leaders may need our advice as parents and adults of faith. The modern church right from the local levels is blessed with people of faith and some with theological training. The church worship may be operating the way it does because the church

⁶⁵ Carolyn C. Brown 1997: *You Can Preach To The Kids Too!*; Designing Sermons For Adults And Children, page.38. Abingdon press, Nashville, United States of America.

leader does not know what is lacking. As theologians and concerned Christians, we need to take the role of advising the church leaders on our concerns about children in our church worship. Though it is not for granted that our advice will always be considered wise or relevant, it seems to be the best way to start.

6.2 GENERAL CONCLUSION(S)

As it is clearly indicated in the main body of this work, this study about children and church worship was carried out in Ankole diocese. The data collected from the research field in the diocese has been a significant pillar in the development of this work. Because the topic under study is theological, a theological discourse with the scripture in considerations has also been analytically used. After watching and observing the treatment of children in church worship, I felt that something needed an explanation. Incidents like separate worships and exclusion from full participation in Holy Communion, as administered to children, have been justified on anthropological understanding. Feeling that there is need for a theological reflection on such issues, I set out to explore the church theology on children, the biblical view of children, and compare the two to ascertain the place and fate of children in the church. The influence of cultural and economic factors on our church mission, in relation to children, has also been addressed. The church sacraments like baptism and Holy Communion have also been discussed. Though it was not the main theme for the thesis, child/infant baptism became an issue that also needed an explanation. As I mentioned baptised children, some curious informants posed a question as to whether in the first place children/infants should be baptised. While I could not give a detailed answer for that, the study was about baptised children, fully considered as Christians.

I wish to acknowledge that the treatment of baptised children in church worship remains an issue for discussion, not only in Ankole diocese or the Anglican Church, but for the church universal as well. From the presentations in the main chapters, the general picture may appear to be that the church in Ankole diocese has abandoned or forgotten children in its planning. The reality is that the diocese has children in its strategic planning but that they have nonetheless been consistently left in a spiritual shadow sometimes without the church's intention. It is therefore

important that while the church sticks to its dogmas and doctrines in order not to lose its identity and foundation, it orients itself toward the biblical and to the modern theological perspectives and demands. The views of Christians in Ankole diocese partly acknowledge that the church worship has marginalised baptised children. Other Christians maintained that there was nothing wrong with the status quo in church worship. While many of these Christians used their personal intellect to answer, others thought something was right because the church teaches so, barely with no concern for the theological implications. This thesis has therefore tried to answer the question on whether children have been/are marginalised in church worship.

The interpretation and analysis of the research data in this thesis clearly confirms that children have been treated unequally with the adult Christians. The hypothesis of the thesis which suggests that children have been treated in a manner that selfishly benefits adult Christians is to a great extent confirmed by the analysis of this work. Considering the key questions in this thesis: whether children are considered as full Christians; whether they are considered to have a Christian faith; whether they are able to take on specific roles in the church including leadership; and whether they are models for adults to emulate in our church, one learns from this work that children are not considered to fully possess any of the above. Since from the interpretation and analysis the trend shows that children have been treated unequally to adults and sometimes seemingly unfairly, and since there is a clear theological uncertainty that needs more interpretation, it is not unfair to deduce that baptised children in Ankole diocese have been marginalised.

Children have been sidelined partly to be served with what the church thinks is worth for them. This clearly shows that the church is not against children, but its theology somehow conflicts with the biblical perception of children. From all the points discussed, there is a reason to say that in the current situation of the church worship in Ankole diocese, children are marginalised. This marginalisation is not only based on theological discourse, but also on the human relations in the church as well as on cultural traditions regarding the status of children. The manner, in which the adult Christians treat children in the church worship, with much despise, is an observable weakness in the church social relations. The issue which I want to make the core of

this thesis is the *readiness* of the church to receive children as Christians. The treatment the children receive once they are baptised may be enough to show the readiness with which the church receives them. Children in our church worship are an issue like other controversial issues that have emerged in the church history and there is hope it will be addressed satisfactorily. Since the clergy members in Ankole diocese have already acknowledged some theological defects in this issue, their continued theological reflection will represent an important step towards finding the solution for the betterment and harmony of the church worship where children may be incorporated and feel welcome.

