Learning from Christianity through Godly Play

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Theology and Ministry
by

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2021

Abstract

In this thesis I argue that Godly Play, a Montessori-inspired form of Christian Catechesis, is a theologically and pedagogically well-founded method that with appropriate care can be used with integrity to assist children to learn from Christianity in the context of English primary schools.

I examine the history and development of Godly Play exploring the theological shape of the method through the principal theological themes underlying the method: Imagination, Play, Salvation History and Narrative Theology. I identify some of the potential theological questions its adoption raises, particularly in relation to salvation history and treatment of eschatology. Further, I argue for the theological importance of childhood and examine what is meant by children's spirituality which Godly Play is often quoted as contributing towards.

Godly Play has sometimes been seen a middle-class phenomenon. The empirical field work of group interviews conducted with thirty-two children growing up in two low-income urban communities in Northern England demonstrated the ongoing value of the experience of Godly Play. I examine something of what it means to grow up in such contexts and how Godly Play has helped children growing up in such contexts. The children, who had experienced Godly Play in near ideal conditions, showed a high degree of recall, for some three to four years later, describing the enduring positive impact it had upon them. Many found a sense of freedom and self-expression through Godly Play that had helped many to express their own opinions and make their own decisions. For some, it had led them into a deeper devotional place. I argue for the educational and ethical appropriateness of Godly Play in the context of English state education and call on the Church of England to engage more seriously with child catechesis, commending Godly Play as an effective method for school and parish.

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List of Abbreviations used in this Thesis

AREIAC	The Association of RE advisers, inspectors and consultants supports teachers of RE.
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CofE	Church of England
CGS	Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
DfE	Department for Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GCD	General Directory of Catechesis (RC)
GP	Godly Play
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LOSA	Local super output area
NASACRE	National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education
NATRE	National Association of Teachers of RE
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (replaced by Ofqual 2010)
CEW	The [Roman] Catholic Church in England and Wales
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
CUF	Church Urban Fund
RE	Religious Education
RC	Roman Catholic Church
RI	Religious Instruction
RK	Religious Knowledge
RS	Religious Studies
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
SATS	Standard Attainment Tests
VA	Voluntary Aided School
VC	Voluntary Controlled School

A note on anonymity

Names of individuals have been anonymised and care has been taken to remove details that could identify individuals.

Declaration

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. This thesis is my own work.

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

To use a Montessori term, this has been a 'big work.' It is almost 20 years since I first came across Godly Play and drove our Youth Project Minibus down to Trumpington to see the Godly Play room that had been created in the Vicarage outhouse. It has been an adventure that has deeply shaped my theological outlook and ministry.

Grateful thanks are due to all those who have supported, encouraged and challenged me in this exploration.

- My supervisors Dr Joss Bryan for her astonishing enthusiasm and the Reverend Professor Jeff Astley for his patience, good humour and grammatical exactitude.
- To the Reverend Dr Jerome Berryman for his encouragement, good grace and correspondence over the years.
- Dr Rebecca Nye and the Reverend Peter Privett for their dedication wisdom and insight in nurturing Godly Play in the UK.
- Linda Kaiel and Màrta Gouóth-Gumberger, formation leaders in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, who helped me distil the theological shape of Godly Play.
- Rachel Miller for so enthusiastically proofreading my drafts.
- The children of Hull and Middlesbrough with whom we have shared Godly Play particularly those who have contributed to this research.
- My wife and partner in the gospel, Heather for her forbearance and putting up with years of taking too many books on holiday.

1. Introduction

Godly Play is a Montessori based method of Christian catechesis developed over a period of forty years by the Reverend Jerome Berryman in the USA. Godly Play is increasingly used in church and school contexts in the UK. The roots of the methodology lie in Berryman's training as a Montessori teacher in Rome in the 1970s and his encounter with Sofia Cavalletti, an Italian Hebrew scholar, who with her long term collaborator and Montessori teacher, Gianna Gobbi had developed a method of catechesis building on earlier work by Maria Montessori and E. M. Standing.

In the mid-1970s Berryman invited Cavalletti to the US to lecture on the method of Catechesis she had developed in her home in Rome. Out of these conferences arose what the American association dubbed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). In the 1980s, however, Berryman, by now an Episcopalian Priest, began to develop the materials in new ways, significantly reducing and simplifying the number of presentations and developing an Old Testament storyline. Distilling years of experience Berryman offered these materials with carefully crafted scripts as 'Godly Play'.

The central question which this thesis seeks to explore in the effectiveness of Godly Play as a way of learning about and from Christianity in communities where the Christian faith is largely unfamiliar. The empirical heart of the research described in chapter six of this thesis is a series of group interviews with children in years five and six who had experienced Godly Play earlier in their primary school career. Because of the complexity of the method, Berryman is insistent that only

those who are 'fluent' in Godly Play are equipped to research it properly.[1] Unlike many previous short-term studies, Godly Play was delivered in these communities in near ideal settings; fully equipped rooms by experienced practitioners. This study hopefully demonstrates something of what is possible when Godly Play is delivered well over a period of time. In all three settings children had the opportunity to experience a year, or more, of the full core curriculum of presentations.[2]

The last fifty years in England have been a period of major cultural change as Christianity has lost its hold on the religious imagination (see discussion in chapter seven, section seven). Although, for the Established Church of England, the formal ties of state religion to Crown and Parliament remain, attendance and cultural influence have rapidly faded. There has been some growth in new denominations but nothing to match the overall disaffiliation. In this new environment the role of the Christian educator has become more complex as alternative narratives dominate the life world of children. As Jerome Berryman states.

> If learning to be a Christian is like learning a language, then teaching children to speak Christian is more complicated than it used to be. Families don't go to church as much as they once did, and the culture does not naturally support Christian speech or Christian ways of thinking about the world. When children seldom hear the Christian language spoken fluently, they can't absorb its structure, function, and content. They learn only bits and pieces to carry with them into adolescence.[3]

Godly Play represents, I contend in this thesis, one of the most appropriate, sophisticated, and attainable methods available for primary age children to engage in a meaningful way with Christianity in parish and school settings. Since its introduction to the UK by Dr Rebecca Nye and the Reverend Peter Privett in the late

[1] Jerome Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), pp. 173-78.
[2] See Appendix 2
[3] Jerome Berryman, 'Godly Play and the Language of Christian Faith', in *The Christian Century* (Alexandria VA: Center for the Ministry of Teaching, 2019).

1990s, the movement has slowly expanded in parish and primary school settings but has failed to be comprehensively embraced by national church bodies, dioceses or Christian educational trusts. This is a great shame and symptomatic, I argue, of a general dumbing down and lack of investment in Christian education by the churches over the last fifty years.

In his introduction to *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research,* Martin Steinhäuser lists a number of reasons why Godly Play should be comprehensively researched. Firstly, Steinhäuser argues, as Godly Play is widely adopted by many different denominations and cultures it is important that its premises are theologically and pedagogically examined. In chapter two I explore the pedagogical roots of Godly Play as they derive from Maria Montessori before moving in chapter three to explore theologically why we should expend effort in the catechesis of children. In chapter four I look at what is often the main reason given for engaging in Godly Play, namely developing children's spirituality and what we might mean in this endeavour. In chapter five I examine the principal theological themes underlying Godly Play and what I believe to be its theological weaknesses. Montessori began her work in the slums of Rome. Appropriately this study was conducted in two urban communities in the north of England, Middlesbrough, where I served as Vicar from 2004-2020, and Hull, both with very high levels of child poverty. In chapter seven section two I briefly explore what it means to grow up in low-income communities before examining in chapter seven section three how Godly Play contributed to children's confidence and identity. Lastly in chapter seven sections four to six, the thesis addresses a common objection to Godly Play that it is too difficult and expensive to implement and that it is only appropriate for middle-class contexts and argues the contrary. With sufficient resources and training of catechists Godly Play

could contribute significantly to children's knowledge of Christianity, their spiritual wellbeing and autonomy.

Steinhäuser argues, in the European context where Religious Education is often a feature of state funded education, can Godly Play, which began as a church based form of catechesis, be legitimately employed? If so, how does Godly Play relate to the democratic, scientific and cultural values and standards expected by regulators, and how does it relate to the wider educational context?[4] In the discussion of the appropriateness of Godly Play in an English school setting in chapter seven section six I explore the historical background and the current legal and cultural background in regard to the place of Christianity in state funded schools. I then move on in chapter seven section seven to explore the potential significance of Godly Play in the context of British secularisation.

Lastly in chapter eight I discuss the implications of the thesis in the parish, school and national context for the Church of England's practice commending Godly Play as part of a renewed seriousness in engaging a younger generation.

[4] Martin Steinhäuser, 'Introduction 2: Research on Godly Play', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, ed. by M. Steinhäuser and R. Øystese (Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2018), pp. 28-45 (pp. 30-31).

2. The Roots and Development of Godly Play

Godly Play is the name given to the life's work of the Reverend Dr Jerome Berryman, an Episcopal priest and educator based in the US. Over the last twenty years Godly Play has expanded internationally and is now found in over 50 countries around the world.[5] Godly Play stands in a tradition of catechesis leading back to the work of the Italian educationalist Maria Montessori. It is a tradition, born not so much from empirical research as from prolonged reflective practice. Berryman regards himself as standing in the fourth generation of this tradition leading back through Sofia Cavalletti and E. M. Standing to Montessori herself.

2.1. Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Maria Montessori was a remarkable and complex figure, not the plaster saint that some of her more sycophantic followers made her out to be. She was a scientist and feminist, strong minded and often vain, a woman of deep, but sometimes unconventional, religious faith. In 1896 she was the first woman to graduate as a medical doctor from Rome University. A year later in 1897 Montessori joined a research programme at the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome working with children with additional needs. As part of the

[5] Andrew Sheldon, 'Where in the World Is Godly Play?', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 120-26.

study she visited Rome's asylums and was told how the children locked in bare cells would scramble for crumbs on the floor. Montessori became convinced that the sensory deprivation experienced by the children was contributing to their condition. She became fascinated by the work of two early nineteenth century French scientists, Jean-Marc Itard (1775-1838), who had made his name working with the 'wild boy of Aveyron', and his student Edouard Séguin (1812-1880). Itard had developed a method of education through the senses, which Séguin later adapted for mainstream education. Séguin, in response to the regimented learning of the period, emphasised respect and understanding for the individual child. He created practical apparatus to aid the child's sensory perceptions and motor skills, which Montessori later developed in new ways. During the 1897-1898 university terms she sought to expand her knowledge of education by attending courses in pedagogy, which included the writings of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel.

Montessori shared her insights at an international medical conference in Turin and became involved with the National League for the Education of Retarded Children, leading to her appointment as co-director, with Giuseppe Montesano, of a new institution called the Orthophrenic School for handicapped children. At the Orthophrenic School, Montessori experimented and refined the materials designed by Itard and Séguin, teaching and observing the children. She noticed how at an early age children seemed to effortlessly absorb knowledge from what surrounded them.[6] In contrast to the (still) typical teacher-led age and subject differentiated pedagogy of the day, Montessori moved to a radical child centred approach to learning. She saw that a carefully prepared environment with appropriate learning materials could enable children to learn much more effectively than in a speaking and listening teacher-led lesson. She advocated the view that it was more important

[6] Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 6th edn (Madras: Kalakshetra Publications, 1967), pp. 135-49.

for the teacher to pay attention to the child than the reverse. Her directresses were to 'sit on their hands' and allow the inner teacher to work, by demonstrating and gently guiding, then stepping back. Unconventionally, she used multi-age groupings and filled the day with up to three-hour blocks of unscheduled time, for the children to learn at their own pace. Behaviour was almost self-regulated needing minimal adult intervention when the environment was carefully prepared freedom and self-discipline developed. She found that children became so absorbed in the joy of learning that it rendered the need for extrinsic rewards redundant. She was also one of the first people to notice that there were certain ages or 'sensitive periods' when the child was primed to grasp new concepts. The key for Montessori was to trust the inner teacher.

> I seek to discover the man [*sic*] in the child, to see in him the true human spirit, the design of the creator: the scientific and religious truth. It is to this end that I apply my method of study, which respects human nature. I don't need to teach anything to children: it is they who, placed in a favourable environment, teach me, reveal to me spiritual secrets as long as their souls have not been deformed.[7]

It was at this time that Montessori fell in love with Giuseppe Montesano and she became pregnant. Mario was born on the 31st March 1898. The families agreed that they would not marry and the incident would be kept private. Mario was quietly secreted away to a wet-nurse in the hills. They vowed to each other that neither would marry another but in 1901 Montesano did marry another woman. The secret pregnancy and birth of her son led Montessori in a radical change of direction. In a state of distress, she spent several weeks in retreat in a convent near Bologna, a practice she would continue each summer for many years to reflect and pray. She would visit Mario as a child, but in public he was referred to as her nephew; it was

[7] Quoted in, Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography* (New York: Putman, 1976), p. 251.

only towards the end of her life that she publicly acknowledged him as her own son, bequeathing her legacy to him.

In 1901 Montessori left the Orthophrenic School and immersed herself in the study of educational philosophy and anthropology. In 1904 she took up a post as a lecturer at the Pedagogic School of the University of Rome, which she held until 1908. In 1907 she opened her first school in San Lorenzo, a deprived district of Rome, and set up her first *Casa dei Bambini* (children's house) which opened on the feast of the Epiphany 1907 using the materials she had developed in the Orthophrenic school. By autumn 1908 there were five *Casa dei Bambini,* four in Rome and one in Milan; her fame began to spread and in 1909 she gave her first training course, the notes of which were later published as *The Montessori Method*.[8] In 1910 she relinquished her medical certification and resigned from her academic post at Rome University to concentrate on her educational work. Montessori and her closest followers swore before the Blessed Sacrament to remain faithful to the Roman Catholic Church and to dedicate their lives to serving children.

The School in Barcelona

Just before Christmas 1912, Montessori's mother died aged 72. Maria was deeply affected, and the following year she brought her now 14-year-old son, Mario, to live with her and her father, near the Piazza del Popolo in Rome. The work continued to expand rapidly and she began to tour internationally, sharing her work and training others. Montessori saw in the liturgy and symbolism of the Mass *the* pedagogical method of the Roman Catholic Church, closely akin to her educational discoveries, that seemed to speak directly to the spirit of the child. She noted particularly how the sensitivity to language acquisition, including religious

[8] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Cambridge, MA: R. Bentley, 1965).

language, was at its strongest before the age of six. Montessori's work came to the attention of the Vincentian priest, Father Casulleras, who returning from missionary work in Guatemala had become convinced of the importance of grounding children in the liturgical life of the church. The Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat invited Montessori's colleague, Anna Maccheroni, to speak at a liturgical congress in 1915 in response to Pope Pius X's initiative to promote the active participation of the laity in the liturgy and admit children to Holy Communion in the encyclical of 1910 *Quam Singulari.*[9]

In 1916, on her return from a speaking tour of the USA, Montessori moved to Barcelona to set up a model school. She was joined by Mario and his young American bride, Helen Christie whom he had married in 1917 aged 19. They had four children but later divorced. The years in Barcelona allowed Montessori to deepen and expand her curriculum. The international spread of her work continued to grow and gain recognition including being awarded an honorary doctorate at Durham University in 1923 for her pioneering work in education.[10]

During this time Montessori developed sensorial materials about the liturgy and the history of the church to aid the children in their religious formation.[11] In stark contrast to the austere schools of the previous age the rooms were full of light, with child sized furniture. There was a deliberate connection to the natural environment with shaded walks, a meadow, a fish pool and animals.

The unity of life and liturgy was built into the school's routine. At the heart of the school was a chapel designed to meet the religious needs of the children. A young priest, Mossèn Angèles, was chosen as chaplain. Part of a large meadow was set aside for the growing of vines and wheat. The children cut the wheat and ground

[9] Pope Pius X, 'Quam Singulari', ed. by Vatican (Vatican City, 1910).
[10] 'Maria Montessori, M.D', *The British Medical Journal*, 1 (1952).
[11] Jerome Berryman, *The Search for a Theology of Childhood: Essays by Jerome W. Berryman from 1978-2009* (Ballarat, VIC: Modotti Press, 2013), pp. 23-24.

it to flour then pressed it to make the bread for communion.[12] It was during this time that she published her only two explicitly religious books, *The Child in the Church* and *The Mass Explained to Children*.[13] For Montessori, the auto-didact she had seen within the child was nothing less than the work of 'the Spirit and Wisdom of God operating in the child.' To follow the child was, for Montessori, to discover the natural laws of God. It was only in doing so that there was true respect for the child.[14]

> The secular approach sometimes pompously talks about respect for the child. But, in view of our egotism and our desire for domination and power, true respect for the child is only possible when we have respect for God in the child. The individual who does not believe in God – the beginning and end of all things – and who, therefore, comes to consider man himself as the supreme being, inexorably falls into a tyrannical attitude towards the child. Without question, he will begin, under the appearance of genuine concern, a real struggle with the child in order to force him into what *he himself* considers is the ideal.[15]

The rise of fascism led to the closure of all Montessori schools in Italy and Germany. Seen as a dangerous libertarian, in 1933 an effigy of Montessori was burned on a bonfire of her books in Berlin. The civil war in Spain forced the Montessori family to flee Barcelona on a British battleship arriving in England in the summer of 1936 for the Montessori conference in Oxford that year. Now homeless and stateless, the refugees travelled to the Netherlands to stay in the family home of Ada Pierson, the daughter of a Dutch banker who Mario, shortly after, took as his second wife.

In 1939 Maria and Mario set off to India, at the invitation of the Theosophical Society with which she had been acquainted since 1907, to give a three-month training course in Madras followed by a lecture tour. They were not to return for

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[12] Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday Morning Handbook* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 19.
[13] Maria Montessori and Mortimer Standing, *The Child in the Church* (London; Edinburgh: Sands & Co., 1965); Maria Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932).
[14] Montessori and Standing (1965), p. 14.
[15] Ibid.

nearly seven years. As Italian citizens, Mario was interned and Maria put under house arrest when Britain declared war on Italy. She petitioned the British authorities that Mario should be released, which he was two months later. With the support of the Theosophical Society they trained over a thousand Indians in the Montessori Method. It was during this period that she developed her 'Cosmic Education', the story of the interconnectedness of all things for children in the second plane of development, the 6-12 age group. Cosmic Education describes the role of education as comprehensive, holistic and purposeful; to encompass the development of the whole person within the context of the universe. It also introduces the possibility that humanity might have a role to contribute to future generations.[16]

As a free-thinking person, in a church that was in a reactionary and conservative mood, her relationship with the Roman Catholic Church was not always straightforward. She was criticised for teaching boys and girls together and there was suspicion that she was too 'liberal', whilst Jesuits accused her of naturalism and positivism. Working in the multi-faith context of India and as the Montessori method became a global phenomenon, Montessori gradually toned down much of the specifically Christian language that she had used in earlier works. In her final manual, *The Discovery of the Child*, Montessori notes that 'the experiment in religious education was eventually abolished in our Children's Houses because it was aimed exclusively at instruction in Catholicism.'[17] Her association with Theosophy towards the end of her life led many to regard her as a 'New Age'

[16] Montessori Academy, 'What Is Cosmic Education' (2017). <https://montessoriacademy.com.au/cosmic-education/> [accessed 23 June 2020]
[17] Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, rev. and enl. edn (Madras: Kalakshetra Publications, 1962), p. 326.

thinker.[18] However, the development of Christian materials continued quietly during this period.[19]

For these reasons, the Christian roots behind the Montessori method are largely hidden in modern Montessori practice. There remains, however, a profoundly Christian insight into the dignity and purpose of human life, not unlike that described by Karl Rahner.[20] In one of her final works, *The Absorbent Mind*, based on her lecture tour of India, she returned to the theme of the dignity of the child by reflecting on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, 'It [1 Cor. 13] is not a long enumeration of facts, a long description of features, but all these features remind us strangely of the qualities of children. They seem to describe the qualities of the absorbent mind.'[21] She continues, 'this energy we call love is the greatest cosmic energy. Even when we use such terms we still speak of it disparagingly, because it is more than an energy it is creation itself and is better expressed in the phrase, "God is Love."'[22] She concludes, 'If we consider the description given by St. Paul [1 Cor. 13] and then look at the child, we say, "Here it is that all these are found; so here is the great treasure itself."'[23]

In 1946 Montessori returned to be with her grandchildren in the Netherlands where she continued to work until her death in 1952. As a citizen of the world she insisted that she was buried where she fell in the Catholic cemetery in Noordwijk.[24]

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[18] Scottie May, 'Maria Montessori' (2018) <http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/catholic/maria_montessori/> [accessed 20 August 2018]
[19] Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, revised and expanded edn (Denver, CO: Morehouse, 2009), p. 24.
[20] Karl Rahner, 'Ideas for a Theology of Childhood', in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), pp. 33-50.
[21] Maria Montessori *The Absorbent Mind* trans. Claude A. Claremont, 6th edn (Madras: Kalakshetra Publications, 1967), p. 238.
[22] Ibid. p. 237.
[23] Ibid. p. 239.
[24] Association Montessori Internationale, 'Biography of Dr Maria Montessori' <https://montessori-ami.org/resource-library/facts/biography-dr-maria-montessori> [accessed 2 October 2018]; E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 21-35; Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance* (2013), pp. 27-47.

2.2. E. M. Standing (1887-1967): The Catholic Montessori League

The religious aspect of Montessori's experiments in Barcelona, though she continued to work on them a little in India, did not enter the mainstream of Montessori practice. Following Maria Montessori's death, Mario took over leadership of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI)[25] based in Amsterdam continuing to develop a network of national societies and training centres. As the organisation expanded, and the practice of the movement began to diverge, Mario worked hard to preserve his mother's legacy but realised that it had become a worldwide educational movement such that it could no longer be so closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, or any particular religion.[26]

However, Edward Mortimer Standing (1887 - 1967) together with the Dominican sisters in Dublin and a few others in the US, continued the work of developing Montessori inspired materials for religious formation.

Born in Madagascar, Standing was the son of Quaker missionaries. He was sent, aged six, to a Quaker boarding school in England before graduating from Leeds in Biology in 1909. In 1921 Standing met Montessori and attended one of her training courses in London. He became part of Montessori's inner circle and was baptised into the Catholic Church, probably in 1923. In 1929 he published a collection of her articles in English as *The Child in the Church,* including a greatly expanded second edition in 1965 together with a somewhat hagiographical biography.[27] Standing was one of the founding members of the Catholic Montessori Guild which aimed to perpetuate the religious aspect of her work. The Guild was short lived, however, and

[25] 'Association Montessori Internationale'.
[26] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance* (2013), p. 45.
[27] Montessori and Standing (1965).

by the mid-1960s seems to have vanished. In addition to the artefacts of the Mass and the church year developed by Montessori, materials developed by the Guild included the geographical materials about the Holy Land and model of Jerusalem still found in the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd,* but also materials on the lives of the saints and popes which have not.

2.3. Sofia Cavalletti (1917-2011) and Gianna Gobbi (1920-2002): *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* [28]

'One of the things that I most value in what Sofia has taught me is that, if you want to know the essence or true nature of a thing, you must look carefully at its origins.'

Rebekah Rojcewicz [29]

Sofia Cavalletti was a Hebrew scholar who had no training in educational studies and very little experience of children until she was in her thirties. Sofia was born in the Via degli Orsini, near the Piazza Navona in the heart of Rome, on 21 August 1917. This same apartment, where she lived and worked all her life, had been in her family for over 300 years.[30] As was customary for girls of her high social status, Cavalletti was largely educated at home. When she went to school aged ten, she discovered a flair for languages and rapidly mastered Latin and Greek. Cavalletti's teenage years were overshadowed by the war and the German occupation of Rome. In 1946 she passed the entrance exams for the University of Rome where she met Eugenio Zolli, the former chief Rabbi of Rome, who a few years before was baptised into the Catholic Church as the Germans were being driven out of the city.[31] Zolli lived quietly at the Gregorian University, also teaching Hebrew and biblical studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the University of Rome where Cavalletti met him. Zolli's influence on Cavalletti was profound, bringing the scriptures to life for her. She said that in his teaching, 'the Bible began to open totally new horizons for me. I came to discover a profundity and multiplicity of meanings

[28] Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, <https://www.cgsusa.org/> [accessed 4 October 2018]
[29] Rebekah Rojcewicz, 'The Adventure of the Catechesis', in *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Essential Realities,* ed. by Tina Lillig (Chicago, IL: LTP, 2004), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).
[30] Scottie May, 'Sofia Cavalletti', <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/sofia-cavalletti> [accessed 3 October 2018]
[31] The story is told in Zolli's autobiography: Eugenio Zolli, *Why I Became a Catholic* (Harrison, NY: Roman Catholic Books, 1997).

in the Bible that I had never imagined.'[32] Cavalletti remained an active Hebrew Scholar and Bible translator, publishing 46 technical studies between 1954 and 2005.[33] She was active in Jewish-Christian relations and Christian ecumenism, serving on the Ecumenical Commission of the Diocese of Rome and the Ecumenical Commission of the Italian Bishops Conference.

At the time, the religious education of children in the Roman Catholic Church consisted mostly of memorising the catechism. In 1954 the formidable Adele Costa Gnocchi, a friend of her aunt and champion of women's rights, who had attended Maria Montessori's first training course in 1909, persuaded Sofia to give some Bible lessons to a seven-year-old boy named Paolo, the grandson of a friend of Gnocchi.[34] Cavalletti took up the Bible, which she loved, and beginning with the first creation account opened the scriptures to the child. Cavalletti wrote of the experience:

> As for my involvement with children, I would never have thought that Catechesis would have become the work of my life, until I saw a child's eyes filled with tears. It happened after having had a meeting with three or four children, a meeting that I thought would be followed with a few other meetings and then stop forever. Paolo, after having spent two hours with me, reading the first account of creation in Genesis, did not want to leave. I was very impressed and I asked myself, "What have we done? Why did Paolo not want to leave?" His mother had told me that he had not been very willing to come![35]

Cavalletti was introduced to Gianna Gobbi at Costa Gnocchi's school. Gobbi would become her collaborator for nearly 50 years. Gianna had begun work at Gnocchi's school as a teenager and had assisted Montessori in the last course she gave in Rome in 1951.

[32] Sofia Cavalletti, 'My Readings', in *Way of Holy Joy: Selected Writings of Sofia Cavalletti*, ed. by Patricia M. Coulter (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012), pp. 60-78 (p. 62).
[33] Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance* (2013), pp. 56-61.
[34] Rojcewicz, p. 3.
[35] Personal Electronic Correspondence 2006 quoted in, May, '*Cavalletti*'.

Gobbi and Cavalletti began receiving groups of children at Cavalletti's apartments. The Atrium[36] eventually consisted of three rooms, for each Montessori developmental phase, Level 1: age 3-6, Level 2: 6-9, Level 3: 9-12. The room in which Sofia was born became her study.[37]

The Atrium, being in Sofia's private apartments, gave her a degree of independence from ecclesiastical scrutiny to experiment and develop her method away from the intense scrutiny of the clergy. This same freedom is something she saw as a gift to the child. The Atrium had to be a place that was un-programmed and 'de-schooled', a place of enjoyment and contemplation.[38] Building upon Montessori's work in Barcelona, Michel Lanternier's work in Rennes on the Eucharist and the liturgical year, the Dominican sisters in Dublin and the work of the Catholic Montessori Guild in England, Cavalletti and Gobbi laboured to refine and develop the legacy of Montessori's work in religious formation.[39] As the years unfolded, Cavalletti and Gobbi would try new materials and observe how children interacted with them. If the material did not resonate with the children it was consigned to the cupboard. Following the children's response, the doctrinal emphasis of the work gradually began to shift from the sacrifice of the Mass to the Good Shepherd gathering his sheep around the table. Cavalletti would say that it took her almost twenty years to discover this![40]

In 1957 Cavalletti delivered a paper to the International Montessori Conference in Rome which brought their work to a wider audience. In 1961 Cavalletti and Gobbi published their first book, *Educazione religiosa, liturgia e metodo*

[36] A name derived from the entrance fore-court of a basilica anciently used as a place of instruction for the catechumen.
[37] Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance,* (2013), p. 63.
[38] Rojcewicz (2004) p. 6.
[39] Montessori and Standing (1965), p. 132.
[40] Berryman (2013), p. 64.

Montessori, translated into English in 1964 as *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*.[41] This was followed by the formation in 1963 of *L'Associazione "Maria Montessori" per la formazione religiosa del bambino*. Cavalletti began to visit other countries to share the work of the centre. Further expansion took place in 1975 when Cavalletti gave her first courses in the USA and Mexico in 1976. The work which in English came to be known as *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* (CGS) began to include Episcopalians and Lutherans. Today the CGS is found in 65 countries around the world in Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox contexts.[42] Though the work is steadily growing in Europe, the centre of gravity for the CGS today is the American association. Compared with Godly Play, the presence of the CGS in the UK is small, mostly concentrated in London.[43]

In the traditional Montessori manner, there is no printed curriculum for CGS, formation courses are given aurally and participants make notes on the presentations which are then checked by the formation leaders. The intensive formation courses are typically two six-day weeks for levels 1 (3-6 year olds) and 2 (6-9year olds) and up to four for level 3 (9-12 year olds). Trainee catechists will be introduced to the theology and Montessori theory underpinning the catechesis and shown presentations. The catechists will then create an 'album page' on the presentation noting the direct and indirect aims, the appropriate time of the liturgical year to present, the doctrinal content together with a description of the materials and moments of the presentation. The completed album pages are then checked by the formation leader. To absorb the meaning of the materials the catechists will make and work with the materials to become familiar with their use before sharing them with children. Although the patterns for the materials

[41] Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964).
[42] Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.
[43] 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd UK', <http://www.cgsuk.org/> [accessed 22 February 2021]

themselves are centrally agreed at an international level with variants for rites and language groups, there are no set scripts as there is in Godly Play. The tradition is passed on aurally and each catechist forms their own album page which is then checked by the formation leader.

A liturgical hermeneutic, sacramentality and rich theological anthropology lie at the heart of the CGS. This theoretical underpinning is set out in two pairs of books. The two volumes of *The Religious Potential of the Child* set out the principles of the 3-6 Atrium in part 1 and the 6-12 in part 2.[44] The second pair of core texts, which provide background to the materials, is *The History of the Kingdom of God. Part 1: From Creation to Parousia,* which sets out the typological understanding of the 'golden thread' of salvation history.[45] *Part 2: Liturgy and the Building of the Kingdom,* sets out the relationship of the liturgy and sacraments to salvation history.

Cavalletti was very reluctant to talk about herself, but in 2003 she responded to a letter from her niece asking her about the books that had been significant in her work.[46] Cavalletti was extensively read, and fluent in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and five modern languages. She cites in her letter to her niece a wide range of authors. The wider influence of the kerygmatic movement is clearly evident in the method (see later discussion); however, two figures seem to me to stand out: Paul Ricœur, in her treatment of parables and historicity[47] and Jean Daniélou in her treatment of biblical typology.[48]

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[44] Sophia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: 3-6* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992); Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: 6 to 12 Years Old* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2002).
[45] Sofia Cavalletti, *The History of the Kingdom of God, Part 1: From Creation to Parousia* (Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications, 2011). Which is an updated version of Sofia Cavalletti, *History's Golden Thread* (Chicago, IL: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 1999).
[46] Cavalletti, *Way of Holy Joy* (2012), pp 60-78.
[47] In particular, Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965); Paul Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1981).
[48] Jean Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960).

2.4. Godly Play: Jerome Berryman (b.1937)

Jerome Woods Berryman was born in 1937 in Ashland, Kansas. He graduated from the University of Kansas in 1959. He trained for the Presbyterian ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary, gaining an MDiv and became a minister in 1962. It was during his time at the seminary that he was struck by the almost complete lack of reference to children during his theological studies.[49] He found that even in Christian Education classes 'children were treated like empty vessels that needed entertaining and filling up.' The emphasis, he says, 'was on getting the doctrine right and then convincing children to believe it. No one seemed to think children might already know God and that what they needed was an appropriate language to construct their own personal meaning about that reality.'[50] Working as a school chaplain, Berryman was confirmed in his love for teaching but figured out 'that adolescence was rather late in the game for building fundamental spiritual foundations.'[51]

Moving to Tulsa to study law, while watching his daughters learning in a Montessori school, he knew that this was the foundation for a better form of Christian Education. Berryman moved to Italy with his wife, Thea, and their two young daughters in 1971 to study the year-long diploma programme at The Centre for Advanced Montessori Studies in Bergamo. During the course, Cavalletti came to Bergamo to demonstrate some of the materials that had been developed in Rome. Before their return to the US the family visited Cavalletti's centre in Rome.[52]

[49] Brendan Hyde, 'Introduction', in *The Search for a Theology of Childhood: Essays by Jerome W. Berryman from 1978-2009,* ed. by Brendan Hyde (Ballarat, VIC: Modotti Press, 2013), pp. 1-18.
[50] Berryman, *Teaching* (2009), p. 14.
[51] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance* (2013), p. 76.
[52] Jerome Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How to Lead Godly Play Sessions,* Vol 1 (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 2002), p. 88.

