

Hope for a Humane and Habitable World for the Children

A Message from Fuller Theological Seminary

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 2024

A young man was holding a little child when I entered the elevator. After smiling at and speaking to the child, I greeted the man. He observed, “The child gets all the attention.” I responded good-naturedly, “We had our time. It’s the baby’s turn now.” The elevator door opened, and I exited.

Children bring joy for today and hope for tomorrow. When they enter our hearts and homes, they come with both unexpected disruptions and unanticipated delights. Welcoming these little strangers requires various rearrangements. However, many who have welcomed a child—by birth, foster care, adoption, or temporary housing—testify that they have discovered more love than they knew they could give. There are exceptions, but children are usually considered blessings.

Tragically, too many children are vulnerable to exploitation and violence. They are sometimes forced into child labor or sexual abuse. Some are forced to become “child soldiers” where they are threatened, manipulated, violated, and trained to kill. In other cases, they face the terror of living amid war: bombings, dislocation, rape, destruction, death, and more. Violence is traumatic for all people, but it is particularly the case for children both immediately and for years ahead.

In these weeks that follow Christmas, recall the account in Matthew 2:16-18 after the Magi traveled a great distance to worship Jesus:

*When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.” (NIV)*

The reports from the ongoing war in Gaza are heartbreaking. Sparked by the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, by the end of 2023 more than 1,300 Israelis and over 20,000 Palestinians had been reported killed. Perhaps three times the number of people killed on both sides may be injured, and the overwhelming majority of casualties are women and children. This horrendous news continues the long horror of dislocation, death, disease, and injury in this region of the world.

All people suffer from war. Women and children are particularly impacted as civilians who experience displacement, sexual violence, hunger, lack of health care, and more. While many debate the political, tactical, strategic, and economic issues that complicate and endanger life in Palestine, Israel and Ukraine (as well as many other places around the world), may we hear the “weeping and great mourning” because of the death and destruction of the children. May the pain and grief that come “because they are no more” call followers of Jesus, people of various faiths and no faith, those with political and military authority, economic leaders, social influencers, and citizens around the globe to commit to making this world humane and habitable for children—the most vulnerable of all. For this we must pray and work and hope. It is time for the children to get the attention.

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