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APPENDIX I: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Master of Theology Thesis Project 2008-2009

School of Mission and Theology, Misjonmark 9, 4024 Stavanger, Norway

Thesis Topic: “Baptised Children – The Marginalised Christians?

**Children and Worship in Ankole Diocese of the Church of Uganda
(Anglican).”**

Student: Bernard Mugabiirwe

Advisor: Thor Strandenaes

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE AIMED AT LAY CHRISTIANS

Dear respondent, I greet you in the name of our Lord. I am a master student from Uganda studying in the school of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway. As part of my master thesis project I am currently collecting data from informants in the Ankole diocese, with a purpose of learning more about church practices concerning children and worship. I hereby request you kindly to contribute to my work by responding to this questionnaire. I guarantee that your identity will not be disclosed, and that the information you give me in this questionnaire will be treated discreetly and anonymised in the thesis. Also, all electronic transcripts will be deleted by the end of the project period (June 15, 2009). I will ask you for your oral consent to participating. At the same time you should know that you are free to withdraw your participation from this project at any time – now or at a later stage – if you so decide.

Instructions:

- (1) Please fill in your answers in the spaces provided.
- (2) If you need more space, please continue at the back of the page.

Information about yourself

1. Sex (male/female).....
2. Age.....
3. Church and Parish.....
4. Occupation and Responsibility in the church(if any particular).....
5. Date.....

Questions to answer

1. According to your understanding, who do you identify as a child?
.....
2. How many children do you think regularly attend Sunday worship in your church?
.....
3. Averagely, at what age are children in your church baptised?
.....
4. Do you regard baptised children as full members of the church?
Yes.....
No.....
 - If yes, why do you think so?
.....
.....
 - If no, why do you think so?
.....
5. Do you think there is anything adults may learn from baptised children in your church?
Yes.....
No.....
 - If yes, what do you think adults may learn from baptised children in your church?
.....
 - If no, why do you think that adults do not have anything to learn from baptised children in your church?

.....
6. Do you think that there are possible roles or tasks that children may take up in the worship life of your church?

.....
Yes.....

No.....

- If yes, can you please identify which possible roles or tasks you think children may take up in the worship life of your church?

-
- If no, can you please state the reasons why you think children have no roles or tasks to take up in the worship life of your church?
-

7. In which ways do you think adult members of the church may assist the children in your church on their spiritual journey?

.....

8. Do children in your church normally worship together with adults?

Yes.....

No.....

- If yes, what do you think are the reasons for this?

-
- If no, what do you think are the reasons for this?
-

9. As you understand it, do baptised children have a Christian faith?

Yes.....

No.....

- If yes, why do you think so? Please elaborate.

.....
•If yes, do you regard the nature of Christian children’s faith to be similar to or different from the Christian faith of adults? Please elaborate.

.....
•If no, why do you think that baptised children do not have a Christian faith? Please elaborate.

.....
•If no, what do you regard as genuine Christian faith? Please elaborate.
.....

10. Does your church offer special worship services for children?

Yes.....

No.....

•If yes, which special worship services does your church offer for children?
.....

11. Do you enjoy worshipping together with children?

Yes.....

No.....

•If yes, why do you enjoy worshipping together with children?
.....

•If no, why do you not enjoy worshipping together with children?
.....

12. Do you think that Jesus considers baptised children to be equal to adults?

Yes.....

No.....

•If yes, why do you think so?
.....

•If no, why do you think so?
.....

13. Do children in your church receive Holy Communion?

Yes.....

No.....

- If yes, at what age or time do children receive Holy Communion? Please elaborate.

.....

- If no, do you think they should be able to receive Holy Communion?

Yes.....

No.....

- If you think they should, why do you think so?

.....

- If you think they should not, why do you think so?

.....

14. How does your church involve children in the Christian fellowship?

.....

15. Does your church operate Sunday school for children?

Yes.....

No.....

- If yes, do children normally attend Sunday school in your church?

Yes.....

No.....

- If children normally attend Sunday school, how useful do you regard Sunday school to be to them and to your church? Please elaborate.

.....

- As Sunday school is currently operated in your church, do you think that it lacks anything?