Berryman returned to the USA to teach in a Montessori school in Cleveland, before taking up an appointment at the Institute of Religion, Texas Medical Center in Houston. In 1978 Berryman invited Cavalletti to America, to deliver what was her second course in the US at the Institute of Religion at the Texas Medical Centre. It was during this time that he began to develop materials for the spiritual care of sick children.[53]

In 1984 Berryman was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church and served at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston, Texas as Canon Educator from 1984-1994. During this time Berryman developed his distinctive approach to Montessori religious education. Berryman, with his wife Thea, continued working and researching the method. The first edition of *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* was published in 1991.[54] By 1993 it became clear that his approach, which he dubbed 'Godly Play', had become significantly different to Cavalletti's. Jerome recalls,

> I was surprised the other day to look around my own research centre and discover that there were two materials there that Maria Montessori had originated and two that Cavalletti had originated. The rest had come from my own response to scripture, children and the presence of God. It was a strange discovery, because I had assumed that all our materials had come from Montessori and Cavalletti... My task is not at odds with that, only different.[55]

Their pedagogical ways had parted but they remained friends and correspondents until Cavalletti's death in 2011.[56]

From 1994 Berryman began to devote most of his time to lecturing and presenting workshops about Godly Play and the spirituality of children. Berryman was increasingly called upon to give lectures and teach courses in Godly Play all over the US and internationally. From 1998 until his retirement in 2007, Berryman

[53] Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), p. 27.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid. pp. 26-27.
[56] Berryman, *Complete Guide,* Vol 1 (2002), p. 89.

was Executive Director of the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Denver, Colorado. In late 2007 the Godly Play Foundation was established to coordinate the training, promotion and development of Godly Play, which (in the American way) became a trademark.

Godly Play in the UK and beyond

In 1998 Rebecca Nye, whilst visiting the USA to share the fruits of the research from her recently completed PhD on children's spirituality,[57] was overwhelmed by her visit to a Godly Play room. Later that year she met Berryman at an international research seminar in Wales. In May 1999, Nye invited Berryman to the UK to demonstrate Godly Play, Berryman returned in January 2001 to offer a week-long course at the University of Cambridge Divinity School. In 2002 Nye and Peter Privett went to the US to train as Godly Play trainers. Acting initially as freelance trainers they travelled throughout the UK and beyond offering introductory courses. In 2007 Godly Play UK became a registered charity. There are now several UK trainers, with over 1500 people having attended the three-day core training.[58] Thanks largely to Rebecca Nye and Peter Privett, Godly Play is now well established in many European nations.[59]

[57] The work was published as the highly influential David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* (London: Fount, 1998).
[58] Peter Privett, 'The European Growth of Godly Play', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research,* ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 65-119 (pp. 117-19).
[59] Andrew Sheldon, 'Where in the World Is Godly Play?', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research,* ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 120-26.

3. The Child in Christian thought

In this chapter before I embark upon the examination of Godly Play as a form of Christian Catechesis it is important to ask who is the child and what is the theological meaning of childhood? This is fundamental to what we as catechists think we are doing. Children and childhood have rarely been a major focus of theology.[60] In his essay 'Children's Voices and Theology', Friedrich Schwitzer, one of the leading German theologians of childhood, states.

> In my understanding, both Godly Play and children's theology need to be based on a theology of childhood. This theology has to be in line with the Christian tradition that goes back to Jesus himself, by accepting children's capacity for the faith and for their own understanding of faith - and ultimately as models for the faith of adults. Theologies of childhood have to do justice to this, theologically as well as in terms of the practice of religious education.[61]

In *Children and the Theologians,* Berryman summarises four predominant attitudes towards children through the ages: ambivalence, ambiguity, indifference and grace.[62] In the patristic era simplicity, innocence and, particularly, the child's lack of sexual desire were valued aspects of childhood.[63] In the tradition of Augustine, the Reformers tended to focus on the fallen nature of children born in original sin and requiring correction. More optimistic commentators have tended to pick up on either qualities of the child such as trust, honesty, transparency, or the

[60] See Introduction, in Marcia J Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), (p. x).
[61] Friedrich Schweitzer, 'Children's Voice and Theology: Godly Play in a Broader Perspective', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research,* ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 141-50 (p. 149).
[62] Jerome Berryman, *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2009), pp. 200-15.
[63] Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), pp. 56-109.

social status of the child as marginal or invisible.[64] Who the child is, and what childhood means determines the shape and purpose of catechesis. Are children incapable of being 'real' Christians until they are capable of independent rational thought and able to 'make a decision for Christ' or are they a 'fellow pilgrim on a journey' in their own unique and insightful way accompanying us as fellow disciples?

3.1. Children in the canonical Gospels

Marcia Bunge states at the beginning of *The Child in the Bible,* that 'the Bible is teeming with direct references to children, childhood, and adult child relationships.' These speak of conception, birth, infertility, longing and naming; children who are cherished and abandoned, and complex sibling relationships. Texts refer to adult-child relations and obligations, of discipline and education. But, though, as Bunge notes, the scriptures are 'flooded with direct and indirect references to children and childhood,' until the last couple of decades they have largely been ignored by scholars.[65]

There are two events, recorded in all three synoptic gospels with variants, where the child takes central place in the narrative. In Mark's Gospel these encounters with children sit significantly between Jesus predicting his own death at the end of his ministry in Galilee and setting out on the road to Jerusalem. These two

[64] Keith J. White, 'He Placed a Little Child in the Midst: Jesus the Kingdom, and Children', in *The Child in the Bible,* ed. by Marcia J Bunge, Terrence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 353-74.; Judith Grundy-Volf, 'The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament', in *The Child in Christian Thought,* ed. by Marcia J Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 29-60 (p. 38).
[65] Marcia J Bunge, 'Introduction', in *The Child in the Bible,* ed. by Marcia J Bunge, Terence E Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), pp. xiv-xxvi.

closely related events lift up two important truths of Christian discipleship: the value of the 'little ones' and the attitude of heart required of a disciple.

3.1.1. 'Welcoming a child in my name' Mark 9.33-37 (Mt 18.1-5, Lk 9.46-48)

In Chapter 9 of Mark's gospel (Mk 9.30-37) Jesus enters a house in Capernaum, a town that had acted as a base for Jesus and his disciples in the early stages of his ministry. On the way he has told the disciples that he is about to be betrayed and killed and rise again. The disciples are clueless and, we are told, afraid to ask him what he is talking about. Jesus then asks the disciples what they have been arguing about on the way? At this point Mark reverts to calling the disciples 'the twelve', perhaps evoking, Betsworth suggests, the age of Jairus' daughter, the number of years the woman in the crowd had been suffering from haemorrhaging, and to the more obvious twelve baskets left over from the feeding miracles as well as the most obvious analogy to the twelve tribes of Israel.[66] We are told that the twelve, Jesus' inner circle, had been arguing about status and which one of them was the greatest. In a hierarchical society, where status and honour were very important values, this is natural and worthy of discussion. Nonetheless it is a curious topic of conversation given that Jesus has just been predicting his death.[67] As Nineham states, what follows is not accidental, it illustrates the march towards the cross: it is 'a commentary on the second prediction of the Passion, showing once again that the freely accepted suffering which awaits Jesus is not an accident, isolated occurrence, but exemplifies a law of the kingdom which applies equally to all who would enter upon its life'.[68]

[66] Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 66.
[67] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 2001), p. 61.
[68] D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), p. 251.

Entering the house Jesus sits down, the posture of a teacher, calls the twelve and subverts the conversation saying to them, 'whoever wants to be first (πρῶτος) must be last of all and servant (διάκονος) of all.' This is a theme that Jesus will return to, challenging the cultural assumptions of rank and status and what constitutes greatness.[69] To be great, to be the 'prime', the disciple must embrace the 'last', no rank, no authority and no status. Jesus illustrates his rebuke with a demonstrative action.[70] At this point Jesus takes a child (παιδία)[71] in his arms and places it in the midst of them and says, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' (Mk 9.37). Jesus thus incarnates his saying by introducing a 'least one' into their midst. Unlike Matthew's parallel (Mt 18.3-4), Mark points not to the attitude of the child, but to the attitude of others towards the child. The child in first-century Palestine lacked social status and legal rights. A child was a 'non-person,' totally dependent on the adults of the family for care and protection.[72] The true disciple achieves this greatness not through status but by doing service to insignificant people such as the child.[73] On this reading, it is this not the status of biologically being a child that is significant, but the child's low social status, which is shared with women, the poor and the unclean. Jesus is saying to his male disciples, who have some power over women and children, that they are to serve those with less power than themselves.[74] Moreover, Ched Myers argues, Jesus is not only inviting his

[69] James L Bailey, 'Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13', *Word and World,* 15 (1995), 58-67.
[70] Vernon K. Robbins, 'Pronouncement Stories and Jesus' Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach', *Semeia,* 29 (1983), 42-74.
[71] A weaned child up to the age of puberty. The Aramaic *talya'* can mean both servant and child. Matthew Black, 'Unsolved New Testament Problems: The Problem of the Aramaic Element in the Gospels.', *The Expository Times,* 59 (1948), 171-178.
[72] John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 285.
[73] Nineham (1963), p. 252.
[74] Elizabeth Struthers-Malbon, 'Gospel of Mark', in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated,* ed. by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), pp. 478-92.

disciples to embrace the 'least' but to take up the powerlessness and vulnerability of the child.[75] To welcome the child is to welcome the Son of Man who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus is identifying with the status of the child, and to embrace Jesus is to embrace the one who sent him, or as Robert Fowler puts it, to embrace 'a child is like embracing God.'[76] The most apparently insignificant people, Myers argues, are important because they carry the name of Jesus and belong to him.[77]

Profound and practical theological implications flow from this. The child, and others without social status, are worthy of respect, care and protection within the Christian community. Tragically, we have seen in recent decades that the consequences of this duty of care has not been uppermost in the hearts and minds of those church leaders where protection of the institution has been prioritised over the vulnerable.[78]

3.1.2. Receiving the Kingdom of God as a child Mark 10.13-16 (Mt 19.13-15, Lk 18.15-17)

In the second encounter, Jesus has travelled over the Jordan to Judea. Jesus is recalled as giving uncompromising teaching on marriage (Mk 10.2-12) after which, in the next pericope, we are told 'people were bringing little children (παιδία) to him that he might touch (ἅψηται) them.' Although the narrative is vague about the identity of the people who are bringing these children to Jesus, it is clear about their purpose for doing so, 'in order that he might touch them.' Presumably, Evans concludes, it is the parents of the children who are bringing them. Less clear is the

[75] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 266-71.
[76] Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), p. 72.
[77] Myers makes this point very forcibly, Ched Myers (1988), pp. 266-71.
[78] Alexis Jay, Malcolm Evan, Ivor Frank, Drusilla Sharpling, *Child protection in religious organisations and settings Investigation Report* (London: Independent Inquiry: Child Sexual Abuse, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 2021) <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cp-religious-organisations-settings> [accessed 25 September 2021], p32.

desired effect of Jesus' touch. Elsewhere in the gospel, and generally in the ancient world, touch was about coming close to a holy person to gain healing. It is most likely in this incident that parents are seeking a blessing that would help or protect them for the future.[79]

Having evidently not learnt from the previous encounter recounted by Mark in chapter 9, the disciples speak harshly and rebuke (ἐπετίμησαν) those bringing the children (Mk 10.13). It is not entirely clear whether the disciples are rebuking the children or the parents, but they are obviously concerned that Jesus has more important things to do than be distracted in his work by children bothering him. Nineham suggests that it was possibly because the children were too young to 'make a responsible decision upon his claims.'[80] Jesus, we are told, is indignant about the disciples' response and tells them to 'stop forbidding them' and 'let the children come' to him, 'for of such as these [possessive] is the kingdom of God.' They have every right to approach, or to be brought to Jesus, as the kingdom of God *belongs* to people such as children. This was not necessarily a new teaching as similar views are found in later rabbinic teachings.[81] Although in later Christian writings this passage became a proof text for the practice of baptising infants, there is no reason to read this idea back into Mark, though this may have resonated with the Markan community.[82] Jesus then continues, 'truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child (παιδίον) will not enter it.' Unlike some later

[79] Evans (2001), p. 93.
[80] Nineham (1963), p. 267.
[81] Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1917), pp. 118-20.
[82] Donahue and Harrington (2002), p. 300. Although it is probable that children were included in the 'entire households' baptised, as recorded in Acts 16.15;18.8; 1 Cor 1.16, the NT itself is inconclusive. Tertullian's disapproving comments of the practice, which seems to have been common in North Africa by the second century (*De baptismo* 18) were the first confirmed record of it. See, Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, revised and expanded edn (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), pp. 35-37, 89-90; Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (London: SCM Press, 1960); Joachim Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Aland* (London: SCM Press, 1963).

rabbinic teaching which pointed to the purity, or sinlessness, of children, Dennis Nineham states, it is 'not so much the innocence and humility [or obedience] of children; it is rather the fact that children are unselfconscious, receptive, and content to be dependent upon others' care and bounty.'[83] It is those who share with children this *characteristic* of openness who will enter the kingdom. As Vincent Taylor saw, the receptiveness of the child is the key to understanding Jesus' action, as the kingdom of God is a gift, 'an experience into which, if they have the receptiveness of a child, man [*sic*] may enter here and now.'[84] John Pridmore, in his exploration of salvation and childhood, argues that because the young child lives in the 'continuous now' children fulfil Jesus' command to 'not worry about tomorrow' (Matthew 6.34) in a unique way. Pridmore argues that 'unless salvation can be apprehended in childhood's "continuous now" it is not salvation at all.'[85]

Jesus then not only touches the children, but takes them into his arms and embraces them, and here Mark using the only occurrence in the NT of the intensive form, 'blesses (κατευλόγει) them', placing his hands upon them (cf. Gen 48.14; Deut 34.9). In this powerful gesture, Jesus makes clear children's acceptance and value in the kingdom of God.[86] The 'kingdom of God is both gift and task.'[87] As Sharon Betsworth observes, Jesus has made a profound theological point, 'Children are not just of value to their families for what they will be and will be able to provide; rather children in the present, as children, are models of discipleship.'[88]

[83] Nineham (1963), p. 268.
[84] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark: The Greek Text* (London: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 421-22.
[85] John Pridmore, 'Salvation', in *Through the Eyes of a Child,* ed. by Anne Richards and Peter Privett (London: Church House Pub, 2009), pp. 185-204 (p. 197).
[86] Evans (2001), p. 94.
[87] Bailey (1995), p. 62.
[88] Betsworth (2015), p. 67.

3.2. Children in the early Christian communities

Christianity began as a messianic movement within Judaism during a period of Roman occupation of Palestine. It is in this cultural melting pot between Greco-Roman culture and its Jewish religious roots that Christian attitudes to children and family were forged.[89] The New Testament household codes (Eph. 5.21-6.9; Col. 3.18-4.1; 1 Tim. 2.8 - 3.13; Tit. 2.1-10; 1 Pet. 2.13-3.7),[90] like those of Aristotle,[91] show a community eager to demonstrate a traditional patriarchal pattern of family life in keeping with the broader society. What is perhaps different in this nascent community, Betsworth observes, is the higher regard for the *intrinsic* value of children that begins to emerge.[92]

Much has been written in recent years about children and families in the Greco-Roman world, including their role in the pagan cults.[93] The general picture was one where children held low social status. It was an honour-based society that idealised the free-born adult male who were regarded as the strongest and most rational. All other people were defined in terms of their relation to adult male citizens. In the domestic sphere the *paterfamilias* held the highest place of authority and honour in the household and had *patria potestas* (legal authority) over his wife, children and slaves.[94] Physical violence, or the fear of it, and what today we would regard as sexual abuse was a common part of everyday life for children. To defy or

[89] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Rev. edn (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), pp. 9-23.
[90] Margaret Y. MacDonald, 'Reading the New Testament Household Codes in Light of New Research on Children and Childhood in the Roman World', *Studies in Religion /Sciences Religieuses,* 41 (2012).
[91] Pol. 1.1253b, quoted in. Betsworth (2015), p. 28.
[92] Ibid. pp. 28-29.
[93] For an overview, see Bakke (2005), pp. 15-51; Betsworth (2015), pp. 5-37; Thomas E. J. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[94] The early Christian community worshipping in household churches absorbed some of the pattern of the paterfamilias into its emerging patterns of ministry. Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 66-69.

bring dishonour to the *paterfamilias* would often result in harsh discipline, particularly for slaves.[95]

Due to the perils of childbirth, the relatively older age of fathers and sometimes divorce, what we would today call 'blended families', were not uncommon. It has been estimated that 30% of children died in the first year of life, perhaps only 49% of children reaching their 5th birthday and 40% to their 20th.[96] Although the Stoics would berate those who mourned the death of young children, there is little to suggest parents didn't acutely feel such losses. If, however, a child was born weak or deformed, or the family simply could not manage to bring up another child, it was not uncommon for babies to be exposed at birth. This practice, largely abhorred by Jews and Christians, was perceived as a form of birth control.[97] From surviving documents, it seems twice as likely for girl babies to be abandoned than boys. Abandonment didn't mean certain death, as babies were usually left in public places where others might adopt them or bring them up as slaves or slave prostitutes.

During the reign of Augustus, the minimum age for marriage for girls was set at 12 and 14 for boys. At around 16 a male citizen would adopt the *toga virilis.* They could undertake military training and vote but were not allowed to hold public office until they were 25. High status girls would usually be married at the onset of menstruation, or even before for political reasons. Jewish and Christian girls usually married in their late teens, but this is likely to have had more to do with their relatively low social status rather than religion. Men did not usually marry until their mid to late 20s, hence the traditional picture we are given of a young Mary and an older Joseph would be the cultural norm.

[95] Bakke (2005), pp. 52-53.
[96] Wiedemann (1989), p. 16.
[97] Rawson (2003), p. 117.

3.3 Children and worship in early Christianity

Evidence suggests that children have been involved in Christian worship from earliest times. Children in the ancient world were surrounded by religious ritual from the moment they were born. In Greek families the new-born would be carried around the hearth and presented to the family gods. If the child survived a week, a ritual would be held on the eighth day for girls and the ninth for boys. In a similar way Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day, though Josephus counsels that this should be celebrated without the excessive alcohol consumption of the pagan rituals.[98]

From a young age children would participate in religious ritual and worship of the household gods would be part of everyday life. Children were seen as channels of divine communication, they had special roles in domestic marriage and funeral rites as well as having special roles in civic rituals often in choirs or as acolytes. Jewish families were likewise steeped in domestic ritual and tradition but, unlike children raised in pagan cults which had few written texts, Jewish children would learn to memorise the Torah (Deut. 6.4-7). By this period the synagogue had become central to Jewish life and worship, especially for those in the diaspora. Evidence suggests that children participated in the household churches of early Christianity in a similar way. Whilst the exact form of house is largely unknown, the primary meeting place of the emerging Christian community was domestic. These households would have been full of these households' free and slave children.[99] Unlike their pagan counterparts, Jews and Christians would not participate in the imperial cult or civic pagan rituals. The Empire's relationship with Jews was,

[98] Josephus Ag. Ap. 2.204, quoted in, Adele Reinhartz and Kim Shier, 'Josephus on Children and Childhood', *Studies in Religion /Sciences Religieuses*, 41 (2012), 371.
[99] MacDonald (2012), p. 379.

generally, tense, taxed but tolerated. But the new religious movement of Jews, and increasingly Greeks, being expelled from the synagogue, who worshipped Jesus as God… that was a different matter, as Agnes, Lucy and many other children bore witness.[100]

3.4 Ideas for a theology of childhood

Like all the major theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner made few references in his prolific writings to children or childhood. But in a lecture given in 1962, published in 1963 in the journal *Geist und Leben* Rahner set out his 'Ideas for a Theology of Childhood.'[101] The essay, later collected in volume 8 of the *Theological Investigations*, is probably the most profound essay on the subject to emanate from the major theologians of the twentieth century. Rahner poses the question, 'in the intention of the Creator and Redeemer of children what meaning does childhood have, and what task does it lay upon us for the perfecting and saving of humanity?' Flowing from his theological anthropology, Rahner concludes that there is a 'unique and unrepeatable value attached to childhood.'[102]

There is inevitably a preparatory nature of childhood, Rahner concedes, but childhood is not merely a preparation or prelude to adulthood, 'not merely a pledge of the grace of adulthood.' Childhood is valuable in itself. Children are whole human beings; they do not become more human as they grow and mature. This child, from the beginning, 'is related with absolute immediacy to God himself.' The

[100] William Horbury, 'The Jewish Dimension', in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, ed. by Ian Hazlett and W. H. C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 40-51 (p. 43); Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 10-13.; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 108-10.
[101] Karl Rahner, 'Ideas for a Theology of Childhood', in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 8 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), pp. 33-50.
[102] Ibid. p. 33.

child is already fully and uniquely a particular human being not a case of a general idea. Humans are always becoming and cannot remain fixed at any particular stage of life. We do not remain children but the meaning of our childhood remains part of who we are; in this sense, we retain our childhoods. Our childhood, Rahner explains, 'remains an open question for us.' It is a unique stage of human life Rahner says, that touches upon the divine in a special way, 'a field which bears fair flowers and ripe fruits such as can only grow in *this* field and in no other, and which themselves be carried into the storehouses of eternity.'[103]

Rahner argues that, according to Christian tradition from conception there is not a time when the child is not a human being, that 'the child is already spirit and body united in a single entity.' There is an idealism and a realism in the Christian tradition, Rahner contends, which does not seek to iron out the complexity of the experience of childhood; the meaning of childhood lies in real children. The child is surrounded by grace, but this beginning 'is not simply *pure* beginning.' Children are born into the grubbiness of what it is to be human, into what the language of tradition calls original sin, a humanity in need of a saviour. The child's beginning is in the context of history. 'And this history is, right from the onset, also a history of guilt, of gracelessness, of a refusal to respond to the call of the living God.' Therefore, Rahner concludes, Christianity cannot 'regard the origins of childhood as a sort of innocent arcadia, as a pure source which only becomes muddied at a later stage.'[104]

True religion is to remain a child; it is, Rahner insists, 'a basic condition which is always appropriate to a life that is lived aright.' It is an orientation towards God. Childhood is a mystery of our early life that we grow into when we learn in faithful maturity to be hearers of the Word and commit ourselves, reverently and lovingly to

[103] Ibid. pp. 33-37.
[104] Ibid. pp. 38-41.

'this state of being given over to the mystery.'[105] Maturity of faith is in a way to become like a child:

> Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness. The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves.[106]

Children, who are happy enough to have a secure loving childhood, learn something about perfect divine trust even from their imperfect parents. Yet the terminology of father and child in Christian theology, Rahner maintains, is no mere metaphor or projection. As Eph. 3.15 speaks of all fatherhood deriving from the eternal Father, so all childhood derives its name and origin from 'that one childhood in which the Logos itself receives its own nature in the act of eternal generation by the Father' through which we have received, a share in the divine nature,' the grace from the life of God himself to be children of God and brothers and sisters of one another.'[107]

3.5 The Child in the Church

To conclude, although at times the Christian tradition has neglected children the witness of Jesus in the gospels and the evidence of the early church points to a greater appreciation of children in the church. In his disputes with the Gnostics about the nature of Christ, Irenaeus, (c.130-c.200) concluded that since Christ was fully God and fully human from his conception, he has sanctified every age of human life.[108] Jesus grew and matured as boy and man, but there was no point when

[105] Ibid. pp. 42-49.
[106] Ibid. p. 48.
[107] Ibid. pp. 49-50.
[108] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 2.22.4.

he was not the Son of God incarnate. As Karl Rahner argued, childhood is not *merely* a preparation for adulthood, indeed Christian maturity is to become like a child in openness of heart. In serving the child Rahner insists there is no room for 'petty sentimentality'.[109] The child deserves their full dignity as a human being made in the image and likeness of God. Despite the imminent expectation of the eschaton, evidence suggests that the one of the characteristics of the early church was that, following the example of Jesus with their spiritual roots in Judaism, they valued children as fellow worshippers in the household churches of the emerging community.

Serious attention needs to be given to the spiritual nurture of children and young people, an area that I argue has been seriously neglected in recent decades. Godly Play is one way that the place of the child is valued, heard and nurtured at the heart of the church.

One of the great sadnesses of too many British churches in our age is the lack of children. In the contemporary Church of England shiny 'resource churches' full of young adults in their 20s and 30s are often held up as the ultimate sign of 'success' but Churches without children, and those older people who have rediscovered the childlike joy and simplicity of heart that Jesus was talking about when he commanded to 'become like children' (Mt 18.3), are deeply impoverished. 'How can they know the way' (Jn 14.5) unless they have 'a little child to lead them' (Is 11.6).

[109] Rahner, *Childhood,* p. 50.

4. Children's Spirituality

The curriculum for a maintained school or maintained nursery school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broadly based curriculum which (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and (b) prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

Education Act 2002

Godly Play has often been used in schools, and indeed in this study, as a means to developing children's spirituality. This chapter explores what is meant by 'spirituality' and how Godly Play contributes to children's spiritual development.

The Education Act 2002 reiterated the requirement set out in the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts to promote the spiritual development of pupils. It was Archbishop William Temple who introduced the term 'spirituality' to the 1944 Act as being a 'broader and more inclusive term' than 'religious.'[110] This sounds like an invitation to 'motherhood and apple pie' but the 2002 Act came at a time when the connection between Christianity and spirituality, which in the recent past would have been a given, had become increasingly problematic.

In the Education Act 2002 the link between promoting the spiritual and the moral state of the nation enshrined in the Education Act 1944 persists. What has changed, Adrian Thatcher states, is that this new establishment is now controlled by humanists rather than Christians.[111] Andrew Bolton, reflecting on the contribution of the Nonconformist tradition reflecting on the implementation of the English National Curriculum and the centralisation of Education, writes of 'a new

[110] Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley, *Children, Churches and Christian Learning* (London: SPCK, 2002), p. 172.
[111] Adrian Thatcher, 'Theology, Spirituality and the Curriculum - an Overview', in *Spirituality and the Curriculum*, ed. by Adrian Thatcher (London, New York: Cassell, 1999), pp. 1-11 (pp. 2, 9).

Constantinian shift, a new Establishmentarianism, a new "Church of Education."'[112] The effect has been to flatten the notion of spirituality in the curriculum away from encounter with the transcendent. For some, religious education now finds its reference beyond any particular religion, and instead finds its validity in human experience.[113] Mary Grey points out that this is due to the influence of postmodernity's rejection of any universalist claims, coupled with the marginalising of Christian theology in the increasingly multi-faith and multi-cultural context of Western Europe.[114] It has become increasingly common for people to describe themselves as 'spiritual but *not* religious,' at least superficially rejecting any formal framework to interpret the affective human spiritual instincts. There has been a steady progression from a generic 'CofE' religious identity, often denoted by the phrase, 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian', where religion and spirituality were seen as synonymous, to being 'spiritual but not religious' where religion has almost become the antithesis of spirituality.[115] Sadly, sometimes lacking an affective spirituality, formal religion has often become dry and doctrinaire.[116]

Thatcher argues that, due to a lack of confidence in Christian theology since the 1940s, theology has made a 'negligible contribution to educational theory in general, and to religious education in particular.' There is, Thatcher asserts, a relationship in late capitalist societies between a resurgent interest in individualistic spirituality and increased secularisation.

> Now that spirituality has floated free from religion, are individuals enabled to explore the spiritual dimension of their lives without the dubious benefits of religious or ecclesiastical

[112] Andrew Bolton, 'Non-Conformist Approaches to Spiritual and Moral Development', in *Spirituality and the Curriculum,* ed. by Adrian Thatcher (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 90-110 (p. 100).
[113] Robin Minney, 'Otto's Contribution to Religious Education', in *The Contours of Christian Education,* ed. by Jeff Astley and David Day (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1992), pp. 216-29 (pp. 216-17).
[114] Mary Grey, 'Christian Theology, Spirituality and the Curriculum', in *Spirituality and the Curriculum,* ed. by Adrian Thatcher (London, New York: Cassell, 1999), pp. 33-54 (p. 12).
[115] Paul Heelas, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
[116] Brendan Hyde, *Children and Spirituality* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), pp. 25-26.

> mediation? Or does the preoccupation with spirituality merely mirror the importance which is attached to the individual, to the self and its rights, needs, pleasures and projects?[117]

Both Kalevi Tamminen and Leslie Francis have demonstrated that, in the sceptical and secular post-Enlightenment air of Western culture, children's interest in religion seems to collapse somewhere between the ages of 8 to 15.[118] Hay blames this loss on a culturally mediated inhibition or 'blotting out' of spiritual awareness.[119] Rebecca Nye regards the diminishment of religious identity in British society as a form of childhood impoverishment. Over the last few decades significantly fewer children have attended church or participated in Sunday schools or catechism classes. There is, she argues, a significant 'religious knowledge deficiency and a lack of any functional sense of religious identity.' Spirituality, she insists, should not be seen as a sort of 'extension activity', but a right of the child.[120] Godly Play, Nye suggests, is a way to address this cultural loss.

What then does it mean to say that Godly Play contributes to children's spirituality? For Godly Play to be permissible in the state funded school, does it need to fulfil the essentially secular criteria of spirituality of the educational establishment? But if it is to be a valid orientation to the 'Christian language system,' it must, I argue, also reflect an authentic theistic Christian understanding of spirituality and not simply be seen as a stance for living, or even as a window into the transcendent, but a journey to a relationship with God.

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[117] Thatcher, p. 1.
[118] Kalevi Tamminen and Tiedeakatemia Suomalainen, *Religious Development in Childhood and Youth: An Empirical Study* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1991); Leslie J. Francis, 'The Decline in Attitudes Towards Religion among 8-15 Year Olds', *Educational Studies,* 13 (1987), 125-134.
[119] David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, rev. edn (London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), p. 57.
[120] Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), pp. 13-15; UNICEF, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' (Geneva: UN, 1989); These 'rights' are not simple, see, Maarit Jänterä-Jareborg, 'The Child in the Intersections between Society, Family, Faith and Culture', in *The Child's Interests in Conflict: The Intersections between Society, Family, Faith and Culture,* ed. by Maarit Jänterä-Jareborg (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2016), pp. 1-30.

4.1. What is spirituality?

The first difficulty is the lack of clarity about what is meant by spirituality. Gordon Wakefield defines spirituality as a word that describes 'those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them reach out towards super-sensible realities.'[121] Grounded in our deepest emotions, spirituality describes the commitments, values and beliefs that motivate and shape our actions and form our character; those things in which we put our faith in and to which we give worth. But the word 'spirituality' has not always had its current meaning. Nor has it always had this sense of transcendence. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was a term distinguishing the clergy or ecclesiastical property or revenue from the temporalities. The first use in the Latin West of *sensus spiritualis,* analogous to the physical senses in the perception of the divine, is found in the works of Origen (c.185-c.254). This analogous usage was common in the mediaeval West and later became foundational for Protestant writers such as John Wesley in England and Johnathan Edwards in America who advocated a more affective understanding of faith.[122]

There is, Astley reflects, both a vertical and horizontal dimension to spirituality.[123] The vertical dimension of spirituality is a reaching towards the transcendent, for the theist this is to an 'I-thou' relationship with God, or for the non-theist just whatever transcends the material world. It connotes a relationship beyond the self to an ultimate reality. This vertical dimension of spirituality is concerned

[121] Gordon S. Wakefield, 'Spirituality', in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality,* ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (London SCM Press, 1983), pp. 361-63.
[122] Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[123] Jeff Astley, *How Faith Grows: Faith Development and Christian Education* (London: National Society Church House Publishing, 1991), pp. 4-5; Jeff Astley, 'Spiritual Learning: Good for Nothing?', in *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education,* ed. by David Carr and John Haldane (London: Routledge; Falmer, 2003), pp. 141-53.

with the existential quest, why anything? Is there any ultimate meaning and purpose? This feeling of ultimacy need not necessarily be religious, however. The horizontal, 'know thyself,' aspect of spirituality, by contrast, describes the deeply held meaningful values, convictions and practices that determine and express our relationship to ourselves, to nature and to other people, which may or may not be corporately shared. Such horizontal spirituality again need not necessarily be religious at all. Wildman notes that the term spiritual is often used 'to describe the aesthetic, moral, or circumstantial experiences that seem pregnant with existential and ontological significance.' So it has become not uncommon for people to describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious.'[124] In contemporary Britain, for example, there has been a blossoming of a 'well-being' business, often adopting traditional Buddhist and Hindu techniques such as Yoga and mindfulness in an essentially secular way.

All religions, Wakefield points out, have their 'spirituality', as may other ideologies. This need not necessarily be always a positive thing, as in the case of the Nazis with their mythological Germanic cult! Within mainstream religions certain forms of spirituality may also be pathological. It has become increasingly common to speak of 'spiritual abuse',[125] and the recognition of the potential misuse of spiritual authority is therefore increasingly being recognised in official documents and training courses.[126] The Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse* (2017), defined spiritual abuse as occurring 'where the perpetrator deploys spiritual language as part of the

[124] Wesley J. Wildman, *Religious and Spiritual Experiences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 81.
[125] Lisa Oakley and Kathryn Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 21.
[126] The defining of spiritual abuse has been controversial, and some would prefer such abuse to be considered within the current legally recognised categories of emotional and psychological abuse see, Steve Clifford and David Hilborn, 'Reviewing the Discourse of "Spiritual Abuse": Logical Problems and Unintended Consequences' (London: Evangelical Alliance Theology Advisory Group, 2018), pp. 1-18.

coercion of those abused and the justification for their [the perpetrators'] actions'.[127] Stephen Pattison speaks movingly of his own spiritual struggle with his privileged but abusive upbringing.

