**Christ blessing the Children – Cranach**

**This links to the story from Mark 10**

*Mark 10:13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ 16And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

*Unless specified all references refer to Mark*

* Jesus surrounded by women presenting their children to him for blessing
* Jesus is visibly carrying out this role – blessing one with right hand whilst kissing the forehead of the one he is holding (presumably belonging to woman praying on his right)
* On the outside of the scene are the disciples, Peter and Paul reflecting the biblical text.
* No landscape or other visual language for setting the scene but can establish it is 10:16
* Image not featured in panel painting before Cranach’s work
  + Reflects the closeness between Cranach and Luther in expressing the ideas of the Reformation.
* Luther emphasises the ‘divine authorisation’ of child baptism as seen in this passage.
  + Cranach, who worked very closely with Luther, would then have expressed this in a visual format.
  + Questions whether this is a didactic piece or a sermon/propaganda
* Debate arises as to why this became a strong view in Lutheran theology
* **Idea 1**: only an unspoiled childish belief in God, as revealed in Christ, can prepare the way for sinful mankind to achieve redemption.
  + Children represent the type of people who will be present in heaven – i.e. receiving the kingdom as a child means receiving it without the ambition to be a figure of authority but being content to *be last of all and servant of all*
    - Biblical idea (9:35) but a good description of a child?
  + The Joy of context to support this idea
    - **9:33-37**: Who is the greatest? Disciples argued about which of them was the greatest. Jesus rebukes them saying ‘whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all’
    - Jesus brings in a child to illustrate his point. ’Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me’
    - **10:21**: Rich man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. ‘Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.
    - Children are not concerned or kept back by these earthly commitments, they are able to focus on the message of accessing heaven
  + Possibility of Justification is simple. So simple that a child can understand it. I.e. follow the commandments and love Jesus. Simples.
* **Idea 2:** as opposed to the doctrine of adult baptism espoused by the Anabaptists
  + 1530s: Anabaptists – name derives from credobaptism (believer’s baptism)
    - This required candidates be able to make their own confessions of faith and so Anabaptists refused baptize to infants
    - Adhered to literal interpretation of text; sola scriptura. Specifically literal integration of Sermon on Mount and Believer’s baptism
    - Rejected conventional Christian practices such as wearing wedding rings, taking oaths, and participating in civil government.
    - Were considered heresy by all other major Christian denominations at the time of the reformation period.
    - Baptism was seen as necessary for salvation and thus wrong to delay baptism until later in life – hence promotion of infant baptism.
    - Anabaptists were heavily persecuted during the 16th century and into the 17th by both Roman Catholics and other Protestants.
  + Image used to emphasis that infant baptism is the correct tradition as it has biblical heritage.
* **So Idea 1 or Idea 2?**
  + Surely if this was a polemic against the Anabaptists would show that. In the image we only see the promotion of Jesus’ connection with children. We do not see a polemic against the Anabaptists
  + Refer back to the Passional Christi und Antichristi – Cranach knows how to establish a polemic and criticize an idea
  + So if not polemic what is it? Didactic re: justification. I.e. justification is easy if you are not distracted by earthly concerns. Adults want to be first and want to be in charge – this approach is not going to enable justification. Jesus teaches that believers should approach with child-like manner
    - I.e. being last; having an approach to the world re: simplicity. Children are not (should not be) tied to the world through cares of finance, authority and power.
* **Visually this image links to Christ and the adulteress**
  + Theological significance of this?
  + **A consideration of the characteristics of the justified believers**
    - Not bound to earthly concerns
    - Non-Judgemental
  + **Rejection of previous assumptions of the justified**
    - It will be the last who are first
    - Previous judgements of right/wrong were wrong – even the possibility of judging was wrong
  + **Expression of justification of faith**
    - Justification can start from the very outset of life
    - Justification is possible even if one has sinned
* **Does it work as didactic for us today?**
  + Image of figure of authority kissing children has become a cliché PR image today. However if viewed within the context of religion...