Yes.....

No.....

- If you think it lacks something, what is it that it lacks? Please elaborate.

.....

•If you do not think it lacks anything, what are your reasons for thinking so? Please elaborate.

.....
16. Someone has said: “The unity of the church is endangered if children are not actively involved in the joint worship of all ages”. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please state your reasons for doing so.

.....
17. If Sunday worship service is practiced in such a way that children are expected to leave it or worship separately, how would you regard such a practice? Please elaborate.

.....
18. If you were to give recommendations to your church regarding how it ought to preserve its baptised children’s Christian rights, what would then be your recommendations? Please elaborate.

.....
19. If you were to give recommendations to your church regarding adult-children interaction in relation to worship and fellowship practices, what would then be your recommendations? Please elaborate.

.....
.....

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Master of Theology Thesis Project 2008-2009

School of Mission and Theology, Misjonmark 9, 4024 Stavanger, Norway

Thesis Topic: “Baptised Children – The Marginalised Christians?

**Children and Worship in Ankole Diocese of the Church of Uganda
(Anglican).”**

Student: Bernard Mugabiirwe

Advisor: Thor Strandenaes

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Dear respondent, I greet you in the name of our Lord. I am a master student from Uganda studying in the school of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway. As part of my master thesis project, I am currently collecting data from infants in the Ankole diocese, with a purpose of learning more about church practices concerning children and worship. I hereby request you kindly to contribute to my work by responding to my interview. I guarantee that your identity will not be disclosed, and that the information you give me will be treated discreetly and anonymised in the thesis. By the end of the project period (June 15, 2009) all tape recordings and electronic transcripts will be deleted. Further, you may withdraw your participation in this project at any time if you so decide. If you give me your consent to participating, I will proceed to ask you some questions which I request you kindly to respond to.

The Interviewee’s profile

- a) Sex
- b) Age
- c) Church and parish.

- d) Occupation and responsibility in the church.
- e) Date

Questions to be answered

1. According to your understanding, who do you identify as a child?
2. How many children do you think regularly attend Sunday worship in your church, and how do they normally participate?
3. Averagely, at what age are children in your church baptised?
4. Do you regard baptised children as full members of the church?
 - Yes/No
 - If yes, what are your reasons for thinking so?
 - If no, what are your reasons for thinking so?
5. Do you think there is anything adults may learn from baptised children in your church?
 - If yes, what may adults learn from children?
 - If no, why do you think adults do not have anything to learn from children?
6. Do you think that there are possible roles or tasks that children may take up in the worship life of your church?
 - If yes, can you please identify which possible roles or tasks you think children may take up in the worship life of your church?
 - If no, can you please give the reasons why you think children have no roles or tasks to take up in the worship life of your church?
7. As you understand it, do baptised children have a Christian life?
 - If yes, why do you think so?
 - Do you regard the nature of Christian children's faith to be similar to or different from the Christian faith of adults?
 - If no, why do you think that baptised children do not have a Christian faith?
8. Does your church offer special worship services for children?
 - If yes, which special worship services does your church offer for children?
9. Do you enjoy worshiping together with children?
 - If yes, why?

- If no, why?
10. Do you think that Jesus considers baptised children to be equal to adult Christians?
 - If yes, what are your reasons for thinking so?
 - If no, what are your reasons for thinking so?
 11. Do children in your church receive Holy Communion?
 - If yes, at what age or time do children receive Holy Communion?
 - If no, do you think they should be allowed to receive Holy Communion?
 12. How does your church involve children in the Christian fellowship?
 13. In which ways do you think adult members of the church may assist the children in your church on their spiritual journey?
 14. Does your church operate Sunday school for children?
 - If yes, how useful do you regard Sunday school to be to them and to your church? Please elaborate.
 - As Sunday school is operated in your church today, do you think that it has any weaknesses or lacks anything? Please elaborate.
 15. Someone has said; “The unity of the church is endangered if children are not actively involved in the joint worship of all ages” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why do you agree/disagree?
 16. If you were to give recommendations to your church regarding adult-children interaction in worship and fellowship practices, what would then be your recommendations?

APPENDIX III: MAP OF UGANDA