> To me as a powerless, victimized child, Christianity spoke directly. I felt bad. Christianity told me that I *should* feel bad because I was guilty of sin. I felt unwanted and misunderstood. The Bible informed me that I would be bound to feel like that because followers of Jesus were always outcast and despised. I felt that myself was totally unacceptable and perverse. Christianity suggested that all selves are basically unacceptable and perverse, but praying to Jesus would enable me to become like him, that is, to become holy, good, and, above all I suspect, significant and powerful.[128]

Safeguarding is not just about morality and safe practices. As Pattison goes on to explore, the shape of our theology matters and some theologies have not always led to a safer church. This darker potential of Christian theology to create a climate conducive to abuse is not always acknowledged.[129]

Spiritual Foundationalism

The English term 'spirituality' was initially used in a pejorative sense, to encompass piety with a hint of mystical interiority, as applied to *La Nouvelle Spiritualité* of Madame Guyon (1648-1717).[130] In place of traditional popular Catholic practices, Guyon discovered and promoted a silent contemplative prayer.[131] While God has been the object of spiritual sensing in the Christian tradition, especially in

[127] Church of England, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse* (London, Faith & Order Commission, 2017), p. 20.
[128] Stephen Pattison, '"Suffer Little Children": The Challenge of Child Abuse and Neglect to Theology', *Theology & Sexuality*, 9 (1998), 36-58 (p.41).
[129] See, for example, Krish Kandiah and Justin Humphreys, 'On Behalf of the Voiceless: A Theology of Safeguarding' (Swanley: Thirtyone:eight, 2020), p. 16.
[130] Michael Richards, 'Guyon, Jeanne-Marie Bouvier De La Motte', in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 184.
[131] Liz Carmichael, 'Catholic Saints and Reformers', in *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Gordon Mursell (Oxford: Lion, 2001), pp. 201-44 (pp. 234-38).

Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834),[132] there has also developed a notion that 'spirituality in general' can be studied apart from religion.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a small group of psychologists in New England, led by the American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910), began researching religious experience. Influenced by the work of William Perkins, Puritanism had become concerned with the testimony of feeling as evidence of election, largely led by the desire to validate the Puritan conversion experiences that were still an important New England rite of passage at the time. James' studies were concerned with recording individuals' religious feelings. The New England Puritans had been deeply influenced by the Lutheran Pietistic movement via the ministry of John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. For Edwards, spiritual understanding came through a first-hand 'sense of the heart'. This sense of intense religious meaningfulness, Edwards thought, was something beyond the five senses.[133] James' studies were concerned with recording individuals' religious feelings and experiences. For James, 'experience against philosophy [was] the real backbone of the world's religious life.'[134] James had little place for formal religious beliefs or institutions and was criticised in his own lifetime for his lack of regard for the corporate.[135] In 1901-2 William James delivered his Gifford lectures, later published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* in which James emphasised feelings and experiences in relation to what the individual regarded as the divine. James identified four hallmarks of personal religious experience of truth, which have their 'root and centre in mystical states of consciousness':

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[132] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[133] David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space: Scientists and Religious Experience*, rev. edn (London: Mowbray, 1987), pp. 75-86.
[134] William James, *Collected Letters* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1935), p. 127.
[135] Fraser N. Watts, Rebecca Nye, and Sara B. Savage, *Psychology for Christian Ministry* (London New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 4-5.

1. ineffability (cannot be adequately expressed in words).
2. noetic (imparting knowledge).
3. transience (a brief, passing experience).
4. passivity (an overwhelming experience that happens *to* the subject).[136]

The Scottish anthropologist James Frazer (1854-1941), in his hugely influential *The Golden Bough,* developed an evolutionary account of human development in three progressive phases: beginning with belief in magic as a way of controlling the environment through organised religion which propitiated gods and spirits, then finally to rational scientific thought. He argued that 'in short, religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science.' The history of religions was for Frazer part of the fascinating evolution of humanity from magic and myth towards rationalism and science. Religious beliefs were important, Frazer thought, not so much for their content, as for their psychological significance.[137]

Like Frazer, the German Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) had a wide knowledge of comparative religion. Otto also understood religion in evolutionary terms, as a progress towards monotheism. Unlike Frazer, however, Otto's motivation was to defend religion from naturalistic interpretations. Otto admired Schleiermacher's recapturing of the sense of holiness lost at the Enlightenment, when he thought that religious sensibilities had been reduced to ethics. Religion, for Schleiermacher, which he defined as the 'sense and taste for the infinite', was based not on dogma but instead on *Anschauung und Gefühl* (intuition and feeling). The highest form of this, the sensation of union and absolute dependence, found its purest expression, he thought, in monotheism.[138] In response

[136] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 380-82. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139149822.012>
[137] James Frazer, *The Illustrated Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: The Softback Preview, 1996), pp. 218-20.
[138] F. L. Cross, 'Schleiermacher', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 1474.

to the 'cultured despisers' of religion of his age, sceptical of scriptural and ecclesial authority, Schleiermacher proposed to found religious truth claims on individual religious experience. True religion, he taught, emerged from the individuals immediate consciousness of the Deity, which he contrasted with conventional religion with its acceptance of the experience and thoughts of others.[139] Experience was now to adjudicate over the traditional theological authorities of scripture, tradition and reason. Experience, viewed as the source not the product of religion, was to form the empirical basis of valid knowledge of God.[140]

Otto's most famous book, *Das Heilige*,[141] first published in German in 1917 and translated into English in 1923 as *The Idea of the Holy*, has deeply influenced Western thinking about spirituality and interfaith dialogue. For Otto, the idea of 'the holy' transcends moral perfection in what he termed the 'numinous'.[142] Otto declares, unlike Schleiermacher's sense of 'feeling of dependence,' that the numinous is not analogous to any normal human experience and 'cannot be expressed by means of anything else.' It is *ganz Andere*, wholly other, only definable through itself. It is a mystery both terrifying and uniquely attractive and fascinating. Otto detected this stance even in the most primitive of religions.[143]

> The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane,' non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul

[139] Schleiermacher (1996), pp. 72-94.
[140] Daniel A. Madigan, 'When Experience Leads Us to Different Beliefs', *The Way Supplement*, Spirituality and religious experience, 93 (1988), 64-74.
[141] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: OUP, 1936).
[142] From the Latin numen (divine power), ibid. pp. 6-7.
[143] Ibid. pp. 9-41.

with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *Mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.[144]

Otto argues that all religions, to a greater and lesser degree, point to the numinous, to an ineffable reality beyond all religions. Where experience of the numinous is central, distinctive doctrinal differences between religions become secondary.[145] Authenticity, the truth value itself, is judged by the affective convictions generated. This also opens up the possibility of synchronising and personalising practices that 'work' from other religions and beliefs, to create a bespoke personalised religion. Robin Minney sees in the work of Otto tremendous possibilities for teaching of religious education that is freed from the 'shackles' of religious specificity. Spirituality, he claims, is 'much broader than religion, with a small but essential overlap.' More than this, he concludes from Otto, that 'the heart of religious experience is an encounter with an overpowering force which outstrips all the descriptions which are used of the supreme power in all religions.' The authority of tradition is thus relegated to 'second place.' In a similar way to the Reformation, Minney contests, spirituality has been democratised now that 'no priestly or doctrinal barrier is placed between the believer and God, or between student and the religion under study.'[146]

[144] Ibid. pp. 12-13.
[145] Jeff Astley, *SCM Study guide to Religious and Spiritual Experience* (London: SCM Press, 2020), ch 8.
[146] Minney (1992).

4.2. Theology and spirituality

For my part I want no religion of pure spirit, of pure internal experience. Basically, such a religion is a mere human invention, in which man ends up grasping only himself, instead of You. He plumbs only the shallow waters of his own spirit, and penetrates only his own poverty-stricken interior, instead of sounding the depths opened up by Your free word.

Karl Rahner[147]

The spiritual foundationalism that derives from the history of religions school, gives rise to a certain form of interfaith understanding, that pervades RE in the United Kingdom. It is, I argue, subtlety erosive of the distinctiveness of Christianity, and indeed of other religions, too. The Church of England report, *Presence and Engagement*, warns that the secular agenda of 'community cohesion and diversity', the language of 'Faith Communities', and 'interfaith dialogue', without an adequate grounding particularly in the theology of the Incarnation, Trinity and the Cross, risks undermining the confidence, identity and sustainability of the local church.[148] Our theological approach to other religions has important practical implications for the teaching of RE. One of the questions that is often asked by teachers is 'can we incorporate stories from other religions into a Godly Play room?' This could easily be done at a practical level, and indeed Islamic and Hindu stories have been developed in the style of Godly Play, but to incorporate them into the room either subsumes them into Christianity or implicitly treats all religions as manifestation of the same thing, a generic religious instinct.

Since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* during Vatican II, it has been official Catholic teaching, and broadly accepted by mainstream Protestant denominations, to discern a common seeking after truth and to honour what is good in other

[147] Karl Rahner, *Encounters with Silence* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine Press, 1999), p. 70.
[148] Church of England, *Presence and Engagement: The Churches' Task in a Multi Faith Society* (London: Archbishops' Council, 2005), p. 78.

religions. This was not new, St Paul's address at the Areopagus (Acts 17.16-29) expressed the same position that the religious instincts of humanity are, at least, an attempt to reach out to a super-sensible reality. *Nostra Aetate* states, 'the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these [non-Christian] religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.'[149] Probably the most famous expression of this instinct in Catholic theology is Karl Rahner's notion of the 'anonymous Christian.' Though Rahner is clear that all salvation is achieved as the salvation of Christ, 'because there is no other,' those who give, 'even if it be ever so confusedly – the Glory to God should be thus designated [as anonymous Christians].'[150] Rahner's, perhaps unfortunate, term refers to the instinct that all human beings are 'always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it.'[151] What Rahner is referring to is that sense in which as humans we are always reaching out beyond towards the infinite. To describe this fundamental aspect of our nature, Rahner used the technical German term *Vorgriff*, which roughly translates as 'pre-apprehension' or 'anticipation', an openness and a reaching out beyond the immediate.[152] Unlike many contemporary understandings of spirituality, Rahner is not just speaking about a special affective disposition but an orientation at the heart of our being that involves a transcendent reaching towards God. This, Rahner insists, is an ordinary part of all human experience. Rahner's theological anthropology proposes a middle way between what he characterises as the two main forms of Protestant philosophy of religion: the

[149] Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992), p. 739.
[150] Karl Rahner, 'Anonymous Christians', in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), pp. 390-98 (p. 391).
[151] Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 53.
[152] Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner* (London: Fount, 1997), pp. 3-14.

'history of religions' school of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner. Rahner argues that the school of Schleiermacher tends towards reducing God to the meaning of humanity. For the history of religions school, Christianity becomes merely a subset of religious experience: 'there can be no revelation of the living God at a privileged spot of human history, with the exception of the others.'[153] He thus contrasts the history of religions school with the approach of Barth and Brunner where, Rahner argues, 'God is the *No* addressed to humanity.' Barth had no place for natural theology and saw religion as sinful humanity's attempt to grasp God, leading only to distortions and idolatry. Rahner sees in this Protestant neo-orthodoxy a view of an utterly fallen human reality in which before saving grace, all is 'absolute darkness and contradiction' and where there is only 'godless shadows' of everything finite.[154] For Barth, dialogue with non-Christian religions is virtually impossible.[155] In contrast, what Rahner proposes is a stance that sees authenticity in all authentic religious instincts, but also recognises that the fullness of revelation is God's word in Christ. Thus, whilst 'anonymous Christian' is an awkward term, it does manage to hold the tension between the uniqueness of Christ as the definitive Word of God and the authenticity of non-Christian spirituality.

Wakefield's concern about 'History of Religions' spirituality, in terms of the Christian tradition of piety, is that it is both content-less and entirely other worldly. Our 'spirituality' is not disembodied but has an electro-chemical manifestation in our bodies. A spirituality which is entirely about the 'inward person' or the 'interior life', he insists, is not sufficiently grounded in society or the physical creation. Wakefield argues, 'confused syncretism and retreat into "pietistic" and bigoted

[153] Rahner, *Hearer of the Word* (1994), p. 155.
[154] Ibid. p. 19.
[155] F. L. Cross, 'Barth', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 163-64.

sentimentality are both to be deplored. Let heart speak to heart, but there must be an enlargement of the mind, which demands its own asceticism.'[156]

The difficulty with a subjective interior notion of spirituality for Christian spirituality, Thatcher argues, is that for Jews and Christians the holy is most often found in the ordinary and common: bread, wine, water, light and oil, rather than the numinous and uncommon. He argues, 'Those who identify spirituality with a non-material dimension to life seem to have become prey to a philosophical and religious dualism which ignores the material conditions which are needed for a spiritual life to be a possibility'.[157] Even if we are reaching out to 'super-sensible realities,' as Wakefield suggests, the way we do so as human beings is through our psycho-sensible selves.

At a profound level, the notion of 'pure' experience, unmediated by culture is, however, as Nicholas Lash points out, highly problematic. He insists from a social constructionism/contextualism perspective, that all experience is mediated by language and culture. The idea of pure experience is illusionary.[158] Individual spiritual experience can become idiosyncratic when removed from a communal context. Religious traditions provide a context and shared language system that roots individual experience within the corporate wisdom of a tradition. Although formal religion may be secondary to a primal universal spiritual experience, it remains important as a means of making sense of these feelings in the construction of a stance for living.[159] Without religious community, Lash contends, spirituality cannot attain depth. It is not that a common 'raw experience' is described or interpreted differently by different religious traditions, but that these traditions

[156] Wakefield (1983).
[157] Thatcher, pp. 3-4.
[158] Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (London: SCM Press, 1988).
[159] For an important critique of such an assumption see, L. Philip Barnes, 'What Is Wrong with the Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education?', *Religious Education*, 96 (2001), 445-461; See also, more generally, Astley (2020), ch. 8.

experience differently. Thatcher argues, 'the belief in a God who becomes flesh provides the ultimate refusal of a theology or theory of human nature which does not begin with embodiment. It is far from obvious that spirituality without theology is even coherent'.[160]

4.3. Researching Spirituality

During the 1890s, William James's student at Harvard, Edwin Diller Starbuck began systematically investigating experiences of religious conversion. However, the psychoanalytic work of Freud and the behaviourism of J. B. Watson overshadowed this early research into religious experience. The renewal of interest in *children's* spirituality began with the Swedish child psychologist, Göte Klingberg, who explored the religious experience of 630 children aged 9-13 years. Klingberg asked the children to write an essay beginning 'once when I thought about God…'. Klingberg discovered that these essays fell into four categories of experience: distress, nature, moral and worship.[161] In 1962 David and Sally Elkind, an American husband and wife team, published a study of 144 slightly older American teenagers based on Klingberg's study but asking more experientially framed questions, including, 'when do you feel closest to God?' and 'have you ever had a particular experience when you felt especially close to God?'[162] Compared with the Swedish study, where church was the bottom of the list as a place of encounter of religious experience, in the American study church was top of the list - perhaps reflecting the more secularised culture of Sweden? A further study by Elkind *et al.* found that as

[160] Thatcher, p. 4.
[161] Gote Klingberg and Elise Boulding, 'A Study of Religious Experience in Children from 9 to 13 Years of Age', *Religious Education,* 54 (1959), 211-16.
[162] David Elkind and Sally Elkind, 'Varieties of Religious Experience in Young Adolescents', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 2 (1962), pp. 102-12.

children moved through puberty there was a shift from a formulaic to a more conversational style of prayer. This finding coincided with the age that the New England school had typically identified as the age of conversion experiences.[163]

In 1969 Alister Hardy the recently retired professor of Zoology at Oxford, set up the Religious Research Unit. Hardy expressed an interest in the religious experiences that seemed to him to be common in the lives of ordinary people. Following a public appeal, thousands of people began writing in describing their experiences which Hardy began to categorise. What was not clear was how representative these self-reported experiences were of the general public.[164]

Research seeking to sample the general population was initiated by David Hay and Ann Morisy, who first took to the streets of Nottingham to interview passers-by in 1975. Further UK research through the National Opinion Poll and Gallup Poll organisations revealed that a third of the British adult population reported having some form of spiritual experience, with women and older individuals tending to report higher levels. The research showed significant regional differences varying from 46% of respondents in Wales to as low as 23% in Yorkshire and Humberside, figures that broadly mirrored church attendance. The reporting did not, however, straightforwardly correlate with religious practice, with around a quarter of self-reporting atheists and agnostics recounting having 'an awareness of a presence or a power', compared to only 56% of churchgoers generally and in the case of practising Anglicans dropping to 33%. There are two possible reasons for this relatively low reporting amongst more liturgical denominations: First, Hay suggests, the questions used by surveyors were often influenced by the Protestant traditions of New England and secondly, a higher number of conventional churchgoers may be attending for predominantly aesthetic and social reasons. There is, Hay concludes,

[163] Cf. Hay and Nye (2006), pp. 50-52.
[164] Hay (1987), pp. 103-19; See also Astley (2020), ch. 2 and pp. 28, 62-3.

'no reason to suppose that people who are in touch with the experiential dimension of religion will necessarily be churchgoers. Nevertheless, coming from a background that has words and traditions that respect this area of human experience perhaps allows people to be open to it.'

Edward Robinson, who had succeeded Alister Hardy at the Religious Experience Unit in Oxford, noticed that a large proportion of the around five thousand accounts of religious experience that had been collected were reminiscences from childhood. Sometimes these experiences were from very early in life. What struck Robinson was how vivid these experiences remained for people and were often referred back to in later life.[165] Although Robinson's research demonstrated the significance of childhood spiritual recollections to adults, sometimes in old age, such long-term memories were susceptible to the refinement of repeated reflection and re-telling.

In the later 1980s, two small scale American studies by David Heller[166] and Joanne Taylor[167] began to interview children directly about their spiritual life, from the perspective of the Christian tradition. In the early 90s, research into children's spirituality broadened its perspective to take account of a more secular and multi-religious environment. In 1992 Robert Coles published the findings of a large-scale study of children from diverse religious backgrounds, *The Spiritual Life of Children*,[168] which demonstrated a spiritual awareness often missed by those looking for the correct use of religious language. (But if we stop investigating the use of religious language and concepts when researching spirituality, what shall we look for?) Coles discerned a universal spiritual awareness. The launch of the *International Journal of*

[165] Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood* (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Unit, 1977).
[166] David Heller, *The Children's God* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
[167] JoAnne Taylor, *Innocent Wisdom: Children as Spiritual Guides* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989).
[168] Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (London: Harper Collins, 1992).

Children's Spirituality by Clive and Jane Erriker in the 1990s, together with the work of Elaine McCreery,[169] broadened the investigation of children's spirituality in the UK through listening more closely for the spiritual experiences of children in their own terms.[170]

4.4. Relational Consciousness

Maybe 'child protection' policies should include measures to protect the withering of children's spiritual potential!

Rebecca Nye [171]

As the relationship between religion and spirituality has traditionally been considered close, most research into children's spirituality has focussed on the use of religious language. Today, there is an emerging multidisciplinary consensus that spirituality, whatever ultimate existential sense we might make of it, is a natural human phenomenon.[172] Human beings from childhood are found to be naturally spiritual.[173] This has led to more recent investigations that focus less on religious language and concepts, and look instead for the awareness, perception, and responses of children in everyday life. This accumulated research has taught us about the importance of, listening to and taking seriously children's spiritual experiences, and to recognise that spirituality is not *dependent* upon religion.[174]

The highly influential research of David Hay and Rebecca Nye stands out in the field of researching children's spirituality. Hay and Nye veer towards an

[169] Elaine McCreery, 'Talking to Children About Things Spiritual', in *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*, ed. by Ron Best (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 196-215.
[170] Hay (1987), pp. 49-62.
[171] Nye (2009), p. 9.
[172] For an overview, see Hyde (2008), pp. 23-44.
[173] David Hay and Rebecca Nye, 'Investigating Children's Spirituality: The Need for a Fruitful Hypothesis', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 1 (1996), 6-16.
[174] Hyde (2008), pp. 46-60.

affective understanding of spirituality, from the perspective of a universal pre-linguistic sensibility.

> The 'knowing' out of which religion grows is different from knowledge *about* religion, in that it is much more akin to sensory or affective awareness. Whilst not divisible from cognition, it is logically prior to it. If the Oxford biologist Alister Hardy is right, it is an awareness that has evolved through natural selection during the course of biological evolution because it has survival value for the individual.[175]

In *The Spirit of the Child,* they developed a grammar, or geography, for identifying children's spirituality in terms of awareness, mystery, and value sensing. Hay and Nye termed this awareness, 'relational consciousness.'[176] Nye states that;

> The rich natural spiritual capacity of childhood – spirituality [is] something 'already there', to be cherished, rather than something to be added on. This means learning to view spirituality as something we expect in every child, rather than something unusual or precocious... sometimes we seem to behave as if spiritual life can only begin once a child has been filled up, by us, with enough religious knowledge.[177]

What is tragic, they suggest, is the way in which this natural spiritual awareness aptitude is often shut down in contemporary society. There is, they found a 'communal nervousness and lack of trust in our general awareness as a source of reliable knowledge.'

Hay and Nye described a 'geography of the spirit' to identify and describe the ways in which children spoke about their spirituality. This understanding that spirituality is something biologically innate and prior to culture and language is important. If Hay and Nye are correct, in a culture that no longer 'speaks Christian' it is important to find ways of identifying spiritual sensibilities in the ordinary. Hay cautions us not to be caught up with the assumption that spirituality can *only* be identified in the use of specialised religious language. He developed with Nye a

[175] Hay and Nye (1996), p. 144.
[176] Hay and Nye (2006), pp. 63-78.
[177] Nye (2009), pp. xi-xii; See also, Hay and Nye (2006), 33-48.

framework for identifying spiritual awareness in children brought up in a secularised culture, based on previous research in child psychology and spirituality. The aim of the framework was to 'discover in which areas of language and behaviour initial 'sparks of spirituality' may be found.'[178]

Hay and Nye - Categories of spiritual sensitivity [179]	
Awareness-sensing	Here-and-now
	Tuning
	Flow
	Focussing
Mystery-sensing	Wonder and Awe
	Imagination
Value-sensing	Delight and despair
	Ultimate goodness
	Meaning

Awareness Sensing

Awareness sensing refers to a reflexive attentiveness towards attention, or the sensation of awareness. As children find it difficult to articulate such awareness, Nye and Hay identified four sub-categories of awareness that they saw resonated with children's experience.

Here and Now

The first sense of awareness is the experience of being fully in the present moment, the here and now. This attentiveness, which is at the core of Buddhist

[178] R. Nye and D. Hay, 'Identifying Children's Spirituality: How Do You Start without a Starting Point?', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 18 (1996), 145.
[179] Hay and Nye (2006), p. 65; Nye and Hay (1996), pp. 146-51.

spirituality, popularised in the form of mindfulness, but also found in Christian practice and very natural to children.

Tuning

Tuning is the sense of being caught up in a heightened aesthetic experience of belonging, being caught up in a piece of music, feeling 'at one' with nature or an intense sense of belonging.

Flow

Flow is what Csikszentmihalyi identified as the sense of being caught up in a sense of activity managing itself, or a mastered activity that moves from conscious struggle to unconscious mastery; the mastery of flow of a skier, rock climber, musician or child who has mastered riding a bike.[180]

Focussing

Focussing is what Eugene Gendlin described as the 'felt sense' of a situation or embodied knowing. Such embodied awareness is common to many mediation techniques and is, Gendlin suggests, perhaps more natural to young children before they have become inducted into Cartesian intellectualism.[181]

Mystery Sensing

By Mystery sensing, Hay and Nye are referring, in contrast to the previous categories, to the experience of transcendence or, better they suggest, encounter with mystery. Mystery is that which is not merely unknown but in principle is incomprehensible.[182]

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[180] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975).
[181] Eugene T. Gendlin, *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning: A Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subjective*, 2nd edn (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997).
[182] Karl Rahner, 'The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology', in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), pp. 36-73.

Wonder and Awe

In the *Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto had identified the experience of sacred mystery as fascination or wonder, combined with fear or awe.[183] For the young child almost anything can be a source of awe and wonder, and the concept of an 'ultimate mystery' has no meaning. As the child matures, they become aware of rational scientific explanations for physical phenomena, potentially repressing the mysteriousness of existence and the sense of real mystery. The role of the religious educator, and Hay suggests the good science teacher, is to keep this sense of awe open.

Imagination

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, to experience mystery necessarily requires the exercise of the imagination. As Hay states, children have a powerful capacity to enter and enjoy fantasy in story and play. This ability is an essential pre-requisite for entering into the metaphors, symbols, liturgies and narratives of religion.

Value sensing

Here Hay is referring to Margaret Donaldson's concept of value sensing in relation to feeling. Donaldson noted that the degree of affect people place on things is a measure of value. Donaldson suggests that this sense of value leads to the development of conscience and morality in children.[184]

Delight and despair

The emotions related to value-sensing are often reported as profound, Hay and Nye proposed. Donaldson suggests that value sensing is related to the notion of

[183] Otto (1936), pp. 5-41.
[184] Margaret Donaldson, *Human Minds: An Exploration* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 141-58.

worship. Children intensely express their ideas of value in delight and despair. In terms of Christian spirituality prayerful attention to these feelings forms the basis of the Ignatian discernment practice of attending to consolation and desolation.[185]

Ultimate goodness

The American sociologist Peter Berger suggests that the sense of ultimate goodness is conveyed to the child initially through the experience of the comforting presence of the mother that has the power to comfort the distressed child. This feeling of omnipotent all-powerful goodness of the parent in early life can be translated into a belief in the ultimate nature of reality, a 'trust in being' itself.[186] Or, in the words of Mother Julian, 'For his goodness enfolds every one of his creatures and all his blessed works, eternally and surpassingly. For he himself is eternity, and has made us for himself alone, has restored us by his blessed passion, and keeps us in his love. And all because he is goodness.'[187]

Meaning

The final category that Hay and Nye identified was meaning-making and meaning-sensing. 'Who am I? Where do I belong? What is my purpose? To whom or what am I connected or responsible?' This has been the predominant interest of researchers with a more cognitive interest, such as James Fowler.[188] This search for and discovery of meaning, Hay and Nye assert, 'may in many cases be the secondary products of the spiritual stirrings found in awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing.'[189]

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[185] Harvey D. Egan, 'Consolations, Desolations', in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 94-95.
[186] Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 72-73.
[187] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 69.
[188] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1981).
[189] The above is a summary of Hay and Nye (1996), pp. 146-51; Hay and Nye (2006), pp. 65-78.

4.5. Spirituality and Godly Play

To conclude, I have argued above that the contemporary focus on psychological understandings of spirituality as an extraordinary interior affective disposition is insufficient for an authentic Christian understanding. Such psychological frameworks may satisfy what the English educational establishment means by spirituality, but this falls somewhat short of its fullest meaning in the Christian tradition, where spirituality embraces not only the affections but the practice of life. It is a holistic stance for living that must form the whole person (Rom 12.2). Wakefield alerts us to beware of individualistic understandings of spirituality that lack their embeddedness in community and practice. As Karl Rahner argued, 'spirituality not only includes love for our close or distant neighbour, but a love which today is obviously more than a private affair and takes the form of a real struggle for more justice and freedom in society; only then is it real Christian love and not an introverted cultivation of one's own precious soul.'[190]

In *Children's Spirituality* Nye outlines six criteria, set out in an acrostic, for nurturing children's spirituality, which she suggests can be used to evaluate educational practices.[191]

1. **S**pace: A conducive physical and emotional space.
2. **P**rocess: Paying attention to how things happen over product.
3. **I**magination: Allowing space for creativity and imagination.
4. **R**elationship: Paying attention to community and connection with God and others.
5. **I**ntimacy: Creating safe space where people can come close to one another and to God.
6. **T**rust: Learning the knowing of faith.

[190] Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1974), p. 82.
[191] Nye (2009), pp. 41-56.

Nye recognises these six criteria as being embodied in Godly Play.[192] The prepared environment and attentiveness to process create a space where children are free to exercise their religious imagination in a safe environment. The communal nature and attentiveness to community in Godly Play mitigates against an over emphasis on individual interiority. By inviting children to enter the thought world of Christianity, Godly Play invites children to explore further, or test, their spiritual intuitions within a particular tradition. In one sense, Godly Play by only presenting Christianity (inevitably including much that is derived from Judaism) could be seen by some educationalists as either diminishing other religions or not respecting the autonomy of the child. Instead, I argue, by only presenting Christianity there is a greater coherence to the child, who is invited, but not coerced, to enter into a particular shape of making sense of life. It can do this in a way that does not try to incorporate or pass judgement on other religions, but rather respects them, by not placing them within the Christian 'language system' of the room. It is then the work of the child, growing up in our complex, diverse, multi-cultural and multi-faith, world, to make what sense they will of this particular way that millions of people, all over the globe, experience and interpret the world.

[192] Ibid. pp. 66-69.

5. Theological Themes in Godly Play

Theology matters but is too often neglected when thinking about the shape of catechesis. In 1980, Mary Boys complained that the methods of church based religious education were often poorly developed and seen merely as a delivery system for a form of simplified theology for the laity. Lacking consensus about its very nature, she laments that Christian education is too often, 'prone to bandwagons, bandages and gimmicks.'[193] Forty years on this would not be an unfair assessment of what little is left of church based Christian education in England. This charge, however, cannot in my view, be levelled at the work of either Cavalletti or Berryman.

Godly Play is unusual in having a well thought through theological shape deriving to a large degree from Berryman's own reflections as shaped by the currents of mid-twentieth century mainstream theology. In this chapter I will examine four of the main theological themes underpinning the distinctive approach of Godly Play and in particular how they flow from and differ to some extent from its predecessor, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS).

[193] Mary C. Boys, *Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education: A Study of the Kerygmatic Era* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1980), p. 278.

5.1. Imagination

'One of the reasons the church is in disarray today is because the adults are not deeply rooted and yet open and creative about how they think about being Christian.'

Jerome Berryman[194]

Imagination is at the heart of Godly Play, and together with play forms the core of Berryman's foundational book *Godly Play*.[195] Berryman sees imagination as fundamental to Godly Play and to the theology of childhood.[196] Montessori described imagination as a 'force for the discovery of truth.'[197] For Berryman, to stifle imagination and creativity is to harm healthy religious development.

> The imagination is needed to envision ways of moving beyond where one is developmentally. If one's religious education's goals is to help foster faith development, then the imagination is of paramount importance. The imagination does not deserve mistrust, but consciously creative and faithful stewardship of our freedom to be creatures created in the image of God.[198]

At the centre of Godly Play is the imaginative encounter with the Christian language system. Through the use of group storytelling, the adult catechist invites children to enter imaginatively into selected Christian stories using representational artefacts. Through the open conversations of the 'wondering time', children are encouraged to think laterally and make connections. In the 'response time' they are then invited, through play and art, to work independently in response to the narratives that have heard. Imagination and play are two linked concepts at the very heart of Berryman's method. Following his discussion of play in *Godly Play*, Berryman devotes a chapter to the imagination.[199] This emphasis on play and

[194] Berryman (2009), p. 25.
[195] Berryman, *Godly Play* (1991).
[196] Ibid. p. 131.
[197] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind* (1967), p. 177.
[198] Berryman, *The Search* (2013), p. 193.
[199] Berryman (1991), pp. 110 – 35.

imagination is a distinctive feature of Godly Play when compared with its Montessori antecedents. The importance of imagination is also reflected in the subtitle of Jerome Berryman's eight-volume *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*: 'An imaginative method for presenting scripture stories to children.'[200] Although Berryman, characteristically, does not offer a systematic theoretical account of either play or imagination in relation to Godly Play, he cites several authors who have influenced his thinking.

5.1.1. The Religious Imagination of Childhood

Epiphanies of the imagination are a common experience of childhood and adolescence becoming less so, as Wordsworth lamented, in adult life.[201] Children's imaginations are vivid and lively and the connections that children often offer profound, resonant and prophetic spiritual insights. In *Surprised by Joy*,[202] C.S.Lewis describes three childhood moments of imaginative intensity, which he would later downplay as, at best, a reflection of genuine religious experience.[203] Was Lewis right to dismiss his childhood experiences? Can the imagination be trusted? Is the religious imagination, filled with its myths, 'mere metaphors' and 'empty symbols' a conveyer of truth?[204]

[200] Berryman (2002).
[201] In the UK the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre has amassed an extensive archive of interviews which supports the view of the roots of religious sentiment in childhood. See, 'Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Lampeter <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/> [accessed 10 September 2021]; Robinson (1977); David Hay, *God's Biologist: A Life of Alister Hardy* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011).
[202] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955).
[203] Mary. Warnock, *Imagination*, (London: Faber, 1976), p. 208.
[204] Cf. Hardy's childhood experience, recounted in Hay (2011), pp. 42-44

5.1.2. The Imagination

The modern English word 'imagination' is of Anglo-Norman origin, via Old French from Latin *imaginatio(n-*), from the verb *imaginari* 'to picture to oneself', and ultimately from the noun *imago*,- 'image'. The imagination is defined as 'the power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects and situations, and those constructed by mentally combining or projecting images of previously experienced qualities, objects, and situations.' Or, more precisely, in modern philosophy 'the power or capacity by which the mind integrates sensory data in the process of perception.'[205]

Berryman takes his view of imagination mainly from the work of psychologist, Robert W. Weisberg.[206] Having spent many years investigating views of imagination, Weisberg determined a middle way between the genius view of leaps of insight and the behaviourist view that when we encounter a novel situation, we simply generalise from our past experience to find a novel solution. Weisberg inferred, from numerous studies of creativity, that creativity was not the preserve of a few geniuses but was generally the result of lots of hard work leading to mastery of a skill. Weisberg concluded that we all possess the ability to adapt to new situations, though these skills differ between individuals. Berryman concludes from Weisberg that there is little evidence that creativity is a special type of thinking, or that creative thinking is somehow extraordinary. 'One of the basic misunderstandings that gets in the way of noticing how fundamental the creative process is for human beings is the assumption that we are not required to think creatively in our everyday world.'[207]

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[205] Oxford English Dictionary, *"Imagination, N."* (Oxford University Press).
[206] Robert W. Weisberg, *Creativity: Genius and Other Myths* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1986); Robert W. Weisberg, *Creativity: Beyond the Myth of Genius* (New York: Freeman, 1993).
[207] Berryman (1991), p. 130.

