



# **"Let the Little Children Come to Me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity**

*Cornelia B. Horn, John W. Martens*

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Although Jesus called on his first followers to welcome children in his name and to become like children, the lives of the first Christian children have remained in the shadows. This book explores the hidden lives of children at the origins of Christianity. It draws on insights gained from comparisons of children's experiences in ancient Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world. The authors also engage a vast body of early Christian literature, extending from the New Testament to sermons, letters, theological treatises, poetry, pedagogical manuals, and historiography in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and other languages current in the early Christian world.

The guiding question of the book focuses on how Christianity changed the lives of children in the ancient world. Some of the other questions examined by the authors include:

Did boys and girls both receive a formal education?

Were Christian children slaves?

How did they participate in manual labor?

What kinds of games did children play?

How did children become a part of the Christian church?

This book breaks new ground in the study of early Christianity by examining the challenges to Christian childhood in the first centuries of the Church. The authors look at violence perpetrated against children, and they consider the effects and opportunities arising from Christians' experiences of martyrdom, and from the increased Christian interest in various forms of asceticism, including celibacy. The book brings into the open the lives of early Christian children and throws much needed light on what has been a largely neglected area of study in early Christianity.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Cornelia B. Horn, assistant professor of Early Christianity at Saint Louis University, is the author of *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine*. John W. Martens is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota and Director of the M.A. in Theology

Program at Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity. He is the author of *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law*.

#### PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"With careful examination of the available evidence, the authors painstakingly sift through what can be known about children in early Christianity, and in doing so they offer new evaluations of old conclusions and significantly advance our understanding of this important topic for the social history of early Christianity."--Carolyn Osiek, Charles Fischer Professor of New Testament, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University

"This volume provides a wealth of detail about childhood, family structure, becoming an adult, and marriage in antiquity as well as renunciation of family ties in Christian asceticism. The authors pay careful attention to the impact of gender, class, and slave or free status on children's lives, and incorporate such unusual topics as toys, games, pets, and music. They argue that children from the beginning were welcome participants in all facets of Christian communal life. Clearly written and well-documented, this book is a valuable resource for students at all levels."--PHEME PERKINS, professor of theology, Boston College

"Horn and Martens survey a wealth of textual sources for the study of children and childhood in early Christianity. . . . The book is valuable as a comprehensive survey of early Christian textual sources on children and childhood; handy indexes of biblical, classical, and patristic passages add to its usefulness. . . . The chapters on family life and work and play would make useful course readings. . . . Recommended."--J. Schott, *Choice*

"Chapters of this work are set up topically and it contains an excellent bibliography, index of biblical references and ancient authors, and an index of subjects and modern authors. Thus, it ser

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