5.1.3. Imagination and Creativity

Vygotsky contrasts imaginative thought with reproductive thinking. As actions are repeated they develop habits that facilitate adaptation. The frequently repeated practice of the musician lays a track in the placidity of the mind. Repeating the action, or mental activity, reinforces and aids mastery. These impressions are not static 'like objects in the bottom of a basket,' but dynamic processes.[208] The human brain not only stores and retrieves previous experiences, but it also creatively re-works elements of past experiences to generate new ideas and behaviours. This, Vygotsky holds, is the basis of all human creativity and is what allows us to have a future orientation that has allowed us to adapt to rapid change. Vygotsky agrees with Weisberg that creativity is the rule rather than the exception. The creative process, Vygotsky states, is at the heart of child play and has the deepest significance for their development. Using what they have seen and heard children creatively re-work and combine experience to construct a new reality.[209]

The associations made by the imagination are a function of emotion as well as reason. All ideas, Ribot[210] asserts, have an 'element of affect, so that it would be complete nonsense to believe in the constancy of any idea existing in a purely intellectual state, in all its dryness and coldness.' Dissimilar images can be affectively associated. 'Happiness, sadness, love, hatred, surprise, boredom, pride, fatigue, and so on, may become the centres of gravity that hold together images or events that have no rational relationship to each other, but are imprinted with the same emotional sign or mark.'[211] These affective similarities, conditioned by personal

[208] Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, 'Imagination and Creativity in Childhood', *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology,* 42 (2004), 7-97 (p. 26).
[209] Ibid. pp. 7-9.
[210] Théodule Armand Ribot and Albert Heyem Nachmen Baron, 'Essay on the Creative Imagination' (Chicago; London: Open Court, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906).
[211] Ribot, quoted in, Vygotsky (2004), pp. 19-23.

experience or culture and history, need not have any intrinsic logic yet have their own 'internal logic' in the imagination.[212]

Like many contemporary philosophical commentators on the topic, Vygotsky gives no credence to unmediated religious experience. All we can know, even from fairy tales, he insists, can only be built upon 'impressions made by the real world.' The power of an individual's imagination thus depends upon the variety of a person's previous experience. 'The more a child sees, hears, and experiences, the more he knows and assimilates… the more productive will be the operation of his imagination.' We are, however, capable of conceptualising what we ourselves have not directly experienced, from the vantage point of our own narrow experience, through affective empathy. Humans thus have the ability to imaginatively assimilate the experience of others and understand not only their reasoning but also their social and emotional world. Thus, Vygotsky states, 'If, in the first case, imagination is based on experience, in the second case experience itself is based on imagination.'

Children in deep play display 'the most authentic, truest creativity.'[213] However, though the emotional roots of imagination are as strong in children as adults, the child's tolerance of fantasy, he argues, is often mistaken for a greater richness of imagination. But Vygotsky asserts that children's imaginations are immature and less well developed than those of adults.

> The child can imagine vastly less than the adult, but he has greater faith in the products of his imagination and controls them less, and thus imagination, in the everyday, vulgar sense of this word, that is, what is unreal and made up, is of course greater in the child than in the adult. However, not only is the material that the imagination operates on to create its constructs poorer in a child than in an adult, but the nature of the combinations that this material enters into – their quality and variety – is significantly more impoverished than that of adults.[214]

[212] Ibid. p. 23.
[213] Ibid. pp. 11-17.
[214] Ibid. p. 34.

It is only towards adolescence, Vygotsky concludes, that imaginative ability and the ability to reason reach their maturity. The imagination must, he insists, be nurtured through an educational process, alongside other cognitive functions.[215]

Mary Warnock agrees that imagination is both ordinary and practical, it enables us to recognise things in the world as familiar and to make sense of the everyday experiences of life. It is both an everyday tool of the mundane and the wings of our most far-fetched perceptions of reality.[216] As soon as we are conscious, meanings spring up around us through our imagination. At every level we use imagination to apply concepts to things. It is imagination that links the mental objects or ideas that are in my head with that which I perceive to be in the outside world, and thus render it familiar and therefore manageable. The imaginative perception of reality, Warnock also confirms, 'comes from the emotions as much as from the reason, from the heart as much as from the head.' All of us use language to form images of what we are not experiencing in the moment, we talk about the past, the future or of an ideal world.[217] At this level, the imagination is tidying up our experiences bringing order to what we perceive and setting them into a framework.

As well as rendering the world familiar, at another level, though sporadically, the imagination can render our world unfamiliar and mysterious. It is as if, Warnock suggests, as our imagination is at work tidying up the chaos, below the level of consciousness, it is messing it all up again. 'It may suggest that there are vast unexplored areas, huge spaces of which we may get only an occasional awe-inspiring glimpse, questions raised by experience about whose answers we can only with hesitation speculate.'[218]

[215] Ibid. pp. 31-39.
[216] Warnock (1976), p. 13.
[217] Ibid. pp. 96-202.
[218] Ibid. p. 208.

5.1.4. Ancient Distrust of Imagination

Today imagination is largely a warm positive word which we associate with art, science and creativity. In a fast moving, innovative modern culture, imagination is seen as a positive thing, the very driving force of progress. But to more settled ancient societies, where everyone was expected to know their place, imagination could be a dangerous attribute. Both Greek and Hebrew thought was suspicious of the imagination, portraying it as a dangerous force causing people to be cut off from the immediacy of the moment. Plato assigned a subordinate role of the imagination to logic. Egan observed that the Platonic sense of the inferiority of imagination has influenced modern curricula to the extent that they are be focussed on the accumulation of knowledge.[219]

This ancient distrust of the imagination was inherited by the Christian Church. Augustine and Aquinas would both see a link between imagination, idolatry and deception.[220] The distrust of the imagination was reinforced by the iconoclasm of the Reformation and can still be found in more conservative Reformed thought. In English this distrust was reinforced by the King James version of the Bible, the standard English Protestant translation for 350 years, which translated various Hebrew and Greek words; *Yeser* (Gen 8.21; Deut 31.21), *Sheriruth* (Jer 3.17; 7.24; 11.8) *mahashebeth* (Prov 6.18; Lam 3.60), διαλογισμοῖς, (Rm 1.21), διανοίᾳ (Luke 1.51), γνώσεως (II Cor 10.5), all by the English word 'imagination'.[221] Thus, on a daily basis, in the recitation of the *Magnificat* at Evensong, Anglican worshippers would hear that God had 'scattered the proud in the imagination [διανοίᾳ] of their hearts.'[222]

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[219] Kieran Egan, *Imagination in Teaching and Learning: Ages 8 to 15* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 15.
[220] Kathrine Sarah Bruce, 'The Vital Importance of the Imagination in the Contemporary Preaching Event' (PhD, Durham University, 2013), pp. 37 - 46.
[221] John McIntyre, 'Imagination', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 283-84 (p. 283).
[222] Book of Common Prayer (1662).

In chapter six of *Godly Play*, Berryman compares the ambiguity of imagination in the Yahwistic creation account in Genesis 2 and the Greek myth of Prometheus. The second creation story can be read as a human usurping of divine power. In Greek mythology, Prometheus, whose name means 'fore-thinker,' was one with the ability to envision or imagine, who encroached on divine prerogative by the theft of fire.[223] Berryman draws a contrast in both traditions between the earthiness of humans and their likeness to the image of God, or gods.[224] Both Jews and Greeks, he argues, consider the imagination as filling humanity with a pride that can burn out the human spirit. He points to the rabbinical *Midrash Genesis Rabba,* 12 which explores this fundamental dilemma of human nature. Berryman summarises, 'If God formed people from the elements of the superior world, there would be no peace because the superior spirit would overcome the earthly. If God formed human beings only from the earth, there would be no peace either. The earthly would constantly threaten the spiritual.'[225] Berryman argues that the story of Jesus resolves this dilemma. 'The incarnation of the Logos is the story in which we find our story… Christ stimulates our imagination to know the God no one has ever seen by restoring God's image, which we had at the beginning but lost at the Fall.'[226] We are, he says, 'an unstable mixture of spirit and clay. Neither heaven nor earth can dominate without destroying the other part of who we are. We are an ambiguity. Our very structure renders the imagination ambiguous.'[227]

[223] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1988).
[224] Berryman (1991), pp. 111 – 14; Egan (1992), p. 13.
[225] Berryman (1991), p. 112.
[226] Ibid. p. 113; Here Berryman is drawing on, Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).
[227] Berryman (1991), p. 113.

5.1.5. Imagination as revelation

Many of the architects of the modern age, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Wagner, Marx, Freud and Sartre, considered religion as a delusion of the imagination.[228] Feuerbach regarded religion as simply a projection of our human nature onto the screen of the heavens, 'the dream of the human mind.'[229] In a similar way, Sartre dismissed the religious imagination, 'the art of the imagination is a magical one. It is an incantation designed to produce the object of one's thought, the thing one desires, in a manner one can take possession of it. I can stop the existence of the unreal object of imagination at any time.'[230]

Green argues that through the influence of Kant and Hegel there grew a polarity between the rationalism of the Enlightenment, characterised by reason, science and the precision of philosophy, and the reaction of Romanticism. For Francis Bacon, language should display a rigorous self-discipline to match the empirical method. Metaphors and other 'ornaments' of language led only to obscuring the truth. The notion of 'imaginative truth' was thus a contradiction in terms. The analytic tradition in philosophy was intent on finding a logically perfect form of language: a form of words, matching the precision of mathematics, where words would correspond without ambiguity to the real world; a pure relation between words and things.[231]

In sharp contrast, the Romantics exalted the imagination to dizzy heights. The fullness of truth was only accessible to those who could feel deeply enough. In both the Enlightenment and in Romantic thought, however, access to truth was reserved for an elite. In reaction to rationalism, Romanticism came to see imagination as the

[228] Berryman (2013), p. 191.
[229] Green (1998), p. 23.
[230] Quoted in, McIntyre (1983).
[231] Paul D. L. Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 14 – 22.

supreme human faculty that linked us to the divine. For Fichte, 'the whole operation of the human spirit proceeds from the imagination' and all reality is produced by it.[232] Following Schelling and Fichte, Coleridge rejected the notion that an idea could be known by pure reason in itself [*ding-an-sich*].[233] For Coleridge symbols are indispensable. 'An idea, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve apparent contradictions.'[234] Imagination, Coleridge insisted, was no second-best form of truth but the 'mediatory power' organising reason and images into a 'system of symbols.'[235]

In the post-modern age, there is a new openness to image and imagination. But this openness has led to a sometimes incoherent and fragmentary vision. Avis observes that postmodernity is as inhospitable to a realist (reality-referring, truth bearing) concept of imaginative truth as were the thinkers of the Enlightenment. Although postmodernity privileges image over discourse, it has lost faith in inherent order, any underlying reality, any metanarrative. 'In postmodernity, everything has the potential to become a symbol, but nothing is a symbol that is transcendent.'[236]

5.1.6. Metaphor and Imagination

Modern philosophers of language see that metaphorical speech cannot be substituted without loss by non-metaphorical terms. Metaphors live in the interplay of the imagination making accessible something that would otherwise lie beyond language.[237] Astley speaks of the way that metaphors offer the possibility of 'a form of stereoscopic vision, in which not only two words but "two worlds" are seen

[232] Garrett Green, *Imagining God* (1989), p. 16.
[233] For an extended study of Coleridge's education thinking, see Eric Daniels, 'The Educational Thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Studied in the Light of His Own Times' (MEd, Durham, 1968).
[234] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 156.
[235] Green (1989), pp. 9-20.
[236] Avis (1999), pp. 23-24.
[237] Green (1989), pp. 127-34.

together and we are jolted into spotting similarities that we had not previously noticed.'[238] 'A good metaphor' Janet Soskice argues, 'may not be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new possibilities of vision.'[239] Christians, she observes, particularly when talking about the ineffable God, circle around in metaphors.[240] Paul Avis states that it is primarily through the imagination in metaphor, symbol and story that we are brought into living contact with the divine. The true nature of Christianity can neither be understood nor lived without the power of imagination. The truth of Christianity is not contained in propositions, but in the interplay of images. 'The deeper study of the of biblical images, parables and symbolic narrative, at which the early Fathers excelled,' Avis argues, 'is more commensurate with the character of divine revelation.'[241] Sallie McFague argues further, that when theology becomes conceptual and abstract, belief and life become separated and fail to compel the heart.[242] The systematic formulations and creedal statements, though helpful for clarification, are secondary to the narrative, metaphor and poetry.[243] The stories and metaphors are the deep mines of Christian meaning. Avis states that 'all the really important affirmations of the Christian faith are expressed in mythic form.' (Myths in this sense are not mere phantasy but story-metaphors or consolations of symbolism in narrative sequence.)[244] The point of the narratives of the Bible, including the Gospels, are not primarily about reporting

[238] Jeff Astley, 'Ordinary Theology and the Learning Conversation with Academic Theology', in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church,* ed. by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Farnham: Farnham, 2013), pp. 45-54.
[239] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 59 - 60.
[240] Ibid. pp. ix-x.
[241] Avis (1999), pp. 3 - 5.
[242] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1982).
[243] William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989), pp. 15-28.
[244] Avis (1999), p. 125; Jeff Astley, *Exploring God-Talk: Using Language in Religion* (Darton Longman and Todd, 2004), pp. 47-50.

historical events but pointing to a deeper symbolic truth.[245] 'Christianity's understanding of the nature of truth,' Avis argues, is 'the truth of the imagination.' Such a view stems, in part, from the insight of Christianity that God is known not as a thing but as personal. The nature of Christian revelation is fundamentally not the presenting of propositions or a theory but 'the disclosure from person to person of existential insight.' The Holy Trinity speaking to the human heart, in Newman's phrase, *Cor ad cor loquitur*.[246]

The profoundly symbolic nature of revelation, based on narrative and poetry is more plastic than a revelation based on propositions. It is this symbolic nature of truth that has allowed Christianity to adapt and flex through various epochs and cultures; to communicate afresh, and to be resilient. The tradition must be organically re-imagined by the community of faith. As Newman saw, as an historical society the Church must change in order to remain the same.[247]

Kevin Nichols speaks of the way that Samuel Coleridge (1772-1834) foresaw the fluidity of a post-ideological world and the need for a new coherence to be found in contemplative wisdom; a depth of thought that Coleridge believed was attainable only by those of deep feeling. As a Romantic, he affirmed that the truth of complex human reality was to be *felt* rather than analysed. This truth was to be found in the proper work of the imagination.[248] Coleridge famously contrasted imagination with fancy.

> The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perceptions, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its

[245] Avis (1999), p. 12.
[246] Ibid. pp. 65-66.
[247] Kevin Nichols, 'Imagination and Tradition in Religious Education', in *Christian Theology and Religious Education: Connections and Contradictions*, ed. by Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 184-97 (pp. 184-88).
[248] Ibid. pp. 184 - 97.

> operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital,* even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.[249]

Thus fancy, in contrast to the true imagination, lacks genuine creativity. Fancy has the feel of decoration. It is, as Nichols notes, what the exasperated teacher means by 'use your imagination.' Fancy lies on the surface, it does not have the creative energy to forge fresh connections, to break, dissolve and re-formulate the tradition. A living tradition is something that is organic and subtle; a superficial or distorted grasp of the tradition, Nichols argues, will result in a fancy, a relic of the past or an abandonment to the spirit of the age.[250]

5.1.7. Imagination and Religious Education

Warnock proposes that the cultivation of imagination should be the chief aim of education.[251] The imagination, she argues, is expansive and absorbing. It helps us see that there is always more and preserves us from futility.

> The belief that there is more in our experience of the world than can possibly meet the unreflecting eye, that our experience is significant for us, and worth the attempt to understand it… this kind of belief may be referred to as the feeling of infinity. It is a sense (rather than a creed) that there is always more than we can predict.[252]

Warnock states, 'Children cannot be taught to feel deeply; but they can be taught to look and listen in such a way that the imaginative emotion follows.'[253] For Warnock, this is more than self-expression, it is more about an encounter. She thinks

[249] Coleridge (1907), pp. 304-05.
[250] Nichols, p. 190.
[251] Warnock (1976), pp. 9-10.
[252] Ibid. p. 202.
[253] Ibid. p. 206.

that hearing an orchestra, poetry and seeing a great painting is likely to be more significant in terms of exciting the imagination than playing the triangle or drawing in class. Neither does she think that children should be told what interpretation to put on their experience. 'In so far as they begin to feel the significance of the forms they perceive; they will make their own attempts to interpret this significance. It is the emotional sense of the infinity or inexhaustibleness of things which will give point to their experience, not a body of doctrine which they might perhaps extract from it, if they were doctrinally inclined.'[254]

Godly Play invites children to take an imaginative step inside the web of symbols, stories and metaphors that make up the Christian language system and try it out. Does it resonate with their lived experience? Does it 'make sense'? The ability to think creatively, to make sense of the world through the power of the imagination is quite an ordinary thing. It is part of what we do all the time, to make sense of our lives. To do this, as Berryman suggests in Godly Play, with the 'Christian language system' might be envisaged, to use Astley's phrase, as way of doing 'ordinary theology' with children.[255]

[254] Ibid. p. 207.
[255] Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 55-57.

5.2. Play

'Godly Play is a way to know God. The problem is that, paradoxically, if we play at Godly Play to know God rather than for its own pleasure, we will not become aware of God as player.'

Jerome Berryman[256]

5.2.1. Play and Humanity

Play, as the name suggests, as at the very heart of Godly Play. It could be thought of as a method of doing theology. In Godly Play, play is not mere play it is a way of delving into the depths of what it is to be human and Berryman suggests the place where the human and divine meet.[257]

In *Homo Ludens,* Johan Huizinga proposed play as a defining characteristic of what it is to be human.[258] Play transcends human culture, we are hardwired to play, certainly as children.[259] As Gianna Gobbi explains, 'Modern psychology defines play as a productive activity, not a mere pastime or diversion; it is seen as the best of activities, aimed towards the full realisation of the individual… Play is a spontaneous activity, motivated by bio-psychic needs for development, and necessary for the construction of the psychic structures of the person.'[260] More recently, evidence of play has been clearly demonstrated in other mammals, reptiles, birds and even fish.[261] Play is deeply rooted in our DNA and culture, part of our human makeup, we are, as Huizinga says, *sub specie ludi*: 'We have to conclude that

[256] Berryman (1991), p. 7.
[257] Berryman (1991), p. 7-8.
[258] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1955).
[259] Farrah Jarral, 'The Human at Play' (BBC, 2017).
[260] Gianna Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children* (Loveland, OH: Treehaus, 1998), p. 104.
[261] Gordon M. Burghardt, *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the Limits*, First MIT Press paperback edn (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

civilisation is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and it never leaves it.'[262]

Play is very difficult to pin down in a definition, as Brian Sutton-Smith observes. 'The word "play" stands for a category of very diverse happenings, though the same could be said about most omnibus categories, such as, for example, religion, art, war, politics, and culture.'[263] Play is about the freedom, voluntary and imaginative, to be who we are but also to play at who we are not, but perhaps who we are becoming. It is meaningful as we can try things out, it involves understanding strength and poise. It is first and foremost about liberty, it is about volition, wanting to do something. We can't really play if we are obliged to do so; it is something I want to do 'right now', something I want to do but don't have to do. This is where the relationship with work gets tricky. We are 'just playing' is now a term that only applies to children - adults are playing *at* something.[264] Play covers a multitude of activities by a multitude of very different people.

Classicists have called play 'amphibolous', meaning that it goes in two directions at once. Anthropologists have termed it 'liminal,' biologists, 'paradoxical.' The Latin term for play, *ludus,* means both play and school. It is both serious and earnest, fun and for real. Work and play define one another; work is that which is not play and play is that which is not work - but only up to a point. The best players in any game are usually those who are professionals, those for whom the game has become their work and livelihood. For example, the best mechanics 'tinker with machines', the best philosophers 'play with ideas'. Thus, even work can be like play, something that flows and can feel free and joyful. It is not necessarily that work requires more effort or is any harder than play. Sports can be much tougher than

[262] Huizinga (1955), p. 198.
[263] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 3.
[264] Jarral (2007).

work and the rules are often much more rigid.[265] Sutton-Smith says of attempts to come to a definition of play, 'we all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness.' It is, in every sense of the word, ambiguous.[266] The thing none of the earnest definitions seemed to grasp, Huizinga observed, was the fun of playing, which resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. For him, 'It is precisely this fun-element that characterises the essence of play.' [267]

In *Homo Ludens,* Johan Huizinga objects to all attempts to define play:

> All these hypotheses have one thing in common: they all start from the assumption that play must serve something which is not play, that it must have some kind of biological purpose. They all inquire into the why and wherefore of play. The various answers they give tend rather to overlap than to exclude one another. It would be perfectly possible to accept nearly all the explanations without getting into any real confusion of thought - and without coming much nearer to a real understanding of the play-concept. Most of them only deal incidentally with the question of what play is, in itself, and what it means for the player. They attack play directly with the quantitative methods of experimental science, without first paying attention to its profound aesthetic quality. As a rule they leave the primary quality of play, as such, virtually untouched.'[268]

Play is slippery, undefinable and ambiguous. Drawing on William Empson's classic book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*[269], Brian Sutton-Smith maps out the ways in which play is ambiguous:

1. the ambiguity of reference (is that a pretend gun sound, or are you choking?);
2. the ambiguity of the referent (is that an object or a toy?);
3. the ambiguity of intent (do you mean it or is it pretend?);
4. the ambiguity of the sense (is this serious or is it nonsense?);
5. the ambiguity of transition (you said you were only playing);

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[265] Walter J. Ong, 'Preface', in *Man at Play,* ed. by S. J. Hugo Rahner (NY: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. iv-xiv.
[266] Sutton-Smith (1997), pp. 1-2.
[267] Huizinga (1955), p. 21.
[268] Ibid. p. 20.
[269] William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Hogarth, 1984).

6. the ambiguity of contradiction (a man playing at being a woman);
7. the ambiguity of meaning (is it play or play fighting?).[270]

Though it may not be possible to tidily define what is meant by play, Huizinga maps out its features:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguises or other means.[271]

5.2.2. The Benefits of Play

From the late 1990s, interdisciplinary academic interest and research collaboration in play studies has grown. Biologists, psychologists, neuroscientists, ethnologists, educators, sociologists and others have recognised the importance of play to many species, including its critical importance to human development. Studies of play in other species has revealed how deep in our DNA is 'rough and tumble' physical play as well as creative and innovative play. Play is critical not only to human development but also to our interaction and well-being.[272] Coming back to this chapter during the Covid-19 pandemic, when participative sport, live music, dance and theatre have been cancelled, live performance venues have closed, playgrounds taped up and where we were told to avoid playing board games at Christmas, the lack of play in society has become palpable.

A 2007 study for the American Academy of Pediatrics highlighted the importance of play in child development, lamenting the fact that the pressure to

[270] Sutton-Smith (1997), p. 2.
[271] Huizinga (1955), p. 13.
[272] Gordon M. Burghardt, 'What Is the State of Play?', *International Journal of Play*, 5 (2016), 212-214.

succeed academically in schools and families meant that 'many children are being raised in an increasingly hurried and pressured style that may limit the protective benefits they would gain from child-driven play.'[273] The increasing focus on testing and information acquisition in the UK education system has also stripped out too much of the imaginative and expressive aspects of learning. A focus on standardised testing and continuous monitoring of pupil progress has led to an increased emphasis on direct instruction and a loss of opportunities for explorative learning.[274] In an article for the *Guardian* a few years ago, Tim Tayor reflected back on his long teaching career.

> A lot has happened in education since I started teaching: the literacy and numeracy strategies, Ofsted, league tables, international comparisons, three changes of government and countless education ministers. But what still holds true (in my mind) is that children learn best when they are engaged in their learning, when it matters to them, when it's contextualised in meaningful ways and when they have a sense of ownership and agency. The best learning I've been involved in has not been 'delivered' to a class, but built, over time, in collaboration with students. Explored, examined and argued over.[275]

The power of play particularly lies in the abilities it develops to deal with complexity. A large body of evidence suggests that the benefits to human development are manifold. Play is important in brain development, creativity, cooperation, establishing healthy boundaries, conflict resolution, relationship building, decision making and tackling childhood obesity.[276] Evidence also suggests not only that play is fun but that it reduces child stress, helps children to become socially competent, improves behavioural self-regulation, enhances focus, expands vocabulary and enhances memory retention.[277]

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[273] Kenneth R. Ginsburg, 'The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds', *Pediatrics,* 119 (2007), 182-91.
[274] Tom Bartlett, 'The Case for Play', *The Education Digest,* 77 (2011) 27-33.
[275] Tim Taylor, 'Children Learn Best When They Use Their Imagination', *Guardian,* 5 February 2013.
[276] See the extensive bibliography in, Ginsburg (2007).
[277] Bartlett (2011).

It is a mistake, to conclude, however, that all play is necessarily positive. As with most human activity, there can be a destructive side to play. John Pridmore offers the stark example of a *Guardian* newspaper front-page picture of children in the streets of Baghdad that like to play at beheading people.[278] As Huizinga observed, 'ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game.'[279] So, play is not always a positive activity. Whilst it often is, real children's play, as any parent or lunchtime supervisor will testify, is not always so positive. It can quickly degenerate into fighting or bullying. Play can be excluding, or victimising, as well as warm and affirming. Thus, whilst most scholars would view play positively as promoting children's overall development and socialisation, not all play is good.[280]

5.2.3. Montessori and Play

As Montessori classrooms do not contain toys, even for the youngest children, it is sometimes mistakenly thought that Montessori did not value imaginative play. However, Montessori's early environments did contain toys but she discovered that children would generally choose to leave them alone when they had purposeful materials to engage with.[281] Children, Montessori observed, would readily abandon their familiar toys and games when invited to engage with tasks such as setting a table, dusting, washing and cleaning shoes. Although Montessori is often quoted as saying that 'play is the work for the child,' she was so convinced of the seriousness of play for a child's relationship to the environment that she came to believe that fantasy play was detrimental to child development. Hence, Montessori distrusted

[278] Pridmore, p. 187; Michael Howard, 'Children of War: The Generation Traumatised by Violence in Iraq', *Guardian*, 6 February 2007.
[279] Huizinga (1955), p. 110.
[280] W. George Scarlett and others, *Children's Play* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 17-19.
[281] Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*, Updated ed. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 183-91.

Western 'toy-civilisation' which she saw as preventing the normal development of the child as it was a form of diversion from the real work of the child 's engagement with the physical environment.[282] She thus believed that adults impeded child development by giving them toys and assuming that all they wanted to do was to play. For this reason when referring to the activity of the child in classroom Montessori invariably used the terminology of the 'work' of the child, rather than its play.[283] In a similar manner to Piaget, she concluded that pretend is 'not a proof of imagination, rather it is a proof of unsatisfied desire.'[284] Montessori also agreed that 'pretending' was largely assimilation of reality to the child's own thoughts rather than adjustment of the child's own thoughts to fit reality.[285] Today we might think of Montessori's distinction more positively as the distinction between deep play and superficial silliness. It is this deep play, Berryman argues, that characterises Godly Play at its best.[286]

5.2.4. The Role of Play in Godly Play

Berryman spends the first three chapters of his foundational book *Godly Play* (1991) discussing play.[287] Unlike Montessori education generally, and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, both of which tend to talk rather of the work of the child, play is a central concept of Godly Play. In his earlier writings, Berryman emphasised teaching the art of playing with religious language at the heart of his method as a form of transitional play. Heavily influenced by Donald Winnicott (1896-1971), play and creativity have been central themes in the development of Godly Play.

[282] Montessori (1967), pp. 136-47; Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1996), pp. 158-60.
[283] Gobbi (1998), pp. 103-07.
[284] Maria Montessori, *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915* (Oxford, Clio Montessori, 1997), p. 41.
[285] See discussion in Lillard (2007), pp. 183-91.
[286] Berryman (2013), p. 197.
[287] Berryman (1991), pp. 1-59.

Winnicott observed the things that young children often carried about with them were 'transitional objects' that formed part of the healthy weaning from the mother's breast.[288] In *Playing and Reality*,[289] Winnicott developed this idea, seeing in play a similar phenomenon of providing a place where one can explore the space between 'me' and 'not me.' Play objects, Winnicott observed, take on a subjective reality and thus mediate a deep connection with the child. He saw this play as being at the heart of therapy.[290] Winnicott's concept of transitional objects in the mediation of experience has been a particularly important element in Berryman's thinking. The artefacts in the room are not there to entertain the children, but to act as transitional objects. To achieve this, Berryman claims that Godly Play materials are to be 'spun out of the core metaphor for each sacred story, parable or liturgical action.'[291] In a similar vein, Cavalletti said that the materials for the Atrium should be 'poor' and 'essential,' meaning that they should be as free as possible from distractions. This play, however, must not be reduced to a teaching device, or a way of instrumentally demanding a product. For Berryman; 'it is about teaching the art of playing so one can come close to the Creator who comes close to us and even joins us when we are playing at any age.'[292] In this respect, Godly Play differs from the typical pattern of teaching in UK schools which seeks to define clear learning objectives. By putting play at the centre of his method Berryman steps away from instructional objectives towards what Elliot Eisner termed 'expressive objectives'. In this way, Godly Play aims to change the learner but defines its outcomes broadly.[293] Eisner writes:

[288] D. W. Winnicott, *Collected Papers of D. W. Winnicott: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958), pp. 229-42.
[289] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), pp. 1-15.
[290] Ibid. p. 38.
[291] Berryman (2013), p. 95.
[292] Berryman (1991), p. 12.
[293] Cf. Jeff Astley, 'Aims and Approaches in Christian Education', in *Learning in the Way: Research and Reflection on Adult Christian Education,* ed. by Jeff Astley (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), pp. 1-32 (pp. 11-14).

> An expressive objective does not specify the behaviour the student is to acquire after having engaged in one or more learning activities. An expressive objective describes an educational encounter… but it does not specify what that encounter, situation, problem or task they are to learn.[294]

Drawing on his experience as a hospital chaplain, in *Godly Play* Berryman explores the ways in which playing helps children come to terms with the existential limits of human experience, 'death, the threat of freedom, aloneness, and the need for meaning.'[295] Exploring these existential limits through materials used to tell selected biblical stories is one of the core features of Godly Play. Play can be a way to communicate deep fears, without necessarily having the language to communicate those fears.[296] Diane Ackerman writes that playing, 'carries one across fear and uncertainty towards the slippery edge of possibility, where one must use oneself fully and stretch human limits to achieve the remarkable...we set bigger challenges, develop new skills, take greater chances, canvas worlds.'[297] One of Berryman's innovations was the use of the desert box for telling many Old Testament narratives. Berryman uses a large Perspex sided tray to tell the story of Abraham and Sarah, the Exodus, the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Babylonian Exile.[298] Berryman cites Jungian sand play, art therapy and the sand paintings of the Navajo people as influences. Berryman claims that the sand is 'more than a metaphor,' but creates a moment of anamnesis allowing children to 'externalise unconscious conflicts.'[299]

From her research, Rebecca Nye concluded that, 'children are hungry for a language to address their complex experiences and sense of life.'[300] Berryman states that human life is bounded by existential limits. 'These limits that box us in like the

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[294] Elliot W. Eisner, 'Instructional and Expressive Educational Objectives', in *Instructional Objectives,* ed. by W. James Popham (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969) (pp. 15-16).
[295] Berryman (1991), p. 57.
[296] Jaco Hamman, 'Playing', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* ed. by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 42-50 (p. 43).
[297] Diane Ackerman, *Deep Play*, 1st edn (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 38.
[298] The sand tray may be substituted by a drawstring 'desert bag'.
[299] Berryman (2013), p. 99.
[300] Nye (2009), p. 81.

four walls of a room — the border experiences of our own death, the sense of fundamental aloneness despite community, the need for meaning, and an awareness of the threat of true freedom… Providing the means and the imagination to cope with existential limits to being and knowing is a major function of religious language.'[301] Berryman concludes that 'our fundamental identity is shaped by these limits and the way we cope with them. Ethical decisions need to be made with our ultimate environment and identity in mind… children [in Godly Play] are encouraged to somersault into the awareness of their existential limits and to use the Christian language system to cope with them.'[302] This existential work, Berryman concludes, is achieved through play.

5.2.5. A Theology of Play

In *Man at Play*, Hugo Rahner[303] explores the theology of play in Christian thought as the early church reflected on scripture in the light of Hellenic philosophy. Rahner begins by considering the playing of God.[304] The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously stated, 'αἰὼν παῖς ἐστι παίζων, πεττεύων· παιδὸς ἡ βασιληίη' ('the course of the world [human life or time] is a child at play, moving figures in a board game; kingdom belongs to the child').[305] Heraclitus, Miller suggests, is employing play as a metaphor of authentic human existence, something that the child understands more profoundly than the adult.[306] We might compare the words of Jesus, 'whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child [παιδίον] will never enter it.'(Mk 10.15).

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[301] Berryman (2009), p. 46.
[302] Ibid. p. 67.
[303] The older brother, and fellow Jesuit, of the prolific and influential Karl Rahner.
[304] S. J. Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play* (NY: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. 11-25.
[305] Heraclitus *Fragment 52* (Diels) Andrei Lebedev, 'New Edition of Heraclitus' Fragments: Greek Text with Apparatus Criticus and English Translation.', in *The Logos of Heraclitus: A Reconstruction of his Thought and Word* (St. Petersburg: Nauka Publishers, 2014), p. 16.
[306] David LeRoy Miller, 'Kingdom of Play: Some Old Theological Light from Recent Literature', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 25 (1970), 343-360.

But in the *Laws* 1.2, Plato speculates 'May we not regard every living being as a puppet of the Gods, which may be their plaything only, or may be created with a purpose?'[307] Plato concluded that people have very little part in the true nature of things. Rahner contrasts this with the God of Christianity who, rather than looking down from above at his puppets, comes and pitches his tent among them (Jn 1.14). If God is truly free, Rahner argues, there could be no metaphysical necessity to creation 'as though God were in some way subordinate to his own works or, in some pantheistic sense, identical with them. The Creator is free.'[308] Thus, he argues, when God himself breaks into our apparently closed creation it is therefore meaningful but not necessary. In joyful spontaneity God creates, and thus, says Rahner, 'we speak of the playing God, who through this creative pouring out of himself makes it possible for the creature to understand him in the wonderful play of his works.'[309] There is, Rahner insists, an interplay 'between almighty power and childlike play, between the strength of God and a child's weakness.'[310]

Jürgen Moltmann similarly argues that for God to be free, the existence of the world is not necessary 'nor an emanation of his being from his divine fulness.' God is free, but he does not act capriciously. 'When he creates something that is not god but also not nothing, then this must have its ground not in itself but in God's *good will or pleasure.* Hence the creation is God's play.'[311] Moltmann continues, '*For what purpose did God create the world?* This is the question of the adult in the child who doesn't want to play anymore but needs goals in order to make something respectable of himself.' But the creator God is not *deus faber.* 'God did not have to create something to realise himself.'[312] This playing of God, Moltmann informs us, is

[307] Plato, *The Essential Plato* trans. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Alain De Botton (London: The Softback Preview, 1999), p. 1243.
[308] Rahner (1965), pp 11-12.
[309] Ibid. p. 24.
[310] Ibid. p. 18.
[311] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, 1st edn (NY: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 15-24.
[312] Ibid. p. 18.

analogous but not identical to human play. The biblical Hebrew term for the activity of God, *bahrah* (בָּרָא), Moltmann points out, is *never* used for human activity. The principal distinction between God's play and human play, is that God creates out of nothing whereas, when we humans play, we create within what is given. The closest we come to the freedom of God's play, Moltmann argues, is as children (Mk 10:15). Quoting the *Westminster Catechism* of 1647,[313] Moltmann states, the 'chief end of man' is not, as Feuerbach insisted, to 'realise God' but to 'glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.'[314] When a society sees the purpose of human life only in being useful as labourers or consumers something about human nature has been fundamentally misunderstood, or as Moltmann puts it, 'the world turns in to a desert where the freedom of play has been lost.'[315]

As David danced before the Ark (2 Samuel 6.5, 21), so in the much-debated text of Proverbs 8.22-31,[316] we find (feminine) wisdom at the beginning of all things playing or dancing like a child before God.[317]

> 22 The Lord created [Heb. *kanah* or acquired][318]
> me at the beginning of his work,
> the first of his acts of long ago….
> 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;
> [Heb. *`amon,* artisan or child][319]

[313] https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism/ [accessed 17 January 2021]
[314] Moltmann (1972), p. 18.
[315] Ibid. p. 16.
[316] See Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler and Michael A. Fishbane, *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1461-62; William P. Brown, 'Wisdom and Children's Play', in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice,* ed. by Kevin E. Lawson (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), pp. 26-38; Thomas McCreesh, 'Proverbs', in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary: Student Edition,* ed. by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), pp. 453-61 (p. 457); Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
[317] Rahner (1965), p. 20.
[318] The latter interpretation was the basis of identifying Wisdom with Logos; *Jewish Study Bible* (2004), pp. 1461-62.
[319] Fox describes the interpretation of Proverbs 8.30 as 'one of the great puzzles of the Hebrew Bible,' in Michael V. Fox, 'Amon Again', *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 115 (1996), 699-702.

and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

What is striking in this text is that, unlike the Genesis creation narrative, it is spoken in the first person. The Hebrew word *amon* is often translated 'master worker' (as in the NRSV). Brown suggests from the context, however that *amon* is better interpreted in the image of a child playing as Wisdom. Wisdom's play is everywhere but she is not a child labourer, 'joining God in the arduous task of cosmic construction.'[320] Wisdom is not at work in this text; she is simply there beside God, playing and delighting.[321] She is, Brown suggests, holding God and creation together in delight. By the end of Proverbs 8, Wisdom is a mother instructing her children (Prov 8.32-34) but, as Proverbs 1.5 reminds us, even the elderly have much to learn in God's world. In the words of Brown, the 'wide-eyed delight of children [will] never be lost on the wise… the playful quest for wisdom is ever ongoing, and progress on the path will always be marked by baby steps.' Perhaps, he suggests, when Jesus took a little child and put it beside him (Lk 9.46-48) it was 'like God and Wisdom, were playing.'[322]

The Greek Fathers, deeply influenced by Plato and Plotinus, saw wisdom as a hypostasis in this text, the dynamic agent of God's creative work. Origen equated the Hebrew personification of divine Wisdom (חכמה, *Chokmâh,* LXX σοφία) of Proverbs, at play with God Ἐν ἀρχῇ, with the divine λόγος of God (John 1.1-14) everlastingly foreshadowing creation.[323] The Latin father, Tertullian, similarly drew a parallel between Logos and Divine Wisdom, speaking of Wisdom as *modulans cum*

[320] Brown, pp. 31-33.
[321] Christine. R. Yoder, *Proverbs* (Nasville: Abingdon Press, 2009), pp. 96-97.
[322] Brown, p. 37.
[323] Origen *De Principiis, I, 4, 4; In Ioannem, I, 9; Joseph* Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 91-100.

ipso, that which is ordering things with God, and *compingens cum ipso,* fixing or adjusting the world with God.[324] Hugo Rahner comments on a famous verse of Gregory of Nazianzen that 'here then the mystical play of the Logos finds a place in the innermost being of the Triune God;' such that, 'the delight of the Father in his Son could overflow on to the earth and all its varied beauty which has been prefigured in the Eternal Wisdom.'[325] The poem of Gregory Nazianzen reads:

> For the Logos on high plays,
> Stirring the whole creation back and forth, as he wills,
> Into shapes of every kind.[326]

Inspired by Gregory's poem, Maximus the Confessor would develop an entire mystical theology. Maximus wrote, 'compared with the life to come, the true, divine, archetypal life, is but a children's game.'[327] Understanding this free and joyful gift of creation, Rahner asserts, gives the believer a lightness of heart knowing that life has meaning and that existence is not the product of necessity. Secure in the knowledge of the love of God our existence is a joyful thing but also, as with all true freedom, always involves peril: 'For there is no play that has not something profoundly serious at the bottom of it.'[328]

Moltmann however, cautions against the over idealisation of the world as a play thing of God and suspects Rahner at times of sliding into a 'gnostic-docetic way of thinking' by not taking the horror of the cross seriously. Jesus' death by crucifixion was no joke even though in the resurrection (quoting Luther) 'death has become a mockery' (1 Cor 15.55-57).[329]

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[324] Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenem* 18,4; 32,2.
[325] Rahner (1965), p. 23.
[326] Gregory Carmina, I, 2,2, vv.589-90 (*PG* 37, 624A f.) quoted in Rahner (1965), p23.
[327] Maximus, *Ambigua,* 261-263.
[328] Rahner (1965), pp. 26-27.
[329] Moltmann (1972), pp. 28-33.

5.2.6. Play and Eschatology

Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), the father of the Christian education movement in the USA was one of the first in modern times to recover the significance of play for religion. He wrote, 'As play is the forerunner of religion, so religion is to be the friend of play; to love its free motion, its happy scenes, its voices of glee, and never, by any needless austerities of control, seek to hamper and shorten its pleasures.'[330] Bushnell clearly saw the eschatological significance in the play of children.

> Play is the symbol and interpreter of liberty, that is, Christian liberty; and no one could ever sufficiently conceive the state of free impulse and the joy there is in it, save by means of this unconstrained, always pleasurable activity, that we call the play of children. Play wants no motive but play; and so true goodness, when it is ripe in the soul and is become a complete inspiration there, will ask no motive but to be good. Therefore, God has purposely set the beginning of the natural life in a mood that foreshadows the last and highest chapter of immortal character … he prepares, at the very beginning of our life, in the free self-impulsion of play, that which is to foreshadow the glorious liberty of the soul's ripe order and attainment in good.[331]

For Pridmore, this image links back to the prophecy of Zechariah 8.4-5, where children's play is interpreted as a vision of salvation, a participative immersion in God.[332] If salvation is to know fullness of life, Pridmore argues, 'for the child, salvation is the enjoyment of the fullness of life that overflows in play.' Thus, 'to be absorbed in play is to be caught up in the divine nature.'[333] Play is a foretaste of heaven: total absorption in ceaseless joy (Ps 16.11). It is 'for freedom Christ has set us free' (Gal 5.1); we are, Moltmann insists, invited to a festive 'rejoicing in freedom.[334] Joy has the 'flavour of eternity', as Moltmann states, whereas pain and hell are merely endless.[335] Reading this passage from Zechariah, Cyril of Alexandria would

[330] Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 340-41.
[331] Ibid. pp. 339-40.
[332] Pridmore, pp. 189-200.
[333] Ibid. p. 200.
[334] Moltmann (1972), p. 39.
[335] Ibid. pp. 33-37.

discern that this peace of children playing is already seen within the Church. The Church as the true *Civitas Dei* is full of God's children rejoicing, leaping and dancing in the joy of redemption.[336]

Jerome in his commentary on Zechariah also speaks of a glorious city (Ps 86.3), a community filled with the joy, of the spirit dancing before the Lord (2 Sam 6.22). 'In the Church the joy of the spirit finds expression in bodily gesture,' Jerome writes.[337] Here, Rahner states, reflecting on the incarnation, we find a theological expression of the union of 'mind and body, between idea and symbol, between the seen and the unseen.' In signs and sacraments, grace 'teaches our spiritual eye to see beyond their outward form' to speak of eternal truths.[338] In this 'game of grace', Rahner adds, Christ has become the playmate of humanity in the great festival of heaven.[339]

> The whole game of the Logos which he enacts upon the earth to the delight of the Father, his cosmic dance on the globe of the world, is only a playful hint of what has reposed since the beginning of time in the divine archetypes of Eternal Wisdom, and of what will be revealed when earthly dance has come to an end.[340]

Thus, Rahner concludes, if God is *Deus vere lumens*, humanity made in his image must be *Home ludens*.[341]

5.2.7. The Playing Church

Leora Batnitzky argues that religion, perceived by modern Western thinkers as being centred on faith and belief, can be seen as a product of Protestantism.[342] Jonathan Z. Smith further asserts that religion is essentially an outsider's term

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[336] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Zechariah,* 40.
[337] Jerome, Commentary on Zechariah, 2, 8, quoted in Rahner (1965), pp. 51-52.
[338] Ibid. p. 52.
[339] Ibid. p. 47.
[340] Ibid. p. 24.
[341] Ibid. p. 25.
[342] Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 1-9.

belonging to the language of the anthropologist. In its Roman and early Christian use, it was used as a noun (*religio*), an adjective (*religiosus*) and also an adverb (*religiose*). All these uses were related to the performance of ritual practices.[343] Ritual and play are deeply rooted in our evolutionary past and intimately connected, as Burghardt argues. And, of course, religious ritual may be considered a form of play. Or, as Huizinga put it, religion is 'rooted in the primeval soil of play.'[344]

Play may underlie ritual but they are not the same thing. Rituals, like play, suspend the ordinary; but they have, as Robin Osbourne observes, a different ontological status. Rituals have rules but are not games, they seek to minimise chance and have the same reliable result. The ritual play of the church is a serious matter. Rituals bind: two single people become a married couple, the lawyer becomes a judge and is empowered. Unlike a game, rituals seek to be reliable and minimise chance. They fix reality - the Church speaks of the 'indelible' nature of the sacraments, a person cannot be unbaptised or unordained; a game, however, can always be replayed.[345] Classically the church talks of an ontological change.[346] Bede says of baptism that, to the onlooker, the baptised who emerges from the baptismal font appears the same as when they went in. So baptism appears to be 'no more than a piece of play;' but, 'Mother Church knows' that the person has died with Christ in the tomb and been born-again in him through the waters of new birth.[347]

The etymology of the word 'liturgy' (λειτουργία) is a compound of people and work. Originally meaning public works, or a state project, it gradually broadened to develop a cultic meaning. The Septuagint employed the term

[343] Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* ed. by M. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 269-84.
[344] Huizinga (1955), p. 5.
[345] Robin Osborne, 'Believing in Play and Ritual', in *Ritual, Play and Belief, in Evolution and Early Human Societies,* ed. by Colin Renfrew, Iain Morley, and Michael Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 316-20.
[346] A concept perhaps loosing force? See, Astley, *Learning in the Way* (2000), pp. 6-11.
[347] Bede Homily 2.12 quoted in Rahner (1965), p. 53; See also, *Oliver Clement, The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (London: New City, 1993), pp. 103-07.

λειτουργία 170 times to speak about the Levitical priesthood, and the writer of Hebrews describes how Christ became the λειτουργὸς of the sanctuary (Heb 8.2). Paul could speak of himself as a 'λειτουργὸν of Jesus Christ in the priestly service of the gospel'(Rm 15.16) and Luke would talk of Christian worship as 'making liturgy to the Lord'(Acts 13.2).[348] Thus, liturgy is a public work, the means whereby through text, action and song the Church corporately offers worship to God.[349] But, this serious 'public work' is also play, as Walter Pannenberg declared, 'representational play finds its perfect form in cult.'[350] In liturgy we find a world very unlike the pietistic world of Kant and Schleiermacher; liturgy is like no other human activity, Wainwright declares, 'the Christian liturgy is a focal moment, a moment of concentration, in the process by which we ourselves are being glorified for God's own greater glory; for the achievement of God's loving purpose for his creatures is itself *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.'[351] Liturgy is the interplay of *Lex orandi* and *lex credendi*, a play in which 'Ockham's razor must not be allowed to shave away the very beard of Aaron down which the rich oil of divine bounty flows.'[352] Through the liturgy we sing a 'new song' of eschatological hope, and that worship is God's enjoyment of us and our enjoyment of him (Ps 149.1-4).[353]

When children play, they are constantly playing at who they are not and by playing they become, or grow into being, something else. It is a place where people grow and try on new roles. There is a qualitative difference between adult and children's play, in that adult play is usually instrumental - adults play to relax or do

[348] Anscar J. Chupungco, 'A Definition of Liturgy', in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Introduction to the Liturgy*, ed. by Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 3-24.
[349] Benjamin Nicholas Gordon-Taylor, 'Liturgy', in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship: An Alcuin Guide*, ed. by Juliette Day and Benjamin Nicholas Gordon-Taylor (London: SPCK, 2013), pp. 12-20.
[350] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 1st edn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 331.
[351] Geoffrey Wainwright, 'In Praise of God', *Worship*, 53 (1979), 498.
[352] Ibid. p. 511.
[353] Graham Kendrick, *Worship* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1984), pp. 21-30.

Sudoku to improve their memory.[354] Liturgy has no instrumental intent. It is the interplay of past and eschatological future enacted in the present moment. Like a child at play, when liturgy flows there is a self-forgetfulness; for, as Romano Guardini said, 'when the liturgy is rightly regarded, it cannot be said to have a purpose, because it does not exist for the sake of humanity, but for the sake of God.' Liturgy like art and children's play has *no purpose* and yet is full of profound meaning in a 'mingling of profound earnestness and divine joyfulness.'[355] Liturgy is an end in itself; it does not have a purpose beyond the worship of God. People do not worship to do or become anything else.[356] Perhaps, Guardini explains, the most profound lesson of Christian liturgy is not to see purpose everywhere, not to be too clever and grown up. Instead, 'the soul must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God.'[357] It is no wonder, Guardini observed, that 'Grave and earnest people… tend to experience a peculiar difficulty where the liturgy is concerned.'[358] No wonder, also, that only those who are able to approach the kingdom of God as children are able to penetrate this mystery. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

> Children's play seems in many ways a kind of anticipation of life, a rehearsal for later life, without its burdens and gravity. On this analogy, the liturgy would be a reminder that we are all children, or should be children, in relation to that true life toward which we yearn to go. Liturgy would be a kind of anticipation, a rehearsal, a prelude for the life to come, for eternal life, which St. Augustine describes, by contrast with life in this world, as a fabric woven, no longer of exigency and need, but of the freedom of generosity and gift. Seen thus, liturgy would be the rediscovery within us of true childhood, of openness to a greatness still to come, which is still unfulfilled in adult life.[359]

[354] Jarral, (2017).
[355] Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), pp. 64-67.
[356] Jeff Astley, 'The Role of Worship in Christian Learning', in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 245-51 (p. 245).
[357] Guardini (1930), p. 68.
[358] Ibid. p. 59.
[359] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 14.

Eutrapelia

In the fourth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle speaks of the *eutrapelos,* literally, a 'well turned' person. Eutrapelia comes from the Greek for 'wittiness' (εὐτραπελία) and refers to pleasantness in conversation, with ease and a good sense of humour. It is one of the Aristototelian virtues, being the 'golden mean' between boorishness (ἀγροικία) and buffoonery (βωμολοχία).[360] Happiness, Aristotle asserted, was the most desirable thing in the world but it was not to be found in amusement and frivolity, but rather in a mature adult man of excellent mind and noble deeds. Lacking the honed excellence of years, no child, in Aristotle's view, could be truly happy.[361] Later, Cicero would revive this ideal of aristocratic refinement in *De Officiis.* For Cicero, leisure, sport, fun and relaxation where a form of recharging for the more serious pursuits of life.[362]

> For Nature has not brought us into the world to act as if we were created for play or jest, but rather for earnestness and for some more serious and important pursuits. We may, of course, indulge in sport and jest, but in the same way as we enjoy sleep or other relaxations, and only when we have satisfied the claims of our earnest, serious tasks. Further than that, the manner of jesting itself ought not to be extravagant or immoderate, but refined and witty. For as we do not grant our children unlimited licence to play, but only such freedom as is not incompatible with good conduct, so even in our jesting let the light of a pure character shine forth. There are, generally speaking, two sorts of jest: the one, coarse, rude, vicious, indecent; the other, refined, polite, clever, witty.[363]

By the time of the emergence of Christianity, εὐτραπελία in *Koine* Greek had developed the overtones of *bomolochia.* To describe someone as *eutrapelos* had become a term of abuse, a 'smart-arse'.[364] Surrounded by the pleasure-seeking culture of the Roman Empire, the emerging Christian Church was acutely alert to the dangers of the world and the flesh. St Paul would warn the Church at Ephesus

[360] Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics' (London: Kegan Paul, 1906) (IV,8,11).
[361] Ibid. pp. IX-X.
[362] Douglas Kries, 'On the Intention of Cicero's De Officiis', *The Review of Politics,* 65 (2003), 375-393.
[363] Marcus Tullius Cicero, 'De Officiis' (London: William Heinemann, 1963), I, 29.
[364] Rahner (1965), pp. 91-105.

against silly/foolish talk (μωρολογία) and εὐτραπελία ['vulgar talk' NRSV] (Eph. 5.4). In Aristotle's terminology some in the early Church were perhaps *agroikos*! (Acts 20.9)

In an address to his diocesan clergy, Ambrose Bishop of Milan sternly taught:

> We need to beware of jokes even when telling stories, in case they distract people from grasping the more serious and profound point we want to make. 'Woe to you who laugh, for you shall weep,' says the Lord. And what do we do? We go about looking for things to laugh at! So we laugh in this world and weep in the next. As I see it, it is not just immoderate jokes that we should shun: it is jokes of all kinds—except that it is not unseemly, perhaps, for our language to be full of elegance and pleasantness.[365]

Augustine, similarly, had little time for frivolity, even being suspicious of friendship itself.[366] Likewise, in 390 John Chrysostom would remind the people of the pleasure-loving city of Antioch that 'This world is not a theatre, in which we can laugh; and we are not assembled together in order to burst into peals of laughter, but to weep for our sins.... It is not God who gives us the chance to play, but the devil!'[367]

It was Thomas Aquinas who, through his reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,[368] rehabilitated play through a rediscovery of Aristotle's original meaning of *eutrapelia.* In the *Summa Theologiæ* Thomas Aquinas explores the benefit and purpose of play through its ability to 'refresh the soul.' In his discussion of the ultimate goal of human fulfilment which, following Augustine,[369] he sees in a beatific rather than an Aristotelian eudemonic sense, Aquinas states, 'since human actions are categorised by their goals, and all human actions are generically one… even play,

[365] Ambrose, 'De Officiis' (I, 23,102-03).
[366] Tamer Nawar, 'Augustine on the Dangers of Friendship', *The Classical Quarterly*, 65 (2015), 836-51.
[367] John Chrysostom, 'Commentary on Matthew', Homily 6, 6.
[368] Thomas Aquinas, 'Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics', in *The collected works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by C. I. Litzinger (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1993).
[369] Famously exemplified in Augustine's phrase, echoing Plotinus, 'you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.' Book 1.1.1; Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.

which we distinguish from work because it serves no extrinsic goal, but which nevertheless delights, relaxes and fulfils the player.'[370]

Later in the *Summa Theologiæ,* drawing on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and reflecting upon the virtues, Aquinas stresses balance. Aquinas reminds us that play should not be out of balance with other aspects of life. In excess, play can degenerate and become lewd, or a source of aggression. 'Play can go over the top if it becomes obscene or harmful to our fellowmen, or if the circumstances are wrong.'[371] Thus play, for Aquinas, is a refreshing aspect of a balanced life whose τέλος is union with God.

Part of the art of leading Godly Play is to gently hold a healthy space where true play between creature and creator can happen, where freedom, order and pleasure meet and where true joy is to be found. Berryman applies this to the exercise of the discernment of true play in Godly Play. While true play can be identified, Berryman argues, when it is pleasurable,[372] it must also exercise *eutrapelia*. In the words of Berryman;

> We must learn to distinguish between what is destructively comic and the humor appropriate to the deep laughter that signals Godly play. True humor does not laugh at limits. It understands them. It does not fish for the impossible but knows and accepts the possible… when adults and children encounter the limits of life, there are three kinds of responses: magic, denial, and play. Without Godly play, religion can become a defensive language game of unrelenting seriousness.[373]

[370] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 174.
[371] Ibid. p. 440.
[372] Berryman (1991), p. 13.
[373] Ibid. p. 16.

5.3. Salvation History: time in a line

I came to discover what Augustine calls the 'golden thread'; that is the constant presence of God, of God's plan, in which all the events are linked together, one to the other, in their movement forward to the fullness that all are looking towards.

Sofia Cavalletti[374]

Time lines form a major component of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd especially in Level 2 and 3.[375] Many of these presentations, notably the *fettuccia* are often deeply engaging to children.[376] Though a little less prominent in Godly Play, the unity of the Bible and the narrative flow of salvation history are core components. The presence of a version of Montessori's liturgical 'clock', the layout of the 'sacred stories' and the centrality in the room of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ is key to the method.[377] Unlike CGS, what Godly Play lacks, as I have argued elsewhere, is a proper engagement with eschatology.[378] For Cavalletti, her presentation of the faith, even to the youngest child, points firmly through Christ to the parousia.[379] For Berryman, taking a more existentialist position, salvation does not resolve in the parousia in a Godly Play room but leaves a blank book open at the end of the time of sacred stories; 'the part that hasn't been written yet.'[380]

The theological roots of the notion of a history of salvation (German *Heilsgeschichte*) may be traced in the works of Irenaeus of Lyons who, in his anti-

[374] Cavalletti, p. 63.
[375] See especially, Cavalletti (2011).
[376] Leslie Swaim-Fox, 'Making Connections: The Fettuccia', in *Thoughts from the Sheepfold,* (Shaker Height, OH: Christ Episcopal Church, 2014).
[377] Jerome Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 2002), pp. 23-33.
[378] Ibid. pp. 218-19.
[379] Dominic Black, 'Godly Play and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: A Theological Comparison', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research / Gott Im Spiel - Europäische Perspektiven Auf Praxis Und Forschung,* ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 211-20.
[380] Jerome Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: 20 Presentations for Spring*, Vol. 4, (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 2003), pp. 143-45.

Gnostic polemic *Adversus haereses,* argued that the same God was revealed in both Testaments, who through 'types' revealed in the Hebrew scriptures prepared for the coming of Christ.[381] The liturgical practice of the early church also sees a liturgical reading of scripture in this way, particularly in the development of the Paschal Vigil around the 4th century, laying out a history of salvation from creation to the resurrection.[382] Later in the 5th century, in *De catechizandis rudibus,* St Augustine would systematically set out for catechumen, a long and a short, story of salvation from creation to the church.[383] For Augustine the Old Testament (OT) was essentially a preparation for Christ. The themes of salvation laid out in the OT would later find their fruition in Christ. A little later, in *De civitate Dei,* Augustine would further develop his Christian theology of history analogously laying profane history alongside salvation history.[384]

The concept of *Heilsgeschichte* emerged in modern times in Erlangen University formed by the work of Johann Gotfried Herder (1744-1803) and G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), who laid a foundation for the idea of the providential unfolding of history finding its evolutionary zenith in Christianity. A dangerous implication of this theology of progress was the popularisation of a modern version of the Marcionite heresy:[385] Schleiermacher dismissed the OT as lower status scripture, a mere historical background to the NT.[386] Later, Rudolf Bultmann went so far as to state that, for Christians, 'the history of Israel is not a history of revelation'.[387]

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[381] Adv. Her. 4:14,3; Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 144-63.
[382] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 2011), pp. 66-68.
[383] Augustine, 'Instructing Beginners in Faith', in *Augustine series,* ed. by Boniface Ramsey (NY: Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), (pp. 114-54); Harold William Burgess, *An Invitation to Religious Education* (Mishawaka, IN: Religious Education Press, 1975), pp. 21-24.
[384] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003).
[385] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. edn (London: A. & C. Black, 1977), pp. 52-75.
[386] Friedrich Schleiermacher, ed. by, H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart, *The Christian Faith* (1928), p. 132.
[387] R. Bultmann, 'The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith', in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith: Essays by Rudolf Bultmann and Others,* ed. by Bernhard W. Anderson (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 8-34 (p. 31).

Prominent in the twentieth century development of *Heilsgeschichte* were two German Protestant biblical scholars, Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971) and Oscar Cullmann (1902-1999) who were leading figures in the biblical theology movement (c.1945-1960). Von Rad detected in the Old Testament a 'thinking in historical traditions,' in a mode of thought quite different from the metaphysical thought of Greek philosophy.[388] Biblical history was not something to be dissected but was salvation laden, as such 'the Old Testament can only be read as a book of ever increasing anticipation.'[389] This anticipation finds its full interpretation and goal in Christ, but throughout God reveals himself in word and action.[390] Like von Rad, Oscar Cullmann regarded *Heilsgeschichte* as the key hermeneutical principle of the OT as well as the link between the testaments.[391] Cullmann began by examining what was central to the early Christian proclamation, the *kerygma,* which he especially found in Paul (Eph. 3.9; Col. 1.26; Rm. 16.25f; Tit.1.2; 1 Pet. 1.20) as the notion of the plan of God (οἰκονομία).[392] Time was experienced as either a period of time, αἰων, or a point of time having a special place in God's plan, καιρός.[393] Here again was a contrast between a more Hellenistic cyclical view of time and the Judeo-Christian notion of time-in-a-line being brought to fulfilment.[394] For Jews, Cullmann argued, salvation was the future coming of the Messiah; but for Christians the theological centre of this time was Easter, the 'decisive incision.'[395] Cullmann reflected on the analogy of Easter as the 'decisive battle', 'the time before the end, and yet it is not *the* end.'[396] It is often analogised as the D-day before VE Day.

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[388] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 116.
[389] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 319.
[390] Ibid. pp. 332-82.
[391] Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 297.
[392] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 77.
[393] Ibid. pp. 39-50.
[394] Ibid. pp. 51-53.
[395] Ibid. pp. 81-91.
[396] Ibid. p. 145.

5.3.1. The Influence of *Heilsgeschichte* in Catechesis

Through the work of the great liturgical scholar, Josef Andreas Jungmann and his student, Johannes Hofinger, *Heilsgeschichte* as a hermeneutical principle initiated a profound change in Catholic approaches to the Bible.[397] Cullmann was himself an ecumenical guest at the Second Vatican Council and the deep influence of *Heilsgeschichte* can be clearly seen in *Dei Verbum*.[398]

In the 1930s Jungmann initiated the kerygmatic movement in catechetics in which *Heilsgeschichte* was to function as the key hermeneutical principle. Jungmann proposed a fundamental shift from the memorisation of printed catechisms to the process of catechesis. The all-embracing plan of God, the economy of salvation, was to be at the centre of this new catechesis, not ontology. 'Its proper subject is and remains the Good News - what is called the *kerygma* in primitive Christianity.' The preaching of Peter recorded in Acts (Acts 2.14-42; 4.12-26, etc.) and Paul's letters were to be the core of the message. 'Dogma must be known; the *kerygma* must be proclaimed.'[399] Jungmann's proposal was for a radical shift from reciting catechisms to a Christocentric catechesis where Christ was the pivotal 'mid-point' of world history.[400] Jungmann shared with Cullmann this emphasis on Christocentrism. What differed from Cullmann, Mary Boys observes, was that the Catholic *Heilsgeschichte* theologians, like Jungmann, were deeply grounded in liturgy and tended to emphasise mystagogy rather than the historical Jesus.[401] Whereas the biblical theology movement had played a certain mediating role between conservative and liberal perspectives in Protestantism, the kerygmatic renewal reignited Roman

[397] Boys (1980), pp. 75-92; Jim Gallagher, *Soil for the Seed: Historical, Pastoral and Theological Reflections on Educating to and in the Faith* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2001), pp. 63-71.
[398] Flannery, *Vatican II*, pp. 750-65.
[399] Josef A. Jungmann, William A. Huesman, and William J. Reedy, *The Good News Yesterday and Today*, 25th Anniversary edn (New York: W.H. Sadlier, 1962), pp. 33-35; see also, Josef A. Jungmann, *Announcing the Word of God* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), pp. 59-60.
[400] Jungmann, Huesman and Reedy (1962), p. 79; Jungmann (1967), pp. 17-18.
[401] Boys (1980), p. 86.

Catholic interest in the Bible.[402] Another difference of emphasis was that Protestants tended to see the 'now but not yet' in terms of social progress whereas Catholics tended to see the beginnings of the Kingdom of God in the life of the Church.[403] These denominational emphases I see reflected in the different priorities of CGS compared with GP.

5.3.2. Theological Challenges to *Heilsgeschichte*

In *Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education* Mary Boys describes the growing critique of *Heilsgeschichte* that emerged from theologians, pastors and educationalists.[404] In terms of its influence on Catechesis, *Heilsgeschichte* probably reached its zenith in the mid-1960s when it began to come under critique from theologians and from the 'real world' experience of catechists. A fundamental challenge was, what was the relationship between sacred history and 'ordinary' or 'profane' history? Pastorally, in the light of the civil rights movement, global poverty and the threat of nuclear annihilation, what did the vast sweep of salvation history have to say to the world of politics or the lives of ordinary Christians trying to live out their faith in a complex world?[405]

As James Barr noted, the relationship between the OT and the NT is extremely complex. Barr states, 'if we are to speak of a "history of salvation" as a sequence of the acts of God, we must also speak of the sequence of the "history of biblical interpretation."' The NT is essentially an interpretation of the OT derived from the 'mental, traditional, religious and verbal matrix' of first century Israel. The trajectory of thought for the early Church was not from Jesus to the OT scriptures, but from the scripture to Christ. For early Christians the God of Israel is the one God

[402] Ibid. pp. 121-26.
[403] Ibid. pp. 103-06.
[404] Ibid. pp. 140-252.
[405] Gallagher (2001), pp. 72-87.

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.[406] It is not so much that the Church reads the OT in the light of Christ, but more fundamentally, that OT is the norm by which the church interprets the Christ event.[407]

A further fundamental problem was, did *Heilsgeschichte* do justice to the different genres of scripture, much of which is not history? Can there be one simple unifying principle in a work as complex as the Bible? Ronald Murphy notes, 'In every case, the rubric of unity turns out to be incomplete, whether it be covenant, *Heilsgeschichte,* or promise fulfilment. Every such category, while it has a value of itself, is simply too limited to deal with the variety offered by the biblical material.'[408] There is, Barr concludes, a 'plurality of centres' in a work as complex as the OT.[409]

As Murphy observes, 'the Church has taken over the OT as part of its heritage - and it has also interpreted that body of literature from a Christian point of view.'[410] In the Tanakh[411] of the Synagogue and the OT of the Church, Jews and Christians share the same scriptures as revelation and read and hold them to be speaking of the same God. But these two traditions have long since parted ways, fundamentally disagreeing about who Jesus is.[412] A greater sensitivity to interfaith relationships, notably towards Judaism, meant that many were cautious of the Christocentrism inherent in *Heilsgeschichte.* Christians, not least homiletically, have tended to treat Judaism as fossilised in the NT era, whereas it remains a living tradition that also continues to develop and change. Was *Heilsgeschichte*, when carelessly applied in catechesis, in danger of verging on the Marcionite heresy: essentially dismissing OT

[406] James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 139-54.
[407] Ronald E Murphy, 'Christian Understanding of the Old Testament', *Theology Digest*, 18 (1970), 321-332 (p. 331).
[408] Ibid. p. 327.
[409] James Barr, 'Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology', *The Journal of Theological Studies,* 25 (1974), 265-282 (p. 272).
[410] Murphy (1970), p. 324. Dei Verbum IV .15 Flannery, *Vatican II*, p. 759.
[411] A Jewish acronym for what Christian's term for the OT or 'Hebrew Bible': Torah, Nevi'im [Prophets], and Kethuvim [Writings]
[412] Morton S. Enslin, 'The Parting of the Ways', *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* 51 (1961) 177-197.

revelation as simply a pre-amble to the main event? The discontinuity of the NT must be respected. An overwhelming emphasis on the Christological hermeneutic, Murphy contends, fails to respect the 'not yet' and to hear other dimensions of the OT text.[413] As Rabbis have noted, there has, over the intervening centuries, been more evidence of the 'not yet' than of fulfilment of the messianic age.[414]

Heilsgeschichte, however, remains a useful hermeneutical framework with Patristic pedigree; but it is only one way that scripture may be read - through a particular Christian doctrinal lens. As Mary Boys concludes, though there are texts in the scriptures which speak of a salvation history, notably the exodus accounts of the OT, Ps 136 and the early church's reading of the OT Christologically in Luke-Acts, *Heilsgeschichte* ultimately fails to offer an exclusive overarching principle for interpreting scripture. 'The Bible is *not simply* the story of our salvation, the OT is *not merely* a preparation for the NT, and Jesus *not only* the one in whom God's promises are kept.'[415]

5.3.3. Educational Challenges to *Heilsgeschichte*

Harold Burgess suggests that proponents of a kerygmatic method of catechesis, tend towards a traditional approach to religious education grounded in the Bible and church tradition, where the teacher is a 'commissioned herald of the message.' There is a difference of emphasis between Protestant and Roman Catholic in relation to the teaching authority of the church but fundamentally for both 'the transmission of a unique, divinely ordained message is the primary task of religious education.'[416] The kerygmatic method, with its shift from 'teaching that' to

[413] Murphy (1970), p. 327.
[414] Martin Lockshin, 'Jesus in Medieval Jewish Tradition', in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation,* ed. by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 581-82.
[415] Boys (1980), pp. 274-75.
[416] Burgess (1975), p. 26.

'proclaiming that', had lessened the gap between teacher and pupils as both were seen as participants in the saving plan of God. There was the implicit assumption that teaching was from a context of shared belief.[417] In traditional religious education, unlike more secular understandings of education, the personal character of the teacher is seen as fundamental. Traditionally, the belief, lifestyle and prayerfulness of the teacher would be a prerequisite of a good teacher. Teacher training is as much about personal spiritual formation as it is about knowledge.[418] This is certainly true for CGS and GP where the catechist is acting more as spiritual guide than teacher.

James Michael Lee offered one of the most thorough critiques of the kerygmatic method and *Heilsgeschichte* from an educational perspective. For Lee, the teaching of religion was to be grounded not in theology, but rather in the social sciences. The teacher of religious education was to be an educational professional competent in the 'laws of learning,' possessing the 'technical competence or process expertness' able not simply to pass on information but to modify the student's behaviour as it affects their religious life. The classroom was to be a learning laboratory where students were able to 'act, interact, and react towards the development of personalized and meaningful learning outcomes.'[419]

It was inadequate, Lee argued, to build an entire educational practice on a 'macrotheory.' The kerygmatic method, based on preaching, reduced education to a one-way transmission of information. He argued that the kerygmatic approach, driven and shaped by content, he argued, took the learner out of the centre of the learning process. The learner in such a context was not free to experience and

[417] Gerard Rummery, 'The Development of the Concept of Religious Education in Catholic Schools 1872-1972', *Journal of Religious History*, 9 (1977) 313-16.
[418] Burgess (1975), pp. 41-43.
[419] James Michael Lee, 'The Teaching of Religion', in *Toward a Future for Religious Education*, ed. by Bernard J. Cooke, James Michael Lee, and Patrick C. Rooney (Dayton, OH: Pflaum Press, 1970), pp. 56-70.

explore.[420] By contrast, the educational approach proposed by Lee and others in the 1980s drew upon modern educational developments and related insights from psychology and sociology.[421] There is much to commend Lee's work for bringing a more rounded and learner centred educational approach. The difficulty, however, with his position is that social science perspectives on education, though often very insightful and practically useful to the teacher, are themselves value laden. From the perspective of the Christian educator these values, in my view, must be subject to theological evaluation.

5.3.4. Salvation History in CGS and Godly Play

CGS and GP both draw on the revival of salvation history, very directly in CGS and in a more nuanced way in GP. Both methods may be seen as essentially forms of 'traditional Christian education' as described by Burgess, where the character and faith stance of the adult catechists is a critical part of the method. The Montessori underpinning to some degree, however, de-centres the catechist from the teaching process, allowing the child to encounter the prepared environment with a degree of freedom. But in neither method is the child being lectured at, nor is there a clear 'learning outcome' or evidence of learning as would be expected in more conventional UK education.

Berryman argues that underlying Cavalletti's theology, as expressed in the CGS, is the *Heilsgeschichte* theology of Jungmann.[422] This is likely the case as the influence of Jungmann and other *Heilsgeschichte* theologians such as Johannes Hofinger and Jean Daniélou ran so deep that it became the theological air and

[420] James Michael Lee, *The Flow of Religious Instruction: A Social-Science Approach* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum 1973), p. 190.
[421] Cf. Joe Flemming, 'Is There Anything Religious About Religious Education Any More?', in *Inspiring Faith in Schools: Studies in Religious Education*, ed. by M. C. Felderhof, David. Torevell, and Penny. Thompson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 111-24 (pp. 119-22).
[422] Berryman (2002), pp. 105-07.

undercurrent of the conciliar documents.[423] In practice CGS, with its many time lines, Christocentricity and in the treatment of the OT almost exclusively in terms of typology, may be seen as a thoroughly kerygmatic model. The danger with Cavalletti's typological approach to the Old Testament, though it is grounded in patristic interpretation, is that the OT is never read for itself in CGS but almost exclusively Christologically.

Cavalletti herself, however, mentions von Rad as an influence in her writings but makes only passing reference to Jungmann, citing instead the personal influence of Zolli in seeing the unity of the Bible as he introduced her to the midrashic method. Cavalletti came to realise that there was no neat 'solution of continuity' but that there was one God speaking and acting in both Testaments. She writes:

> The midrashic method takes seriously the fact that the Bible is ONE book, in which there is always the ONE God, who makes himself known and whose words resound in 'seventy languages.' The midrashic method, in proposing unexpected juxtapositions, amplifies illimitability the interpretive horizon.[424]

In CGS Level 3 children are shown patristic Christological typological links in time lines.[425] In GP these links are not made for them but they are invited to discover the connections through play. Here, even more so than CGS, the theological method that children are invited to participate in is one of associations and juxtapositions that could be described as Midrashic or narrative aggada.[426]

It is to the work of Samuel Terrien that Berryman turns to nuance his use of the Bible in GP. Whilst not entirely rejecting the insights of the *Heilsgeschichte* hermeneutic, Terrien argued that the covenant motif inherent in *Heilsgeschichte* was

[423] Boys (1980), pp. 103-09.
[424] Cavalletti (2012), p. 63; Similarly, James A. Sanders, 'Torah and Christ', *Interpretation*, 29 (1975), 379-83.
[425] e.g. Creation, Gen 1.1-2.35, Cavalletti (2011), pp. 25-37.
[426] F.L. Cross, 'Midrash', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 1091-92.

problematic. Firstly, for much of the OT, the wisdom writings in particular, covenant is not a major theme. Secondly, there are at least two major covenants - the Mosaic and the Davidic. The principle of testimonial continuity, Terrien argues, is the elusive presence of God: a God who is present throughout history but occasionally revealed in epiphanies and theophanies.[427]

[427] Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 23-31.

5.4. Narrative Theology and Godly Play

5.4.1. A Narrated Community

Godly Play offers a powerfully immersive and affective way for children to hear and internalise the stories of the Christian faith. Preferring narrative over conceptual presentations, over weeks, months and potentially years, children begin to learn and internalise and then connect stories of the Old and New Testament, parables and liturgical presentations. As the curriculum iterates it deliberately brings presentations together in 'synthesis' presentations, offering new layers of narrated connections. This is a method that lays great responsibility on the storyteller who to do it well must not only be able to learn and recite scripts but one who inhabits them and is able to communicate from the heart. Where Godly Play goes wrong, as evidenced later in this study, it is often where the storyteller is insufficiently formed in the Christian tradition. Godly Play superficially appears to be an 'off the shelf' method but unless the storyteller knows the Bible and has a grasp of the shape of Christian theology and is attentive to the process the results will be poor.

In human culture the telling of stories, traditions and myths are the main modes of passing on wisdom and shared identity. The story of the family, the village, city or nation, social class, ethnic or religious group form the basis of much human identity. Storytelling is a key way that humans make connections and make sense of life, weaving their own stories in reference to wider narratives and becoming aware of their own identity.[428] We tell our lives in story form; stories help us to learn who we are, forming our identity.[429] Though personal identity cannot be

[428] Esther D. Reed and others, 'Narrative Theology in Religious Education', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 35 (2013), 297-312 (p.298).
[429] Elizabeth McIsaac Bruce, 'Narrative Inquiry: A Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research', *Religious Education*, 103 (2008), 323-338.

conflated to narrative identity, Ricœur argued that our sense of self over time is formed by the stories we weave together.[430] As Bryan puts it:

> We are living narratives. Our stories are both enacted by our actions and composed by our actions. In connecting our activities together we generate subplots which usually have some consistency with an overarching narrative, and together they produce an internal narrative which sustains the continuity of personal identity.[431]

In the West it is common to claim that we live in a secular and demythologised age. McAdams claims that many, in a bleak existential wilderness, are driven to create their own personal myths to give coherence to life.[432] For most of the world's population, however, including many in the West, religious narratives frame the 'big picture' of life's meaning. To have a grasp of the narratives of Christianity is, I want to argue, at least as essential as Greek philosophy for anyone wanting to understand Western thought, even for those who do not believe, or practise other religions. The deep seam of Christian narrative in Western culture, though fading, is all pervasive in our literature, architecture and institutions. As Ted Hughes says of the story of Christ:

> The story itself is an acquisition, a kind of wealth. We have only to imagine for a moment an individual who knows nothing of it at all. His ignorance would be a shock to us, and, in a real way, he would be outside our society. How would he even begin to understand most of the ideas which are at the roots of our culture and appear everywhere among the branches?[433]

The Christian church can be understood as a community bound together by a common narrative memory,[434] or, in the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar, as a Theo-

[430] Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[431] Jocelyn Bryan, *Human Being: Insights from Psychology for Ministry and Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2016), pp. 44-45.
[432] Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York London: Guilford, 1997), p. 34.
[433] Ted Hughes, 'Myth and Education', in *Celebrating Children's Literature in Education: A Selection*, ed. by Geoff Fox (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), pp. 3-18 (p. 6).
[434] Anja Cornils, 'Theology and Narrative', in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. by David Herman, Jahn Manfred, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010).

Drama in which 'our play plays in his play.'[435] But, there is not one Christianity, there are many dialects,[436] and any particular version will be incomplete and 'have elements of distortion.'[437] None the less they share a common story rooted in the person of Christ, 'which the vast majority of Christians would recognise and identify with.'[438]

The Christian Church holds that the revelation of God is recorded principally in the words of the canonical scriptures (2 Tim 3.16-17).[439] These scriptures, gathered together in the Bible, contain many literary forms but it is, Goldberg holds, narrative that constitutes the foundation from which theological positions are abstracted.[440] This revelation, supremely given in a divine human being, Jesus Christ (Heb 1.2-3), cannot be reduced to a 'set of bullet points' in creeds and catechisms.[441] The story for Christians is articulated in the Word made flesh in a concrete and personal way: creation, revelation, reconciliation and salvation are all 'through Jesus Christ.'[442] As David Ford states:

> The Christian theodrama has an Author who is also the leading character. The plot begins with creation, moves through the story of Israel to the latter prophets, and has its climax in the Gospel story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The next act is the era of the church, and the New Testament also looks forward to a final act, a God-centred future. That overarching story, from creation to the culmination of history, has been the main framework of Christian understanding and identity for two millennia.[443]

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[435] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 20.
[436] Jeff Astley, 'Will the Real Christianity Please Stand Up?', *British Journal of Religious Education,* 15 (1992), 4-12.
[437] Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 191-95.
[438] Trevor Cooling, 'The Stapleford Project: Theology as the Basis for Religious Education', in *Pedagogies of Religious Education,* ed. by Michael Grimmitt (Great Wakering: McCrimmon, 2000), pp. 153-69 (p. 159).
[439] 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.' Article 6 (Book of Common Prayer 1662). 'We must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided in the sacred Scriptures,' Dei Verbum n11, in. Flannery, *Vatican II*, p. 757.
[440] Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 35.
[441] Anthony Towey, 'Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?' *New Blackfriars,* 90 (2009), 210.
[442] David Ford, 'System, Story, Performance: A Proposal About the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology', in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology,* ed. by S. Hauerwas and L.G. Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) (pp. 201-02).
[443] David Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 24.

From the seventeenth century, attention was directed to the question of historical accuracy; 'did it really happen?' Whilst it does not seek to lose all link to history, when assessing the truth of a piece of narrative theology, the question we should ask is, whether this is 'true to life' in the way that it resonates with the experience of the hearer. As narrative is so concerned with affections and impressions it is particularly difficult to draw out any meaningful criteria to judge whether a story is true or false. Narrative theology is a changing spectrum depending upon our construal of the relationship between text, reader and reality. Narrative theology, Bowden argues, is inevitably an imprecise discipline ill-defined in its relationship to other theological disciplines.[444] But it is precisely its rootedness in theodrama that has provided theology with the flexibility to be resilient in a changing and multi-belief world. It is able, as Ford says, 'to embrace the objectivity and the subjectivity, to maintain a sense of plot and purpose without suppressing individuality, diversity, and the complexity of levels, perspectives, motivations and ideas.'[445] Charles Gerkin argues that a narrative approach offers a way of doing practical theology involving 'a process of interpretative fusion of horizons of meaning embodied in the Christian narrative with other horizons that inform and shape perceptions in the various arenas of activity in which Christians participate.'[446] It is, Gerkin holds, a way of maintaining Christian identity in the midst of plurality and a way for the individual to interpret the 'myriad events and relationships that make up a life.'[447]

[444] J. Bowden, 'Narrative Theology', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology,* ed. by J. Bowden and A. Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1989) (pp. 391-92).
[445] Ford (2011), p. 26.
[446] Charles V. Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society*, 1st edn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 61; here referencing Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. edn trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Continuum, 2004).
[447] Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 40.

To learn to 'speak Christian,' it is not enough simply to engage with scripture, we must also learn the grammar of the faith, how it is understood by the tradition and expressed in liturgy. As Reed et al. state 'it is not just the stories of Scripture that bear significance for narrative theologians, but also those "living stories" that are formed by communities of faith.'[448] 'First and foremost,' John Milbank argues, 'the Church stands in a narrative relationship to Jesus and the gospels' yet, 'the metanarrative is *not* just the story of Jesus, it is the continuing story of the Church, already realized in the finally exemplary way by Christ, yet still to be realised universally, in harmony with Christ, and yet *differently*, by all generations of Christians.'[449] The story of the community, its history and interaction with text and culture over time, form for good and ill a rich web of narrative.

5.4.2. The Rise of Narrative Theology

The mid twentieth century saw a recognition of the many problems arising from conceiving divine revelation as a series of propositional statements. As the rise of Postmodernism, and insights into human nature that were found in narrative, caused increasing importance to be attached to the contribution of story to theological reasoning, narrative theology developed in both the English and German speaking worlds. In 1941 H. Richard Niebuhr argued that the majority of fundamental Christian convictions are anchored in narrative.[450] The term 'narrative theology' was coined in 1973 by linguist Harald Weinrich and theologian Johann Baptist Metz. Weinrich and Metz argued that, just as people use stories to make sense of their lives, so scriptural narratives were themselves community sense-making strategies. However, the term Narrative Theology is imprecise and

[448] Reed and others (2013), p. 299.
[449] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990), p. 387.
[450] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

contested, particularly in relation to epistemology.[451] In its broadest sense, 'any theology that remembers the story is in part narrative or narrativist in character.'[452]

Narrative Theology has been particularly important in the theological response to Postmodernism. Loughlin identifies two strands of postmodernist narrative theologies: an ultimately nihilist textualist strand, represented by Mark Taylor and Don Cupitt, for whom there is nothing but story; and a narrativist theology exemplified by George Lindbeck and John Milbank. The difference between these approaches, Loughlin summarises, is the difference between 'nothing and everything, between ultimate darkness and hoped-for dawn, between violence and harmony.' Narrativists, Loughlin maintains, accept the ubiquity of language and the claim that stories 'go all the way down', but hold that the story of Christ and his church 'is preferable to all others.' It out-narrates all other stories. 'It is a story to live by.' The Christian understands the world in biblical terms not the Bible in worldly terms; it is a master narrative to which all other narratives are subordinate.[453] The result of this linguistic turn, Vanhoozer comments, 'was to remove the prestige from modernity's two privileged epistemological criteria – reason and experience – and to restore the prestige to tradition, understood as a community's habitual practices.'[454]

Lindbeck sees the development of narrative theology as a response to a modernist theology of propositional truth claims, on the one hand, and liberal experiential-expressive theology flowing from Schleiermacher, on the other hand, for which, 'Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set

[451] S. Hauerwas and L. G. Jones, 'Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) (pp. 1-18).
[452] Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. x.
[453] Ibid. pp. 8 - 26.
[454] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, AL: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 10.

forth in speech.'[455] For where doctrines are symbols of inner existential feeling, the religious quest becomes akin to the aesthetic.[456]

Lindbeck proposes instead a metanarrative realism. And for the Christian, the framework for interpreting this reality emerges from within the narrative of scripture. These stories, interpreted through a few simple traditional regulatory rubrics, such as Christocentricity, function as a metanarrative, an overarching interpretation of events that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs, giving meaning to their experiences. The difficulty Milbank sees with Lindbeck's position, is that this metanarrative realism becomes ahistorical as it fails to appreciate the tension in the narrative. Lindbeck's account of Christian narrative, Milbank argues, is reductively atemporal: 'He thereby converts metanarrative realism into a new narratological foundationalism and fails to arrive at postmodern theology.' The solution, Milbank argues, is to pass 'from Lindbeck's Kantian narrative epistemology of scheme and content to a Hegelian metanarrative which is a philosophy of history, though based on faith, not reason.' Milbank moves from narrative theology as a self-referential meaning system for the Christian believer to a world-interpreting, world-critiquing narrative. 'The *logic* of Christianity involves the claim that the "interruption" of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events.'[457] In response to Milbank's seeming privileging of tradition over scripture, however, Vanhoozer re-asserts the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura,* offering a canonical-linguistic hermeneutic, scripture's use of scripture, to deduce 'canonical practices.'[458] Thus, Vanhoozer, in a

[455] Schleiermacher (1928), p. 76.
[456] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 16.
[457] Milbank (1990), pp. 382-88.
[458] Vanhoozer (2005), pp. 6 -16.

not dissimilar way to Lindbeck, seeks to distil self-referential theological norms from within the scriptures.

The practical difficulty with such views is that, while for most ordinary Christians their Christian faith will be of central importance to their identity, it will not be the *only* narrative, perhaps not even the 'grand narrative' of their lives. Most ordinary Christians negotiate daily with conflicting, and overlapping, social, political, scientific and religious narratives. They strive to make 'good enough' sense, to provide practical coherence to their life and faith.

5.4.3. Narrative Theology and Religious Education

In a changing and complex world, narrative teaching methods offer a coherence and flexibility over traditional catechism-based approaches. Western education, Pagnucci argued, has an anti-narrative bias.[459] This has been a particularly unhelpful emphasis in the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in the UK setting, where too often the Bible has been used as a source of moralising proof-texts. In contrast, as Reed et al. propose, 'RE that explores the Bible through the lens of narrative theology enables pupils to approach biblical texts not as quasi-philosophical collections of answers to difficult ethical dilemmas but as narratives of how people have understood, and continue to understand, their relationship with God.' The best way that pupils can come to authentically understand Christianity is not to see a community bound by a particular set of practices and moral prohibitions, but as storied people bound together by shared narratives.[460] A storytelling approach allows children to respond and engage their own emerging stories with the theodrama of the Bible, to be formed by the text, and in time

[459] G. S. Pagnucci, *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton: Cook, 2004).
[460] Reed and others (2013), pp. 301-02.

evaluate its truth claims against the reality of their lived experience. A narrative approach is not looking for specific moral conclusions, which can be written up as learning outcomes, but for an active transformative engagement with the text that affects character.[461] As Cooling states, the primary purpose of teaching the Bible should not be principally to gather information but to encounter the Christian story, to creatively work with metaphor and narrative.[462]

The storyteller in religious education acts, either consciously or unconsciously, as an editor. Editing is essential to good storytelling, as Copley observes, 'Editing is part of the very nature of storytelling. A bore, in contrast to a good storyteller, may be defined as one who lacks the edit filter. The bore cannot select what is of interest or relevance to their hearer or reader and the result is audience alienation.'[463] The needs of the audience, and the context of the story in the wider narrative flow, are just two of the factors that make editing an essential function. But the essential editorial power of the storyteller raises a number of ethical concerns, especially in the context of Religious Education. In shaping the child's perception of the story, the storyteller can misrepresent the tradition and potentially even misuse religious stories to illustrate counter values.[464]

5.4.4. The Affective Nature of Narrative

Emotional engagement - affective engagement - is of the essence of what Christians mean by 'understanding' the faith, which involves not only their learning about a religion, but to learn the religion for themselves.[465] As one learns a religion, Dean Martin argues, as the learner becomes enculturated into the Christian faith,

[461] Ibid. p. 307.
[462] Cooling, p. 161.
[463] Terence Copley, 'The Power of the Storyteller in Religious Education', *Religious Education*, 102 (2007), 288-297 (p. 290).
[464] Ibid.
[465] Astley (2002), p. 7.

they learn a range of affective skills.[466] The true meaning of religious terms have not been fully understood, he insists, unless the learner's affections have been redirected.

> Understanding the words of religion is not just a matter of words alone. Indeed, the demands imposed upon the learners of the language of faith are so arduous and deep that it is no wonder at all that the language must become genuinely their own, in the first-person expression rather than in the third-person, if one is to be changed in the requisite ways.[467]

As John Berntsen states, 'no logical or theological wedge should therefore be driven between emotion and belief, or between experience and doctrine.'[468] Where catechesis is seen simply as learning a set of beliefs, no real engagement is required. But this, Berntsen argues, was not the ancient understanding of the nature of catechesis. The Church Fathers wanted to see, through the period of instruction, an affective change of heart, as the catechumen entered experientially into the mysteries of the faith. The logic of the mind and the logic of the heart were to be unified in the soul of the believer. Berntsen concludes, 'the pedagogy of the early church was not exactly experiential nor yet doctrinal and instructional. It was a unity of teaching and experience.'[469]

Another aspect of the power of narrative, as a method of teaching, is the way it allows the reader to step into other people's shoes. Story and poetry are deeply affective in drawing us into an imagined space. 'We squirm at the thought of frogs in our beds and bowls. We smell the roasted lamb, hold the unleavened bread, and taste the bitter herbs. We discover manna in the morning and watch in wonder as

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[466] Dean M Martin, 'Learning to Become a Christian', in *Critical Perspectives on Christian Education: A Reader on the Aims, Principles and Philosophy of Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Leominster: Gracewing, 1994), pp. 184-201.
[467] Ibid. p. 188.
[468] John A Berntsen, 'Christian Affections and the Catechumenate', in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 228-43 (p. 229).
[469] Ibid. p. 240.

water gushes from the rock. We smell the costly perfume, and, as she wipes his feet with her hair, we wonder if we would ever do the same. We listen, we touch, we look, we taste.'[470]

In his, much quoted, essay on children's literature, 'Myth and Education', Ted Hughes explores the role that the telling of myths and fables played in ancient Greek education. Plato proposed that the foundational strata of education should be learning these myths and tales. Greece, standing at the crossroads of the ancient world, was a crucible of competing religions and myths. It was, Hughes contends, this narrative turbulence that provided the conditions for the birth of Philosophy. 'The struggle created them, it opened the depths of spirit and imagination to them, and they made sense of it.' Story facilitates retention and connection and reconciles contradictions. A story is 'an acquisition, a kind of wealth.' A child can 'take possession' of a story world as, what Hughes terms, a 'unit of imagination.' A story contains a whole thought pattern and 'the child can re-enter the story at will,' look around and explore the world of the story at leisure. As the story is learned well, so all its parts can be seen at a glance, no matter what part of the story we touch. 'The whole story lights up.' Hughes states, 'It has become a word.' Once we know them, stories think for themselves. No matter how ancient, good stories are inexhaustible, 'factories of understanding,' connecting our inner life to the world. As we gather stories, they begin to interact, generating new connections. Thus, Hughes asserts, 'The head that holds many stories becomes a small early Greece.'[471]

[470] Blake R. Oakley, 'Theodramatic Missional Church' (MTh, Trinity International University, 2014), p. 13.
[471] Hughes, pp. 6-8.

5.4.5. Godly Play as Narrative Theology

Jerome Berryman identifies story telling as the primary method of teaching in Godly Play.[472] He insists, however, that it is much more than merely telling stories. One of the common criticisms of Godly Play is that Berryman offers, through his scripts, a layer of interpretation of the biblical text which is then subsequently memorised and retold by the storyteller. Though copies of the printed Bible do feature in a Godly Play room, the texts of scripture are not made available in a readily usable format. Thus, the child is reliant almost entirely on the narrative as presented by the adult storyteller. This lack of access to the biblical text, something that the children in this study refer to, is, I believe, a real problem for the method. Berryman, however, emphasises the pre-eminence of oral transmission; story preceded text, he points out. Some of the most influential teachers in history, Socrates, Jesus and Mohammad left no writings, only later where their teachings and stories captured by scribes. In the Bible, God is the first to speak, bringing creation into being (Gen 1.3): the first story. God was also the first recorded writer in the Bible, inscribing the stone tablets given to Moses (Ex 25.12). Modern Western society has favoured the written text, Berryman observes. This has been good for evaluating new ideas and maintaining stability and continuity of ideas; but it is not without loss. The texts of the Bible, he points out, were spoken before they were written. For the Christian, the gospel is always primarily something that is *announced*.

A story is always of the moment. So much more happens when a text is spoken rather than read: when a story is spoken it becomes embodied in the storyteller, it is enacted and improvised in the present moment. Posture, tone, pace, inflection and gesture mean that the same story cannot be told the same way twice.

[472] Berryman identifies six factors that create a situation where the art of religious language can be learnt well: wonder, the Eucharist, community ethics, creativity, existential limit and religious language. Berryman (1991), pp. 61-78.

The changes in technology from oral storytelling to writing, and later print, abstracted God from being a character in a story to an impersonal idea. As the technologies of communication became more specialised, the story telling has become increasingly one-way, culminating in the imaginative passivity of television. Theology, he argues, thus became the preserve of readers, writers and latterly printers and radio and television producers. Yet, Berryman insists, 'One must have ears to hear, not the eyes to read.' (Mk 4.9). The experience of being told a story from scripture is, he insists, more immersive than reading or even being read to. For 'The storyteller shapes the story to the audience.' Storytelling is qualitatively different to reading; it is social and interactive, the tone, pace, intonation, facial expression, body language, silences are all lost in reading. Because of this, he insists, 'the oral style of communication is best for opening up the creative process and playing with ideas.'[473]

As story is so powerful, so is the role of the storyteller in Godly Play. Whilst there is an independence of response, the telling of stories is tightly controlled by the adult storyteller. It is important, however, to maintain perspective. As Ricœur reminds us, 'hermeneutics itself puts us on guard against the illusion or pretension of neutrality.'[474] There is no such thing as an unmediated text; the reading of a text is always an active process of interpretation shaped by context. The edited presentation of biblical stories to children is particularly relevant here. In more conventional methods of Religious Education, the (sometimes apparently random) selection of stories, the illustrations, typeface, notes, and even the cover, themselves change the presentation of the text.

Though written sacred texts appear unchanging, there is always also a process of live editing every time they are read in public, through selection, pause, infection and emphasis. As Ricœur points out, though a text may in a sense be fixed,

[473] Ibid. pp. 70-71.
[474] P. Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p. 43.

in a text each telling is a new event: 'contextual action creates a new meaning which is indeed an event, since it exists only in this particular context.'[475] Ricœur compared this to the performance of a music score; in a similar way, each time a text is spoken 'it marks the realisation, the enactment, of the semantic possibilities of the text.'[476] Each telling of the story in a Godly Play room is also a communal re-enactment, a performance of the text to a particular community of children. These stories are not primarily explained, or even interpreted by the children, they are *experienced*.

The storyteller has a critical role in embodying an attitude of wonder and playful creativity. The storyteller has to engage the children in 'wonder, the creative process and the awareness of our existential limits as human beings in both the speaker and the listener'. When the teacher enters into wonder themselves, 'the children sense wonder in the air.' The storyteller is to embody the creative process, 'taking delight in the insights and discoveries of the children.' Unlike conventional teaching methods, the point is not to impart facts but to 'teach the art of *using* language to make meaning and find direction in life and death.'[477]

Unlike some approaches to Christian nurture, which simply pick those stories deemed most appealing to children, Godly Play offers a way for children to engage with biblical and other stories from the Christian tradition within a coherent theological framework. There is a theological rationale to the layout of the Godly Play room which highlights the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, and sets out the narrative flow of God's relationship with the people of God, through the Hebrew scriptures, from creation to the building of the Temple, and then through to the beginnings of the Christian church. Not all stories are of equal weight in the grammar of Christian doctrine, so the layout of the materials in the room visualises

[475] Ibid. p. 170.
[476] Ibid. p. 159.
[477] Berryman (1991), pp. 62-63.

their classical theological relationship. At the very centre of the room is Christ's birth, cross and resurrection and along one wall, salvation history, from creation to the present. The shape of the session itself follows the flow of the Eucharistic liturgy, gathering, sharing scripture, feast and sending.

Though not aiming to convert, good Religious Education in the UK aims at equipping children being to be able to empathise with the affective states that accompany the belief of the Christian.[478] Godly play offers one of the most sophisticated methods of such affective Christian education, which I argue later, is acceptable in both church and school settings. It is a way for ordinary children to engage in narrative theology.

5.5. Conclusion: The Theological Themes of Godly Play

I argue above that Godly Play offers a rich and well-grounded narrative method of catechesis that allows children to grasp the main tenets of the grammar of Christian theology. Though in a less systematic way, like its predecessor the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd it offers a liturgical hermeneutic relating theology to the worship of the church. The emphasis on play, narrative and imagination allows appropriate space and freedom for children to explore ideas and integrate them into their lives. In this sense Godly Play offers a method of doing practical theology to children. Play allows children to draw insightful theological connections in ways that lude many word bound adults.

There are however some theological questions that remain for me. Whilst I appreciate Berryman's emphasis on aural storytelling the children do receive the

[478] Astley (2002), p. 26.

narratives mediated through Berryman's scripts with little direct exposure to scripture though Bibles are available in the room. As discussed, this puts great importance on the quality and integrity of the storyteller to authentically narrate. Where the storyteller is not familiar with the scriptures but merely reciting the scripts, this is a problem. The second issue relates to salvation history. Berryman, I argue, is more careful than Cavelletti in his approach to *Heilsgechichte,* but his virtual omission of eschatological hope is I regard a mistake in the teaching of the grammar of the language of Christian theology. Berryman's 'page that hasn't been written' won't quite do. For Berryman the exploration is everything but there is no conclusion. For classical Christianity, I argue, this is a problem.

6. Research Methodology

Doing Godly Play with children over a number of years I had often seen profound engagement from children. Anecdotally, and in many of the short-term studies that have been undertaken into Godly Play, people have observed similar engagement. The difficulty faced by researchers was how does the adult see what is going on in the process of Godly Play without 'breaking' the flow of play? My specific research question in relation to this thesis was not so much do children enjoy and benefit from Godly Play in the moment, which for anyone who has seen it is obvious, but did the experience make any lasting difference to their lives and beliefs? In this chapter I begin by looking briefly at previous studies in Godly Play before examining my own positionality. I continue by describing the research context and then the specific considerations of undertaking research with children. Finally, I describe the methods I employed in the study.

6.1. Researching Godly Play

In *Teaching Godly Play* Berryman sketches out the foundational research in the development of Godly Play over a period of twenty-five years from 1975-2000.[479] Berryman began by trying to study classes though structured quantitative observation to try to understand what was going on in the Godly Play environment. The problem was that observing the class through one-way glass or filming did not manage to capture the feeling of what was going on in the room. It became increasingly apparent to him that the complexity of what was going on in the room meant that qualitative methods were more appropriate in making sense of what was going on. He began by classifying responses to wondering

[479] Berryman (2009), pp. 141-44.

questions and noting choices made in response time composing case studies from these observations.[480] Later, having become convinced of the efficacy of the pedagogical method, through years of refinement, Berryman became convinced that formal studies simply distracted the adults and children in the room from the real matter of attending to one another and God.[481]

There has been a growing number of largely un-published research studies of Godly Play, though as Martin Steinhäuser notes, it has 'seldom been the object of sound empirical research.'[482] The difficulty with many of the studies is that they have usually been very short term and small scale, often without sufficient methodological grounding or understanding of the undergirding Montessori pedagogy. Most of the published studies are of Godly Play that is not sustained and represents non-ideal in practice.[483] As Steinhäuser observes, most of the published research to date can be characterised as first impressions and very little study has been conducted on mature and sustained Godly Play practice.[484] Steinhäuser suggests several reasons why this has been the case. Most of those involved in Godly Play practically either see no need for research, do not see themselves as researchers, or do not have the skills, experience or resources to undertake research.[485] One of the difficulties, as Berryman points out himself, is that Godly Play has been something of a moving target and it is only latterly, as it has approached a period of maturity or 'soft closure' that it can really begin to be studied.[486]

[480] Berryman (1991), pp. 42-60.
[481] Berryman (2009), p. 141.
[482] Steinhäuser, p. 29.
[483] See Berryman's discussion of what constitutes 'Ideal Godly Play': Jerome Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), p. 173.
[484] Steinhäuser, p. 36.
[485] Ibid. p. 29.
[486] Jerome Berryman, 'The Integrity of Godly Play as an Object for Research', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, ed. by M. Steinhäuser and R. Øystese (Münster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 129-40 (pp. 129-33).

My previous research into Godly Play[487] was through an unstructured observation-based study as an expert-participant.[488] It was relatively easy to record the verbal responses to the 'wondering questions' and to observe which response materials the children chose to work with; but this was only the tip of the iceberg of what was going on in the room. In the same way as Berryman had, I found that so much of what was going on in the room was non-verbal that this naturalistic research proved very difficult to make sense of.[489] The principal difficulty was the observation of play. Though I could see what the children were doing and make some assumptions about the connections they seemed to be making with and through the materials, I could not see into their minds. To ask them questions in the midst of play would inevitably break their flow and it would become 'non-play' as they re-framed what they were doing to respond to the question of the adult. Despite many hours of filming and personal observation notes the analysis of meaning proved very difficult.[490] In retrospect, I had not at that point developed my competence as a researcher sufficiently and the data would have benefited from a more systematic approach to coding and data analysis that could have drawn more from the rich data.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Early social researchers, such as Durkheim, recognising the great strides made in the natural sciences, wanted to replicate that success in what became known as the 'Social Sciences.' Through these disciplines social phenomena would be measured, generalisations made through statistical sampling, and causality established between behaviour and consequences.[491] Quantitative research using the tools of statistical analysis has been very helpful in understanding social trends and informing evidence-based policy. In the second

[487] Dominic Black, 'Godly Play: Meaning Making and the Urban Non-Churched Child' (MA, University of Durham, 2010).
[488] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 257.
[489] Berryman, p. 132.
[490] Jamie Harding, *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* (Los Angeles, CA: London: Sage, 2013), pp. 21-22.
[491] Bryman (2008), pp. 21-37.

half of the twentieth century the realisation of the complexity of human behaviour led to a flourishing of qualitative research.[492] If quantitative research lends itself to the macro, qualitative research lends itself to the micro and the particular. Qualitative research values naturalism and seeks to understand the world from the perspective of the respondents. It is particularly useful in new areas of research where there is little existing theory. It takes a holistic approach valuing narrative and context rather than isolating variables. Qualitative researchers want to make connections with the participants and see the world from their perspective. It lends itself to smaller scale studies especially gaining insights from minority and marginal groups that would be lost in larger scale quantitative studies.[493]

Though qualitative and quantitative methods are based on such different methodologies they can none the less be employed in a mixed methods approach.[494] The study of secularisation, referred to later in this thesis, is a good example of this where the big social picture of various statistical measures of disassociation can be better understood through more qualitative studies that explore the changes in communities and individual lives that begin to form a richer narrative understanding of social trends.

Induction and Deduction

A deductive approach to research usually moves from the literature to the field. The literature will suggest a research question that needs exploring further. In practice these questions usually begin with general social questions then narrow to a question which is feasible to answer within the scope of the project.[495] Conversely an inductive approach begins with the particular and moves to the general. The researcher seeks to begin with the situation gathering data and analysing it to discover patterns within it. Probably the most famous

[492] Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th edn (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2009), pp. 57-59.
[493] Bryman (2008), pp. 50-68; Juliet M. Corbin and Anselm L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 4th edn (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), pp. 4-5.
[494] Harding (2013), p. 10.
[495] Nicola Green, 'Formulating and Refining a Research Question', in *Researching Social Life*, ed. by G. Nigel Gilbert (Los Angeles, CA London: Sage, 2008) (pp. 50-57).

inductive approach is Grounded Theory, first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967.[496] Grounded Theory seeks to close the gap between theory and empirical research - moving away from 'armchair' theorising to systematically see what is actually going on in the situation through careful and systematic analysis of data. The concepts from which the theory is constructed should be derived from the data collected during the research process not pre-determined concepts. Steinhäuser recommends the use of Grounded Theory as it seemed to him to offer the best chance of integrating the complexity of the phenomena of Godly Play.[497] In classic Grounded Theory the researcher analyses the collected data through a process of 'constant comparisons' deriving concepts to form the basis of further data collection. In this way the researcher seeks to move beyond description towards theory about why and how something happens.[498] Data that is similar in nature is gradually grouped together into concepts and categories, eventually coalescing into a core category which begin to form the structure of a theory.[499] This 'middle range' theory sits somewhere between a grand theory and a working hypothesis and is then compared with existing theories in the discipline.

Being immersed in the practice and literature of Godly Play I found myself coming to the study with rich theory laden expectations deriving from Montessori practice and the Godly Play literature. My research objective was not to demonstrate that Godly Play 'works' in the moment, but to find out whether there are lasting effects after a year or more. The present study represented a substantial engagement with Godly Play compared with most previous studies, yet in the scope of their primary school career this was a relatively small intervention. We hadn't seen many start coming to

[496] Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1967).
[497] Martin Steinhäuser, 'Participatory Awareness', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, ed. by M. Steinhäuser and R. Øystese (Münster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 266-80 (pp. 274-76).
[498] Corbin and Strauss (2015), pp. 12-13.
[499] Ibid. pp. 6-8.

church; though for a few, including one in this study, this had been part of the journey; but had doing Godly play made any difference to their lives?

According to Steinhäuser's classification of Godly Play research, this study explores firstly the theoretical question of the theological shape of Godly Play through examination of the literature and secondly the personal realm of the experience of children in Godly Play.[500] This second element of empirical study is both qualitative and principally inductive in nature. I approached the study, however, genuinely curious and open to what the children had to say. Though I come to the study inevitably theory laden and personally invested, I am not 'testing out a theory' other than perhaps the working hypothesis that having seen Godly Play do its work in the classroom I would be surprised if it left no lasting impression. Although this study cannot be regarded as a pure Grounded Theory study, I have used the tools of the approach in my treatment and analysis of the data.

[500] Steinhäuser, pp. 40-42.

6.2. Researching the Researcher

I confess to come to this research theory laden, biographically invested and convinced of the merits of Godly Play.

Born to a Methodist mother and Roman Catholic father, I was baptised and nurtured as a Roman Catholic with my younger sister and brother. We all attended the village Church of England Voluntary Aided primary school, receiving catechism classes for those not in the Catholic education system on a weekend at a local convent. Aged seven, I had the terrifying epiphany when walking past the old oak on the village green that I was called to be a priest. Later, separated from my village peers, I went to a RC Comprehensive. Shortly after my dad died, aged fifteen I was invited to an Anglican-Evangelical summer camp. The leaders, like the nuns, were full of answers, whereas I was wrestling with questions. I began devouring my mother's Open University religion and philosophy books. Over time, I gravitated towards the Church of England due to its more open attitude to theological exploration and service of the wider community, being formally received into the Church when I was 20. After a brief career in food research, I trained for ordination at Cranmer Hall, Durham, mainly because it was in the North. I was ordained in 1998 and began my ministry in the Parish of St Michael and All Angels, North Hull. I had no idea what ministry was going to be about other than a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care. The thing I was least expecting to do was youth work. My first job was to fix razor wire to the roof of the old Scout hut at the bottom of my garden in preparation for its partial demolition and conversion into a parish youth centre in 1999. Much to my surprise, I ended up, between funerals, spending most of my time in schools and youth ministry. I became governor of two schools, Chair of Governors at one of them, taught the GCSE RE course at the secondary school when

the specialist teacher left, and for two years, at the end of my curacy, managing the youth project. We made contact in that period with hundreds of children and young people through schools and generic youth work which flourished in the funding environment created by the New Labour administration. Partly due to the secular source of much of the funding, most of the excellent work we did was largely secular. The exception was the youth choir, ran by my colleague and senior youth worker, Anne Richards. This choir of around a dozen became deeply involved in the life of the parish, including a choir trip to Frankfurt. It was a touching indicator of the impact we had made on them when a decade later, as Facebook got off the ground, the members now parents, sought Anne and myself out as online 'friends'. Yet for all the great work and deep positive impact on many young people's lives, the outcomes in terms of passing on the faith were frankly minimal. Was there something more?

My personal journey with Godly Play began, as Berryman's did, with dissatisfaction about what was generally offered as 'Sunday School' in a parish setting. Thanks to my colleague Anne, who by that time was the part-time Archdeaconry Youth and Children's Advisor, a group of us from Hull had the opportunity to visit the Trumpington Godly Play room in 2001. I discovered a theological affinity with Godly Play, finding the liturgical shape and the 'playful orthodoxy' of Godly Play immediately attractive. Here was a form of Catechesis that was orthodox but open to the real questions of children and concerned with encounter not just passing on information or trying to make Christianity 'fun'. Shortly afterwards, we began using Godly Play on a Sunday morning in the outer estate parish we worked in. Part of the team was my fiancée, and soon to be wife Heather.

Arriving at a new parish in Middlesbrough with a nine-month-old baby gave us a fresh personal motivation to develop a quality programme of children's nurture. Early on, I introduced the PCC to Godly Play and much to my astonishment they agreed to convert the PCC meeting room to a Godly Play room in 2006, which in the next few years became the most sacred part of the building. Shortly after Heather had weaned our second child in 2007, she did the three day training course at our diocesan retreat centre, subsequently training to become a national Godly Play trainer in 2009. In 2009 I attended the three day training in West Yorkshire and the work we had begun to do in the room naturally became the subject of my MA Dissertation. In 2010 we expanded the Godly Play room at Holy Trinity and helped St Alphonsus convert their school chapel into a Godly Play room. Now every child in North Ormesby would have the opportunity to experience Godly Play.

During the reading for my MA dissertation, I became intrigued by the work of Sophia Cavalletti. In 2011, during the week that Cavalletti died, I attended my first CGS training and have subsequently undergone all but Level 2, part 2 formation.

Throughout this project I have endeavoured to keep a research journal in the form of a memo file in NVIVO. Looking back through the journal the path has been patchy and due to family circumstances at times rocky. Probably not usually, I have tended to the most productive when I have been able to work on the project in good blocks of time rather than in a piecemeal fashion. The length of time it has taken has meant two things. Firstly, as time has gone on, I have become more engaged with the theology and, sadly, less engaged with children in the Godly Play room. The withdrawal of the Community Primary School from bringing their year two pupils each week when they converted to Academy status was the principal reason for this, meaning that the main context of Godly Play in the parish shifted from midweek to

Sunday mornings when I was presiding at the Eucharist (often, as Area Dean, in two or more parishes). This practical consideration in itself makes me uneasy about how close I was to everyone for whom I had been given the responsibility of the cure of souls as a parish priest. The many weeks of formation in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd led me much deeper into the Montessori background of Godly Play but also unexpectedly offered a rich theological interlocutor, the fruit of which can be seen in the literature review of this thesis. The study of Cavalletti and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has also led me on a journey of personal *ressourcement* of my Catholic roots.

Increasingly through the research journey, I have become conscious of the changing relationship of the church to wider British society even throughout the couple of decades I have been ordained. There is a form of cultural amnesia in relation to Christianity which I find a great shame, both religiously and culturally. I have seen first-hand what happens in a Godly Play room as children are opened up to these powerful narratives and given the space to wonder about them. I therefore come at this research both as a Godly Play protagonist, though not uncritically, and with the professional bias as Christian pastor.[501]

[501] Ibid. p. 38.

6.3. Research Context

Over a period of three years from 2016 to 2018 I gave out a simple questionnaire and interviewed 32 year 5 and 6 pupils at two local primary schools in the same ward of Middlesbrough and children at Boulevard Baptist after-school club in Hull. The aim of the study was to study the effect of Godly Play in areas of significant social deprivation in the North of England. In all three contexts Godly Play had been delivered in well-prepared environments that contained the full core curriculum, often with many enrichment lessons, and by skilled practitioners.[502] In the Middlesbrough ward there was a particularly rich exposure to Godly Play where, for a period of eight years, every primary school child in the ward had the opportunity to experience Godly Play. The situation in Middlesbrough created a unique opportunity in a UK context to study the effect of well delivered Godly Play at scale over a period of time in an area of very significant deprivation.

Both communities are characterised by privately rented Victorian street housing. Because of the cheap, unregulated private rented sector both communities have a high level of transience. Boulevard Baptist Church, Hull, home to Hull Youth For Christ (YFC) and Holy Trinity Parish Church, North Ormesby, both have a long track record of social action work including long established youth and children's provision.[503]

Both communities are predominantly White British Working Class with a relatively high number of East European migrants and Asylum Seekers as part of the Government dispersal scheme. They have a higher ethnic diversity than the regional

[502] Berryman (2013), pp. 173-78.
[503] Francis Davis, Elizabeth Paulhus, Andrew Bradstock, *Moral, but No Compass: Government, Church and the Future of Welfare* (Chelmsford, Essex: Matthew James Publishing, 2008), pp. 129-30; Paul Bickley, *People, Place, and Purpose: Churches and Neighbourhood Resilience in the North East* (London: Theos, 2018), pp. 114-15; Sarah Banks and Catherine Duce, *Walking Alongside Young People: Challenges and Opportunities for Faith Communities: A Research Report on North East England* (Durham: Community and Youth Work Studies Unit and Churches' Regional Commission in the North East, 2007).

norm. In North Ormesby this is average for the general UK population, in the Middlesbrough parish at 14%. It is twice the national average diversity in the Hull parish at 23%. Though Hull and Middlesbrough are statistical partners in the scale and depth of deprivation, there are significant cultural and religious differences. Though church attendance has declined significantly in the UK in recent decades, the presence of the church in Middlesbrough is still relatively strong compared with Hull due largely to extensive Irish nineteenth Century immigration and the legacy of a vigorous Anglo-Catholic heritage. The long settled Pakistani origin Muslim population in the neighbouring parish, where 1/3 of the population identified as Muslim, has also bequeathed Middlesbrough with a higher degree of religious practice and diversity than Hull. In comparison, Hull has some of the lowest rates of church going in Europe.[504]

The population in the Middlesbrough ward is very young, 45% being under 30 as recorded in the 2011 census. This statistic, and the relatively low religious affiliation in the economically deprived white community, means that the religious self-identification was relatively low compared with the North East as a whole. At the 2011 census 59% of people in the Middlesbrough ward described themselves as Christian, 5% Muslim and 28% No Religion. For the Middlesbrough community the memory of practice is fresher, if not altogether unproblematic for some remembering the strictures of some of the RC religious orders active in the town. In Hull 54.9% described themselves as Christian, 2.1% Muslim and 34.3% No Religion.[505]

Community Primary Academy, Middlesbrough

In the case of the Community Primary Academy, over a period of eight years each year two class had visited the parish church's Godly Play room every week and had seen all the core presentations over a period of 36 afternoon sessions. Presentations were given in a

[504] Data Shine Census < http://www.datashine.org.uk > [accessed 17 October 2018]
[505] ONS (Newport: Office for National Statistics, 2021).

small but well-prepared room, just off the main worship space in the parish church overlooking a cloistered garden. Sessions were delivered by three trained and experienced Godly Play story tellers, including myself, my wife, Heather and our parish Children's Worker. This group was interviewed retrospectively at the end of year six over two years. Though the timing post-SATS was convenient for the school, and consistent over both years, it meant that by that stage of their studies the children were beginning to focus upon moving on to secondary school, which may have led to a relatively low uptake for the study compared with the RC Primary. Also, due to the population mobility of the area, the school has experienced very high pupil turn over in recent years and, like the community itself, become increasing multi-cultural. Because of this population instability and the retrospective nature of the study with this cohort, the focus groups have tended to be composed of the more settled parts of the community which limited the available sample size. The expertise of the school in absorbing asylum seekers, European migrants and 'chaotic families' meant that the motivation and literacy levels of parents created a barrier in processing the consent forms, which again limited the sample size. Most of the children had no link with formal religion except through the relationship of the school with the parish church which may have led to a lower uptake. Only one of the children interviewed was a regular church goer at the time of doing Godly Play with the school, though a few of them subsequently began attending, including being part of the Sunday morning Godly Play group. Beyond the regular Godly Play experienced in year two, the link with the school was mostly limited to three seasonal whole school collective worship visits to the church at Harvest, Christmas and Easter.

Roman Catholic VA Primary Academy, Middlesbrough

The Godly Play room in the RC primary school was situated in the same community as the Community Primary school. The Godly Play room developed in 2008 occupied the space that had been the school chapel at the heart of the school. Children have the opportunity to experience Godly Play throughout the school as part of their RE curriculum

time. The school has a strong distinctive Catholic ethos with regular school masses and Rosary. Until recently the school ran the First Holy Communion Preparation on behalf of the Catholic Parish. Although the delivery of Godly Play was in a well set out, dedicated environment and the opportunity to experience Godly Play more consistent than the other groups, the sessions were led by less experienced practitioners than the other contexts. One of the teachers, who was also the RE coordinator, had undertaken the three-day core Godly Play training but the sessions were mostly delivered by teaching assistants who had only attended a short staff training session. Both Teaching Assistants were practicing Anglicans, one an Evangelical and the other of Anglo-Catholic tradition.

Some of the children interviewed were regular Mass attenders, a few were from the local Anglican congregation and some from Black led churches. A small number were from a Muslim background. The majority were from families who would identify as Catholic but rarely attended Mass. The distinctive religious ethos of the school showed through in the devotional language used by the children in the study groups. The take up from children invited to take part in the study was much higher than in the Community Primary, reflecting the priority given to RE in the school and the enthusiasm for Godly Play from the RE coordinator who was also the Year 6 teacher. The distribution and collection of consent forms was handled by the RE coordinator which really helped greatly with the uptake of the study.

After School Club - Hull

The third group studied was an after school club based at Boulevard Baptist Church in the old fishing community of West Hull. Godly Play was delivered over a period of two years by a skilled primary school teacher who had subsequently became a Godly Play trainer. The sessions were delivered in a prepared Godly Play environment which, sadly, by the time of the interviews had become unfit for purpose. The group of children interviewed in this group were perhaps the most challenging, some with very limited English. None of the children in this group had any formal church links beyond the after-school club. The Hull

community had a higher degree of ethnic diversity (23% compared with the Middlesbrough community's 14%), but a similar 59% who identified with Christian in the 2011 Census. This was the context I was least familiar with but I was greatly aided by an extensive one to one interview with the storyteller and access to the detailed journal she had kept of the sessions. The journal and interview helped to give me important context to some of the things that the children were saying.

6.4. Researching Children

This proposal was submitted to the Department of Theology and Religion Ethics Committee prior to the beginning of fieldwork in accordance with Durham University Ethics Policy[506] and its Research Integrity Policy and Code of Good Practice.[507] The principle of non-maleficence is a guiding principle of all ethical research but particular care must be taken when working with potentially vulnerable groups such as children (section 3.2)

It is important to see research ethics as an ongoing consideration that cannot be fully dealt with at the outset of the project.[508] Underpinning the modern approach to child research ethics is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 12 on the views of the child: 'every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.' Article 13 on the freedom of expression also states that 'every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information.' Especially with regard to this research, careful regard must be given as well to Article 14 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion', with its emphasis on the fact that that every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion.'[509] Researching children is a normal part of social and educational research, though less common in theology departments, where children are seldom front and central. The importance of hearing the voices of children themselves is increasingly recognised but there are particular ethical concerns that need to be

[506] Durham University Research Ethics Policy 2018, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/policy/ethics/> [accessed 18 October 2018]
[507] Durham University Research Integrity Policy and Code of Good Practice 2017 <https://www.dur.ac.uk/internal/research.innovation/governance/policy/integrity> [accessed 18 October 2018]
[508] Virginia Morrow and Martin Richards, 'The Ethics of Social Research with Children: An Overview1', *Children and Society*, 10 (1996), 92-95.
[509] UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990 < https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> [accessed 18 October 2018]

carefully addressed.[510] One of the dangers of research with children, which can be exacerbated by the concept of developmental stages, is the tendency to see them as 'human becoming' rather than 'human being'; this can lead the adult to forget the subjectivity of the child.[511] The sensitive researcher understands that a child is a human being though in a different, but not a lesser way, to an adult. Though there are no specific ethical guidelines relating to religious research with children, religion is a way that humans deeply invest their identities and wrestle with existential questions. Zimmermann therefore warns that being in a deeply formative stage of life, children are particularly vulnerable with regard to their spirituality and faith. As such, careful consideration must be given to protecting children from potential psychological and theological harm.[512]

Informed Consent

In the context of this research the consent was threefold; that of the children, their parent or carer and the school.

The principle of informed consent in research arises from a person's right to freedom and self-determination within democratic societies. As well as gaining the consent of the responsible adults it is also of the utmost importance to gain the informed consent of the child. Informed consent has been defined as 'the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions.'[513] This definition assumes competence, voluntarism and full information and comprehension of that information. Researching children raises particular

[510] Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 51-77; Mirjam Zimmermann, 'Respecting Boundaries: Ethical Standards in Theological Research Involving Children', in *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research,* ed. by Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (Munster: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 248-65 (pp. 248-65).
[511] M. Woodhead and D Faulkner, 'Subjects, Objects or Participants? Dilema's of Psycological Research with Children.', in *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices,* ed. by Pia Monrad Christensen and Allison James (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 10-39 (p. 15).
[512] Zimmermann, p. 262.
[513] Ed Diener and Rick Crandall, *Ethics in Social and Behavioural Research* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

issues of informed consent in explaining the research aims in a comprehensible fashion appropriate to the child's cognitive development. However, psychologist Ross Thompson notes that this is perhaps less of an issue than might be imagined, as 'Children from a surprisingly early age can understand basic elements of the research process and their role within it if this information is presented in an age-appropriate manner.'[514] Involving children in decision-making processes about whether to take part in a research project can in itself be a useful experience, giving children a sense of control over their own individuality, autonomy and privacy.[515]

When studying children there is inevitably a power asymmetry, which must always be born in mind. Children lack economic, civil, political and physical power and lack the knowledge and experience of adults.[516] Children must be given the rationale for the research in a meaningful and understandable way and be given a real opportunity to refuse to participate.[517] Care must be taken that spoken and written material is appropriate to the children's cognitive development. Particular sensitivity is needed in contexts, such as those in this study, where English may be a second language or where, due to neglect, children may be experiencing developmental delay. In this context it was also important to remember the low parental reading age.[518]

[514] Ross A. Thompson, 'Developmental Changes in Research Risk and Benefit. A Changing Calculus of Concerns', in *Social Research on Children and Adolescents: Ethical Issues,* ed. by Barbara Stanley and Joan E. Sieber (London: Sage, 1992) (p. 60).
[515] LA Weithom and DG Scherer, 'Children's Involvement in Research Participation Decisions: Psychological Considerations', in *Children as Research Subjects: Science, Ethics, and Law,* ed. by Grodim Ma and Glanelz Lh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 133-80.
[516] Zimmermann, p. 256.
[517] Gary Alan Fine and Kent L. Sandstrom, *Knowing Children: Participant Observation with Minors* (London: Sage, 1988).
[518] OECD < http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf> [accessed 18 October 2018]

Practical considerations in researching children

As well as the special ethical considerations, there are also practical aspects to researching children that must be born in mind.[519] Miller and Glassner argued that the artificial situation of the interview provides a distorted view of the respondents' experience; this can be particularly true when interviewing children.[520] Glynis Breakwell describes a number of hazards in interviewing children between the ages of 4 and 10. Children, she notes, are particularly sensitive to their environment, so it is important that the interview space is quiet with minimal distractions and not a space with strong associations, such as the head teacher's room. Interviewers must be alert to the child's literal mind and the strong acquiescence response bias in younger children, who want to please the adult with the answer they think the researcher wants to hear, or indeed with teenagers who are potentially the opposite.[521] Children answer in a way that is different from adults and have a greater tendency to offer socially accepted responses to please an adult. In the *Child's Conception of the World*,[522] Piaget explored various pitfalls of questioning children which offer particular dangers for researchers of religion.

- 'I-don't care' A response to a question which has no meaning for the child or about which they are utterly uninterested.
- Fabrication: Where the child makes up a story.
- Suggested conviction: When the child tries to answer a question in a way that seeks to please the interviewer.
- Triggered conviction: A response to a question that has already pointed the child in a particular direction.

[519] Ann Mahon and others, 'Researching Children: Methods and Ethics', *Children & Society*, 10 (1996), 145-154.
[520] J. Millner and B. Glassner, 'The "Insider"and the "Outsider": Finding Reality in Interviews', in *Qualitative Research: Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. by David Silverman (London: Sage, 2011) (p. 133).
[521] Glynis M. Breakwell, *Interviewing* (Leicester: British Psychological Society and Routledge, 1990), Pp. 90-93.
[522] Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (Routledge, 1929), p. 20ff.

- Spontaneous convictions: Responses to questions familiar to the child, often where the child does not need to think for too long about how to answer. Spontaneous answers to questions within the child's experience of life, Zimmermann suggests, are often the most valuable for the researcher.[523]

Zimmermann offers a hermeneutical and epistemological caveat based on discussions of child theology within the German speaking world. As the collection and evaluation of data in studies is conducted by adults it is too easy, she suggests, to listen to children without hearing them. Adult researchers can be tempted to indulge in a 'mythical elevation' of childhood. As all adult researchers have been children, we bring to the situation our own 'idealised memories, utopias and myths' of childhood. In an era, which tends to idealise childhood there is, she suggests, 'the constant danger that the results will propagate a mythologised image of children or could themselves become the projection screen of a special adult theology.' Thus, understanding children's theology can too easily become a 'theologically-reflected adult perspective.' There is an inevitably about this. As Geertz noted, what we call data are in reality constructions, our interpretations of how other people interpret their own action and the actions of their neighbours.[524] Because of the temptations to read in our adult perspective, Zimmermann advises a careful interpretation of coding and systematic analysis coupled with a deep awareness of one's own norms and constructs about the topic. She also offers the intriguing suggestion of engaging older children as co-researchers, towards whom children are more likely to offer honest answers and who are more likely, as insiders, to be realistic about childhood.[525]

[523] Zimmermann, p. 258.
[524] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p. 9.
[525] Zimmermann, pp. 259-61.

6.5. Methods

As Steinhäuser suggests, because Godly Play is a complex phenomenon, I initially decided to approach the research through a mixed methods approach to try to understand the experience of the children in the round.[526] The data was coded and analysed within the qualitative data analysis software program, NVIVO.[527]

Research Questionnaire

My initial intention was to employ a mixed methods approach, an initial questionnaire hopefully capturing a large number of children who had experienced Godly Play perhaps offering some appropriate scope for quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative 'deeper dive' through group interviews. I devised a simple pictorial questionnaire knowing that the writing skills of pupils was relatively low in the community. Due to the respondents' poor, often undecipherable writing however, the results proved of relatively little value beyond gauging the general popularity of Godly Play. The pictorials did, however, provide some limited quantitative measures from the respondents. I was hoping for a larger sample than for the group interviews as the questionnaire was less of an ask than the group interview, but due to research consent issues, the number of questionnaires was almost identical to the group engaged in the interview groups. Looking at the data I decided that it would add very little to the findings so took the decision not to include them in the thesis.

Group Interviews

Because of the practical and ethical difficulties of conducting one to one interviews with children, I decided to conduct group style interviews with three or four at a time. The

[526] Steinhäuser, p. 272.
[527] See Appendix 1 for coding.

format I chose was a semi-structured focus group. There were two principal reasons for this. The first was the difficulty of interviewing individual children both in terms of the power dynamic and safeguarding best practice. The interviews were conducted with groups of two to four children aged 9 -11, either alone with the children within the school in a room with an internal window onto the corridor, or in the case of Hull in a corridor with the storyteller. The advantage of focus groups, as Harding suggests, is that it provides the children with the opportunity to explore collective understandings of their experience as a class.[528]

At the beginning of the interview, I again described the purpose of the research and respect for respondent anonymity and emphasised that I was genuinely interested in their honest thoughts and opinions. A potential downside of group interviews is that the researcher is not in total control of the bounds of anonymity, but I introduced the concept of respecting the opinions of others and of not sharing what others had said after the discussion.[529] Though there were inevitably interactions and the children were to some degree influencing each other I generally tried to elicit, but not demand, individual responses from each group member - though not everyone volunteered information for each question. The children responded very maturely to interviews and were confident to offer their own opinions even when these diverged from those of their peers. I decided to transcribe the recorded interviews myself, which proved a useful (though protracted) exercise. It not only allowed me to immerse myself in the discussion and spot the details of what was said, and also because I am familiar with the local dialect, I was able to tune in to the voices of the children and more accurately document their conversation.

Directed by the Godly Play literature, the research sought to gain some clarity about the cognitive and affective experience of Godly Play, in a number of particular areas.

1. Cognitive recall of the Christian language system.

[528] Harding (2013), p. 2.
[529] Pranee Liamputtong, *Focus Group Methodology: Principles and Practices*, 1st edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), p. 25.

2. What presentations they recalled.
3. Which presentations were significant for them.
4. What it felt like to come into the Godly Play room.
5. If Godly Play had influenced their own beliefs and values.

I kept the outline of the questions similar for each group, refining some of the questions over time where children found them more difficult to understand. The relative stability of the questions would aid later comparative analysis, though adopting a semi-structured approach allowed flexibility to follow the direction of the children's conversation when appropriate. The questions looked at recall, preference, significance and emotions associated with the experience of Godly Play. The penultimate question invited a comparison with the more conventional RE experienced in their school life.

1. What do you remember about Godly Play?
2. What was the thing you liked the best about Godly Play?
3. What was your favourite part?
4. What have you learnt through Godly Play?
5. Are there any stories from Godly Play that were special to you?
6. Do you remember thinking that you were in the stories or some of the stories were about you?
7. What were some of the wondering questions you had?
8. Do you think Godly Play has helped you in life?
9. How did Godly Play make you feel?
    a. What did it feel like to have the chance to respond however you wanted to?
    b. Were there things about Godly Play you did not like or made you feel uncomfortable?
10. Do you think that Godly Play is different from other RE you have done in school?
11. Would you like to do Godly Play again and why?

The data was coded and analysed within the qualitative data analysis software program, NVIVO. Details of codes can be found in Appendix 1.

Storyteller interview

I undertook an unstructured interview with the storyteller in Hull due to my relative lack of understanding of the context and the background of the children I was interviewing; in some cases this illuminated the meaning of their responses. In this interview I also set out to better understand why she had come to Godly Play as a preferred methodology, what impact she saw in the children, the challenges of implementation of Godly Play in her context and the benefits she had seen in the children she had worked with.

Conclusion

To conclude, the use of group interviews worked well in this context and avoided some of the difficulties in regard to process and safe practice in working with children. Children opened up more and interacted well with one another. Due to the levels of literacy the paper questionnaire sadly proved almost worthless in this context and did not provide the wider engagement with the pupils that I had hoped for. Due to the different levels of priority given to RE from the two schools the engagement from the RC primary was much higher than the Community Primary. I was attempting to interview children with as long a gap as possible between experiencing Godly Play and interview. The timing to coincide with the end of year six SATS was convenient for the school but meant that the pupils by that stage were beginning to disengage from primary school and therefore possibly less inclined to participate leading to relatively few consent forms being returned. Motivation of staff and disengagement in year six was probably the reason that the best response

rate was from the year five RC primary group. Focussing on consecutive year five classes in both schools could have given a higher response rate.

7. Discussion

In this chapter I begin by examining the predominant theological themes the children referred back to from their experience of Godly Play. I then discuss a little of what it means to grow up in a deprived community and then what the children said about how Godly Play had helped them grow in confidence and find their own voice. I then discuss the wider issues facing the mission of the Church of England in deprived communities before arguing the case for Godly Play as a way of engaging children living in such deprived situations with the Christian faith. Next, I explore the question of the ethical appropriateness of Godly Play in English state-maintained schools. Lastly, I look at the potential contribution of Godly Play to the decline of Christianity in British society.

7.1. The 'Ordinary Theology' of Children

Most of the children in this study had little experience of Christian worship and belief and yet engaged deeply engaged with Godly Play. In *The Spirit of the Child*, Hay and Nye recalled how surprised they were by how readily highly secularised children used religious language and concepts in the task of meaning making, even though this language is little understood.[530] If this awareness in in some was inherent to the human condition this should not surprise us. Archbishop Stephen Cottrell recalls of his own upbringing.

> There was a bit of me that always believed in God and a had a sense of God - and it is surprising how this is the case for many children. Whether they have been brought up in a faith or not, children still have an inkling of God and are sophisticated enough in this unformed faith to draw a distinction between this inchoate sense of God and their other soon-

[530] Hay and Nye (2006), pp. 92-107.

> to-be-discarded beliefs in Father Christmas, Easter bunnies and tooth fairies. They seem to know - as I think I did - that God is different.[531]

Fredrich Schweitzer reminds us that 'children are quite capable not only of asking questions that are of theological interest - the "big questions" as they are often called - but that children are also able to find answers of their own.'[532] In other words they are capable of *doing* theology, what we might call, to use the terminology of Astley, an 'ordinary theology' of children.[533] In this chapter it is this voice that we will seek to hear from the children of Hull and Middlesbrough as they make sense of doing theology through Godly Play.

The children, especially those from the RC primary school tended to speak of their experience of Godly Play in highly Christological terms. When one of the year 5 groups [RC 6A] were asked about what came into their head when they thought about Godly Play they said.

JOSIE When Jesus was born.

EDEN The Easter story.

KAEL Generally things about Jesus.

The thing that Lacey [RC 5c][534] liked best about Godly Play was, "Finding out more about, it's like a bit of a discovery about what happened to Jesus and it just gets more interesting every time." Eden [RC 5a] thought the life of Christ relatable to her, "cos we all start out being born and working things out." "Why did Jesus like sacrifice his own life for us?" was a puzzle to Carsten [RC 5d]. Malachi [CP 6b] said

[531] Stephen Cottrell, *Dear England: Finding Hope, Taking Heart and Changing the World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2021), p. 14.
[532] Schweitzer, p. 145.
[533] Astley (2002).
[534] The code denotes the context; Community Primary (CP), RC Primary (RC), After School club (AS) followed by school year and letter denoting the interview group. See Appendix 1.

"We've learnt the death, he's born, different stories in-between, how he's helped other people. I've learnt a lot I think." Rebecca, perhaps inadvertently lapsing into adoptionism, agreed, "I've learnt that like, our God isn't just used to being a normal person but then he suddenly turned into someone who was special to the world. So that's what I learnt. And like helped and sacrificed himself for other people." Malachi [CP 6b] said, "I always visualise myself in that scene, so like I would be next to the scene what happened, or I would be like in the person, like as the person, in the scene." Rebecca [CP 6b] was not so sure. "In some of them I did, because in some of the stories some people are like me, like have the same feelings cos it looked like I would actually do that. But were in some other stories, I wouldn't do that stuff, like go on the cross, Nah!"

7.1.1. Sin and forgiveness

Many children thought that Godly Play had played a part in helping them in their moral life. Sin, however, was not a major feature of the children's thinking but there were a couple of exchanges in the RC Primary, possibly more related to sacramental preparation, rather than Godly Play. Anne-Marie when asked about her favourite part of Godly Play responded, "When we say our prayer like so you can think about something bad then, you can talk to God about it." When asked, "Do you think that Godly Play has helped you in life?" Raya [RC 5c] responded, "Yes because the way the stories are like quite relatable and like, it's like in a story when someone's done something bad like God's forgave them about something, so if like I do something bad God will forgive me."

7.1.2. The Old Testament

There were few mentions in the interviews of the many Old Testament presentations that make up the Godly Play curriculum. This was surprising given my own experience and that recorded in Suzie's journal of the Hull group that children often worked with the OT desert bag stories in class and that there was often evidence of theologising through play using these materials. The exception was Noah's Ark, referenced 17 times. Many children talked about imagining themselves caring for the animals. Albert [RC 5b] was intrigued by how heavy the boat must have been with all those animals. Rebecca [CP 6b] wanted to know, "what happened to the flood? So, where it all went, so if it can't go down the drains it went where, so what was blocking the drains?" Latham [RC 5c] had spotted a disturbing question in the narrative what did it mean "to see like God actually attacking in a way?" Raya [RC 5c] was also disturbed by the morality of the story, "it's, like … how did God see that like that Noah was the one that was doing all the good things it's like, cos Noah could have done a little bit of bad, but he chose to save him, but why did he not just spare the rest of them and like see the good in them just like he saw the good in Noah?"

7.1.3. Devotion and encounter

A few years previously when I took some religious sisters to visit the Godly Play room at the RC school one of the year six girls had told them, "we used to know these stories… but now they are *our* stories." A similar head to heart movement in the RC primary seemed to be happening years later for these children. The groups in the RC primary often spoke in devotional, ways echoing the character of the school. Anne-Marie [RC 5b] said, "I like listening to the stories and like listening what Jesus did for the people." Eliza continued, "You learn about Jesus and what he did for

poor people." Anne-Marie stepped in, "I like when we hear what God has done for us because I think it good what Jesus done for us, cos he died for us."

The Godly Play room in the school was clearly a place of encounter for many of the children. Mabel [RC 5b] said, "If this room wasn't here, we wouldn't be like able like to talk to God, like inside, and without this room you can't like proper talk to God." I asked, "And how did doing Godly Play make you feel, when you came into the room, how did it make you feel?"

CARSTEN It feels like in Jesus's house.

LEAH Like… we're in Jesus' house erm.

KATE It make me feel like welcome, like whilst I'm learning things about Jesus, I'm like growing up with Jesus' love."

7.2. Growing up poor

Poverty is not just about income, or indeed a lack of resources. It is a complex and multidimensional experience that impacts every aspect of people's lives.[535]

The children in the study were growing up in two of the poorest communities in the UK. Sadly, this fact means that before they were born their life chances even in one of the wealthiest countries in the world were limited. Child poverty is primarily a structural problem. We know that child poverty is not inevitable, as levels have been lower in the past. Nor is it the fault of individuals, and certainly not of the children themselves. The causes are complex but at its most basic level it is about families not having enough money to meet their basic needs to be able to participate normally in society. This poverty affects the long-term life chances of around 4.3m children in the UK; 75% of these children are growing up in working families.[536]

Both communities I studied are, in UK terms, low-income neighbourhoods. North Ormesby, Middlesbrough and the Boulevard area of the Hessle Road former fishing community in Hull are amongst the toughest places to grow up in the UK. Both communities are areas of very high deprivation and child poverty.[537] The North Ormesby community of Middlesbrough was ranked in terms of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) number 2 of 12,599 [in 2017] Church of England Parishes in 2017[538] having the highest child poverty rate in England at 64%.[539] The Boulevard in Hull ranks number 25 with a child poverty rate of 49%.[540] These

[535] CUF, 'Web of Poverty' (London: Church Urban Fund, 2014).
[536] CPAG, 'What Is Child Poverty Like' (London: Child Poverty Action Group, 2021).
[537] The way the UK government measures child poverty has been widely contested, see Joanna Mack, 'Poverty and Social Exclusion' (PSE, 2017). <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/definitions-poverty/official-uk-eu-measures> [accessed 19 August 2021]
[538] The figures are based on an agglomeration of 'Local Super output Area' (LSOA) data mapped onto CofE Ecclesiastical parish boundaries. The 12383 [2021 figure] parishes are ranked by several indices of deprivation, where 1 is the most deprived.
[539] <http://www2.cuf.org.uk/parish/430511> [accessed 5 July 2018]
[540] <http://www2.cuf.org.uk/parish/430378> [accessed 5 July 2018]

communities have been 'levelling down' since the 1980s, having never quite recovered from the demise of traditional industries despite successive regeneration efforts.

Child Poverty by Local Authority Area[541]

Local Authority	2014/15	2019/20
Middlesbrough	29.2%	39.4%
Hull	30.2%	36.3%

As *Faithful Cities* noted, though the UK fiscal economy overall has generally done well but there has been a growing income divide between rich and poor in the distribution of wealth.[542] Something has gone seriously wrong for such a wealthy country to have these appalling levels of child poverty. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights wrote this executive summary of his findings after visiting the UK in November 2018.

> Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated.[543]

[541] <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/local-child-poverty-data-2014-15-2019-20/> [accessed 10 August 2021]
[542] Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 'Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice', (London: Church of England, 2006). This growth in inequality continues, see Andrew Wood and Tom Waters, *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2016–17 to 2021–22* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017).
[543] Philip Alston, 'Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland', (United Nations, 2019).

Poverty is usually considered in terms of economic income. Relative poverty is commonly measured by assessing relative household income. A household is considered to be in poverty if its net income is less than 60 per cent of the national median.[544] This is an important measure, but it misses the point. As the late professor of Social Policy at Northumbria University, John Veit-Wilson, noted, 'statistical measures are necessary proxies for the lived reality.' Statistics look precise, 'but they are imprecise in how they apply in real lived contexts.' Income inequality measures can be misleading because 'medians don't tell you anything about adequacy, and people can be poor at incomes well above the median as well.'[545] Peter Townsend famously defined relative poverty as 'resources so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.'[546] Poverty needs to be understood, Veit-Wilson insists, as a relational concept, as 'relative deprivation', understood in relation to some standard of not-poverty – to adequacy. 'Adequacy is just good enough but not luxurious, what we tend to take for granted when we are "not-poor" in a society.' Not-poverty is the ability to live a decent life according to the ordinary customs and activities of the culture, with its freedoms and frivolities. As Veit-Wilson explains:

> Human rights conventions refer to a dignified and decent level of living. That means having freedom to choose to live a socially inclusive life, to do all the same silly, wasteful things that everyone else can do, whatever their personal problems, without themselves becoming poor. It means not being told how to live your life by other people who control your resources.[547]

[544] CUF (2014).
[545] John Veit-Wilson, 'Three Points to Bear in Mind When You Talk About Preventing Poverty' (Child Poverty Action Group, 2019).
[546] Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 31.
[547] Veit-Wilson.

It is also a mistake, Veit-Wilson insists, to think about poverty in entirely individual or household terms. If poverty is relative, it is also relational. 'Most people leading adequate but not rich lives depend heavily on collective resources, not just on their own purchasing power.' Low income is only one factor of an adequate life. The erosion of public goods through privatisation, deregulation and latterly austerity has contributed to social exclusion and the fragmentation of society and the lowering of quality of life for many people. Collective resources and spaces are crucial factors in allowing people to participate and have an adequate life. The NHS, state education, social care, social housing, libraries, museums, local parks, public transport, cycle routes, youth clubs, public footpaths, street furniture, community events and places of worship are all part of this web of well-being. As income inequality increases the rich are more able to buy these goods privately and consolidate privilege for their children through private education, healthcare, networks and experiences.

7.2.1. The Web of Poverty

The landmark Church Urban Fund (CUF) report the *Web of Poverty*, after an analysis of many people living in poverty,[548] concluded that the many dimensions of poverty can be considered in three dimensions: poverty of identity, resources and relationships.[549]

- Poverty of resources – is when people lack sufficient resources, such as income, skills, qualifications or health, to achieve a good standard of living. Where resources are limited, so are people's choices and opportunities.
- Poverty of relationships – is when people lack the strong and supportive relationships on which individual, family and community life are built,

[548] CUF, 'Web of Poverty: Data' (London: Church Urban Fund, 2014).
[549] CUF. 'Web of poverty' (2014).

resulting in loneliness and isolation. Where relationships are under pressure or where communities are fragmented and hostile, it is difficult to thrive in human terms.

- Poverty of identity – is when people lack a strong sense of self-worth and a belief in their own ability to respond to challenges. Where these are missing, it can lead to low self-esteem, a lack of resilience and aspiration, poor mental health, and drug and alcohol misuse.

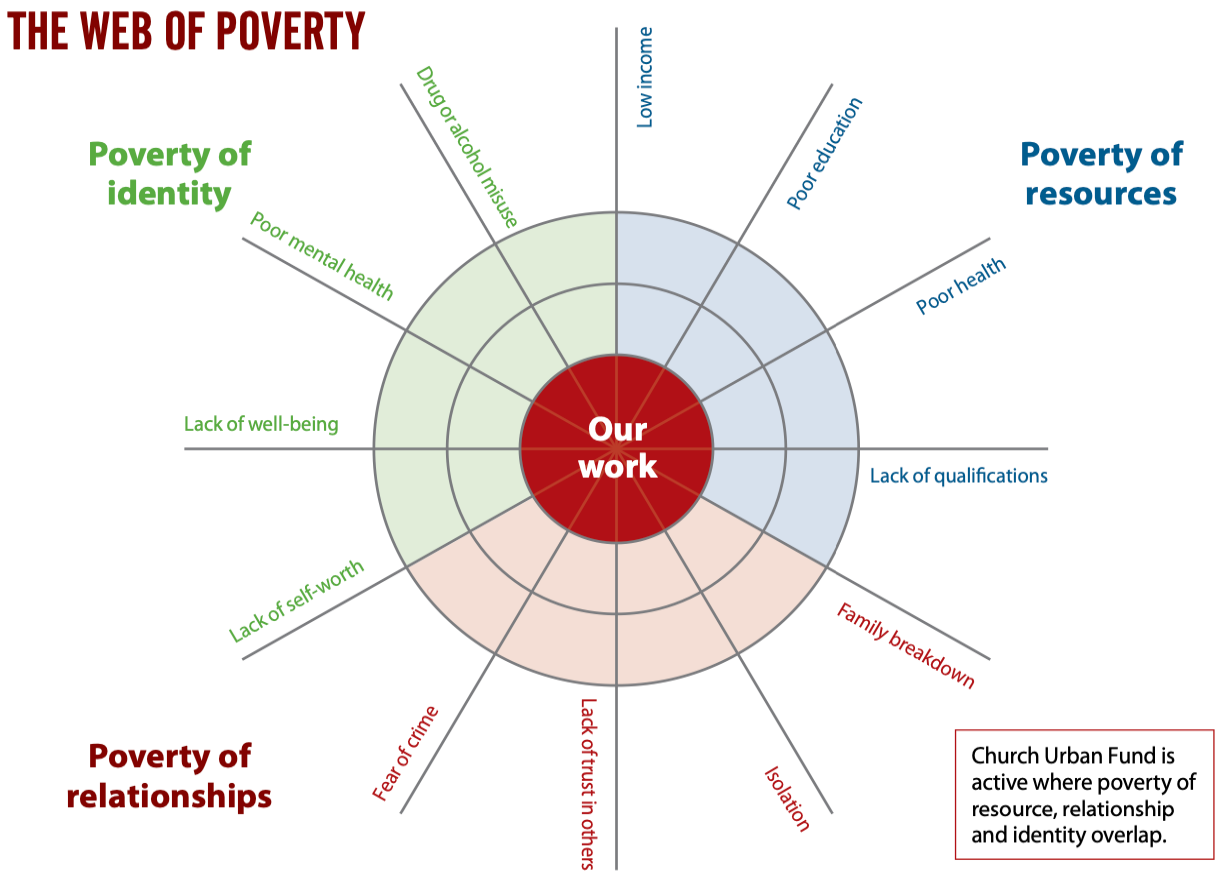

Figure 1 Web of Poverty

The lived experience of children living in poverty is complex and messy, rather like being caught in a web. In recent years much greater attention has been paid to listening to the lived experience of children.[550] What these qualitative studies

[550] CPAG; Sorcha Mahony, 'Understanding Childhoods: Growing up in Hard Times' (London: The Children's Society, 2017); several studies by JRF, 'Children ' (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021).

demonstrate is the emotional burden of poverty for so many children and the harm and lost potential that child poverty represents. The *Web of Poverty* draws particular attention to the psychological effects of poverty; these factors have a significant impact on children's ability to flourish and affect their long-term well-being and life chances.

> Like a web, poverty is difficult to escape and the cycle of deprivation all too often passes from one generation to the next. A parent's poor educational attainment, lack of opportunities or low self esteem can have a detrimental effect on their children's well-being; the impact of which is felt right into adulthood and their own experience of parenthood.[551]

As Adam Dinham's critique of *Faithful Cities* observes, a church operating only at the 'meso-level' or building 'resilience' in communities and individuals is not good enough. If we are not also questioning the policy structures that keep children poor, we are failing them.[552] Most of the time, however, we are operating at the individual and community level, doing what we can to improve the quality of life for the people living in our neighbourhoods. We are seeking to create a web of support, a place of nurture and growth where everyone, especially the children, can flourish. As the causes of poverty are as much relational as economic, so are the solutions. Many local churches attend to the financial needs of their neighbourhoods through the ever-growing network of foodbanks etc., but we also have rich spiritual resources to redress the effects of poverty on individuals. In terms of the experience of poverty, children can particularly fall in self-confidence. This often leaves them feeling worthless, depressed or unhappy and saps them of the resilience to face their problems.[553] This study demonstrates the way in which the experience of Godly Play

[551] CUF (2014).
[552] Adam Dinham, 'Commentary: From Faith in the City to Faithful Cities: The "Third Way", the Church of England and Urban Regeneration', *Urban Studies,* 45 (2008), 2171-73.
[553] CUF, 'Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation on Better Measurements of Child Poverty', (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013).

through the resources of the Christian tradition can begin to redress some of the damaging effects of growing up in poverty through redressing self-confidence and agency.

7.3. Having my own opinions

"You had your own opinion and your own choice."
Rebecca [CP Y6b]

The children spoke very movingly about how Godly Play had provided them with a space to express themselves freely and grow in agency. The theme of freedom was the most dominant factor in the children's responses. Twenty two of the 32 children (66%) interviewed talked about this in various ways in their responses.

In the Godly Play room, children said that they had the space to think and have their own opinions particularly during the wondering questions and response time. The experience of freedom of expression was often contrasted with their general experience of school. Comparing Godly Play with school RE Elysia [AS a] said, "You get sent out [of class for misbehaviour] and she just teaches us things on the white board, but in here they tell us stories and stuff and we get to go free what we choose, there we can be free what we choose." Malachi [CP 6b] explained, "After Godly Play it's like more active and creative, but when we are here [in class] we mostly always do writing, and like get a worksheet, but its better in Godly Play, because you can write, you can draw, and you can create like anything about the story." When asked what they liked the best about Godly Play Connie [RC 6] replied, "I like answering the questions [wondering questions] and like, when we listen to the stories because we can like have our own opinion on things and like think what we want to believe, and then like hearing the stories so we can be more like Jesus and do what he would want us to." In response to what was their favourite part Alice [RC 6] responded, "My favourite is probably response as well, because it err, gives us a bit of time to like reflect on what we've just heard and kind of like link something to the story and yeh."

The children thought there was an openness in the process in Godly Play compared to regular school, Josie [RC 5a] commented that, "when we are in the classroom we can't really ask questions as much as we can in Godly Play." Connie [RC 6] in year six agreed, "I like the questions because it helps me to understand like what we've heard and like what the story is actually about and like if there is something in the story that we don't understand, when we have the questions and we talk about what we think the questions are we like understand more what's actually happened." Later in the session Josie [RC 5a] when asked if she would like to do Godly Play responded, "you can understand it more, and you get the message where other people don't because they think like RE is not really that interesting because normally it's just writing on the board and the teacher would just read it and explain it and people would just think it was boring." Clearly children felt much more at ease to ask questions and explore ideas in the environment. Elora continued, "You come into Godly Play and, it feels, you feel more like open to ask your questions if you don't like understand a bit of the story, at the end you can like feel open to ask as many questions as you like about the story to know like how it all happened from the beginning, if you don't get it you can just keep going on and that."

Malachi [CP 6] said that reflecting on the story of Paul's conversion had given him the confidence to express his own opinions, "It made me feel safe and that I could express any feeling or anything without being embarrassed or shy to say anything." Rebecca agreed, she had the freedom to choose in Godly Play, "you had your own opinion and your own choice, not your friend's choice." The experience of Godly Play had given her the confidence to choose which secondary school to apply to. The conversation continued;

REBECCA Yes it helped me feel like myself not my friends, cos if you know, your friends always want you to go where they want you to go, but It's helped me get out my confidence to erm, to tell them, I want to go here. So, it's made me feel not embarrassed anymore. Cos, I used to be very shy so, I didn't really want to do anything.

MALACHI That's changed!

REBECCA Yeh, from Godly Play it's made me be confident to say things to my friends what I want to do.

ME And what did it feel like to have the chance to respond however you wanted in the response time?

MALACHI It felt like, I could say anything about the story, like I could say my own opinion about being like, being told off like it is a silly answer, a silly question, or something like that. Like if you were talking about this and I like, I said like what happened, I wouldn't get told off saying, like we should know what happened and all that, like it's easier to express and ask anything."

REBECCA Yes it's, for me it's easier for me to express what I like want to say instead of getting embarrassed by and getting told off, and it's made me say my opinion all the time now, but sometimes I get shouted at, but sometimes I don't.

MALACHI I felt freedom, like freedom to do, like freedom to do what we want…

For many children, the enquiring and open process of Godly Play had clearly been a gift, whatever effect it may have on their future beliefs. And for Malachi, the affective experience of narrative engagement with the story of Paul's conversion had evidently been life changing. Unusually, Godly Play didn't have a learning objective,

a right or wrong answer, *the* thing that had to be comprehended by everyone by the end of the lesson. Here was a space to explore, where they felt able to express themselves freely, a space where their questions would be taken seriously and perhaps not always answered but allowed to hang in silence when we have dug deep enough.[554] It had provided them with an experience of community where they were able to discover using the Christian language system something of who they were and what their work was to be.[555]

7.3.1. A Place of Sanctuary

Often linked to the feeling of freedom were the 119 times that the children spoke about the positive feeling of being in the Godly Play room. Generally they spoke about the Godly Play room as somewhere they felt peaceful and relaxed. Kael [RC 5a] when asked what it felt like coming into the Godly Play room simply replied "calm." Marie [CP 6a] remembered Godly Play as being, "nice cos its quite chillaxing." Eliza [RC 5b] that "it clears your head of everything." Anne-Marie [RC 5b] said "I feel happy because, like you know that like, all the stories gonna have a happy part in it and like, like, just like looking around and stuff it just makes me happy." Eden [RC 5a] said, "It makes me feel calm and a happier place to be, so I can like think about the stories and you can have like a discussion after you have listened to the story, you can discuss like what's happened, and it's like better being in there it is like quieter room where you can like think about stuff" She continued, "it makes me like feel better listening to the stories like, for like how Jesus can make you feel better when you are feeling down." Elysia [AS a] helped her realise the importance of solace, "it helped me to know when I need my peace, when anyone

[554] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 1, §217, p85; see discussion on rationality and belief in Astley (1994), pp. 55-60.
[555] Faces of Easter presentation, 'After Jesus was baptized, he went … into the desert … to learn more about who he was and what his work was going to be.' Berryman, Vol 4 (2003), p46.

else is really, go in your room, cos your rooms your space. Cos it is your space actually, your room, your space." Kate [RC 6d] who had a complex home life said, "It hasn't much, but it has helped me a little bit learn that like coming here can like help me with like at home, the difficulties at home." She continued, "Like after my Nana passed away like coming to Godly Play like made me feel more confident of myself." Godly Play was important in the children's sense of belonging. Lacey [RC 5c] said that it made her feel "a part of like this community." For Noosheen, [RC 5d] who had arrived in the community a few earlier she said of Godly Play that "It helps me feel special." Calista [AS a] who was suffering from bullying at school said "I think it makes me feel, like I'm wanted, like people actually like me."

7.4. The Urban Church

Churches are uniquely placed to do this work of building relationships. Local churches offer a long-term commitment to a particular place, an organisational structure capable of managing resources and a dedication to and passion for their work which creates energy for change.[556]

In terms of my own denomination, the fragility of the Church of England in most urban communities is a major factor in any effective development of Godly Play. The benefits of Godly Play for children demonstrated in this study will only be achievable in places where the church is able to maintain a meaningful and adequately resourced presence in local communities. The future of this presence relies on long term structural commitment concerning financial choices, adequate central support, good clergy deployment, and effective and appropriate lay leadership development.

In 1985 the Church of England published *Faith in the City,* a macro level critique of urban policy which famously led to it being accused of being 'Marxist' and 'irresponsible' by Norman Tebbit.'[557] The report questioned the 'structures of our society' and called upon the nation to commit to creating a society in which 'benefits and burdens are shared in a more equitable way.'[558] It directly criticised the government of the day accusing its response to urban policy as being 'woefully inadequate, amounting to little more than first-aid treatment' and demonstrating 'a regrettable lack of will on the part of central government.'[559] In grand terms, the report offered detailed policy recommendations on social policy: employment (pp. 195–227), housing (pp. 229–62), health (pp. 265–70), social care and community work (pp. 272–90), education and young people (pp. 293–323) and law and order (pp. 325–

[556] CUF (2014).
[557] Church of England., *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985).
[558] Ibid. p. 360.
[559] Ibid. p. 174.

54). The Church of England's own response was to establish a Church Urban Fund (CUF) which over the following couple of decades became a major funder for both church based and secular urban projects. The church made an effort to redistribute its resources to take better account of urban poverty and saw a flurry or new ordinands wanting to gain experience in what the report termed 'Urban Priority Area's (UPAs).[560] Much of the activity was focussed on community development projects and many clergy became deeply involved, as we always have been, in leading many of these in local communities. Many of the social organisations I came across in Hull and Middlesbrough had received CUF funding and this had often been the 'seed-corn' that had got them going. Sadly, within a decade the focus and priorities of the Church of England had shifted once more away from the urban poor.

In 2006 the Commission on Urban Life and Faith published *Faithful Cities*,[561] to mark the 20th anniversary of *Faith in the City*. This was a very different report from its predecessor. Whole scale transformation of politics or the priorities of the church was no longer the aim. The church was now positioning itself in an increasingly consensual, enabling and constraining role away from the previous ideological struggles.[562] There were few grand policy suggestions. *Faithful Cities* celebrated the contribution of 'faith communities' towards the sustaining and building of a form of social capital it termed 'faithful capital', where the beliefs and practices of churches and other faith groups provided a glue and moral compass. Dinham observed that the commission had embraced communitarian understanding of society, 'the logic of the `Third Way', problematising the city as a place of untapped 'citizens', waiting to

[560] The term Low Income Community (LIC) is now preferred in official CofE terminology, as not all these communities are urban.
[561] Church of England, *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006)
[562] Dinham (2008), pp. 2167-68.

be transformed by the agency of civil society partners including faith communities.[563] The central motto of the communitarianism, inspired by Amitai Etzioni, that had underpinned the thinking of New Labour, was 'rights with responsibilities'.[564] The strong local community was regarded as the bedrock of economic success. The embrace of the principle of subsidiarity, seen in the policies of devolution and Metro-Mayors, embraced the local and the particular. Society was a 'community of communities.' Difference and distinctiveness, often sources of deep community bonding, including faith which had often been overlooked in previous UK social theory, was now not seen as a problem to be 'integrated', but as a strength so long as this was matched by strong 'bridging capital.' Strong civil responsibility generates robust communities in which people work hard and play hard, thereby sustaining a thriving economy alongside engaging community. The faith of 'faith communities' was now not necessarily problematic but potentially a source of civil strength. *Faithful Cities* envisaged that the Church of England had a particular role growing this bonding and bridging capital. What was different in emphasis in *Faithful Cities* was the role of faith, no longer as something to be apologised away but envisaged as an integral part of the transformation of communities and individuals not simply the source of its motivation.

> We call upon the Church of England and other denominations to exercise a fierce commitment to staying in the urban communities of our nation to contribute in every way possible to the flourishing of our cities. When we express our determination that faith should have a role at every level in bringing 'good news to the poor' we are not referring simply to providing a care service to the victims of poverty, exclusion or misfortune. (*Faithful Cities* 8.54)

At the parish level it is very common to find this 'fierce commitment,' coupled with innovation and community leadership. This is not new, of course,

[563] Ibid. p. 2167.
[564] Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda*, British edn (London: Fontana, 1995).

there is a long and venerable tradition of the church seeking to serve the poor and marginalised.[565] Under the leadership of Paul Hackwood, CUF shifted from being primarily a grant funding organisation to an infrastructure organisation embracing the agenda of *Faithful Cities* through the Together Network supporting church-based community action.[566]

Despite the renewed commitment to parishes in low-income communities proclaimed in *Faith in the City*, there remains a deep-seated problem which is both structural and cultural. In 1991, just a few years after *Faith in the City*, the energetic urban evangelist from Bradford, Robin Gamble wrote a book which continues to have a disturbing resonance for me. In *The Irrelevant Church* Gamble speaks of 'a church that has made a massive retreat in the old inner-city areas. Those that do remain, and those that have been planted afresh in the outer-city council estates are often hanging on by their fingertips.' The diocesan support offered through the parish structures of the Church of England and RC church generally allow them to survive longer than other denominations in inner urban and outer estate contexts, but beyond the pooling of stipendiary and parsonage costs these churches are essentially financially self-supporting. With the exception of some RC churches, strengthened by East European and Asian immigrants, Black led churches and New Church eclectic city-centre based congregations, thirty years on this picture has not improved.[567] Gamble continues, 'if you are born in the affluent suburbs you are much more likely to be part of a congregation than you are growing up on an outer estate. The disengagement of the church from the White working class runs very deep in the mainline denominations and is seldom discussed.'[568]

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[565] P. Musgrave, M. Chester, M. Farrands, *Flourishing Communities: Engaging Church Communities with Government in the New Deal for Communities* (London: Church Urban Fund, Church Action on Poverty and Churches Community Work Alliance, 1998), p. vii.
[566] <https://togethernetwork.org.uk> [accessed 10 August 2021]
[567] Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[568] Robin Gamble, *The Irrelevant Church* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1991), p. 118.

The greatest difficulty for most inner-city and estate parishes is capacity and leadership. In the two deaneries referenced here the Church of England statistical measure of usual Sunday attendance (USA) of urban estate congregations varied from 25-30 adults in Middlesbrough to 12-25 in Hull. These churches tend to be characterised by high levels of community outreach, good access to schools and are often heroically serving their communities in practical ways through foodbanks and school holiday provision. The financial and time constraints of these small, predominantly low income, congregations place a great burden on clergy and people. The time, skills and financial resources available to nurture children and adults in the faith are minimal. The demands on 'faithful capital' to contribute to society remains as high as ever but the capacity to grow new 'faithful capital' is greatly diminished. Many of these parishes are held together by increasingly elderly skilled working-class people, who often no longer live in the community but maintain a fierce commitment. It is sometimes hard for these people to let go and nurture a new generation of leaders but where this is allowed to happen parishes can often find fresh impetus.

Due to the complex historical relationship between parish and diocese in the Church of England although the costs of the stipend and housing of clergy are pooled most resources to run the parish must be found from within the community. There is a strength to this localism but it means that the churches are often as fragile as the communities they serve. During my time as a Vicar and later Area Dean in Middlesbrough three parish churches closed on the surrounding estates serving a combined population of approximately 20 thousand people. They closed not because their mission had failed. They had small but committed congregations deeply embedded in their local communities, acting as community hubs, running foodbanks, recovery groups, youth clubs and holiday clubs for children. They closed

because their poorly designed twentieth century buildings failed and their small congregations could not repair or replace them. When their buildings had been demolished the parishes had no resources to rebuild, the clergy were withdrawn and the visible church vanished. As Gamble warned, thousands of children in those communities are now less likely than ever to hear the message of the gospel.

7.5. The Child in the Church: From Infotainment to Nurture

A 'holding exercise' in the hope that children
will eventually become part of the adult congregation.

Margaret Withers[569]

At a conference of the US Religious Education Association in the summer of 1973, Charles F. Melchert posed the question, 'does the Church really want Religious Education?'[570] Nearly 50 years later we might ask the same question. There are notable exceptions, but it would not be unfair to say that the education of ordinary Christians, certainly within the mainstream denominations, has been sadly neglected for decades. Within the CofE there is a centrally recognised and resourced system of selecting, training, deploying, authorising and supporting clergy and Readers. Bob Jackson and others have identified effective children, youth and families ministry as one of the key elements of congregational growth.[571] Generally speaking, the evidence suggests, churches die older and grow younger. One of the key ingredients to churches beginning to grow is effective ministry among these age groups. In the CofE there have been a string of national reports[572] and a long-established loose network of diocesan advisors but there remains no denominationally organised

[569] Margaret Withers, *Mission-Shaped Children: Moving Towards a Child-Centred Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2010), p. 24.
[570] Charles F. Melchert, 'Does the Church Really Want Religious Education' *Religious education*, 69 (1974), 12-22.
[571] Bob Jackson, *The Road to Growth: Towards a Thriving Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), pp. 64-65.
[572] Church of England, *Children in the Way: New Directions for the Church's Children* (London: Board of Education; National Society for Promoting Religious Education, 1988); Church of England, *All God's Children?: Children's Evangelism in Crisis* (London: National Society, 1991); Withers (2010); Church of England, *Children and Holy Communion* (London: Education Division, 2005); Church of England, *Children in the Midst: Theology, Principles and Curriculum Elements for Training People to Work among Children* (London: Church of England, 2002); Church of England, *Good News for Young People: The Church of England's National Youth Strategy* (London: Church of England, 2002); Church of England, *Sharing the Good News with Children* (London: Church of England, 2003); Church of England, *Children Included* (London: Church of England, 2002).

selection, training, recognition, support or resources for children, youth and families ministry. Affluent churches can afford to employ people in these ministries but for most it is beyond local means. This is a fundamental structural problem.

As Melchert pointed out, if Christian education is everything then it is nothing. Following John Dewey many prominent Christian educators such as James Michael Lee[573] and John Westerhoff began to stress informal learning, in the hope that children would somehow catch Christianity by absorption from the example and practice of adults within the faith community. Whilst these insights were important in getting away from the arid and disengaged teaching of what Westerhoff termed the 'schooling-instruction paradigm,'[574] this 'de-schooling' as Montessori herself termed it, with its acknowledgement of the unspoken lesson and the prioritising of community and practice over content has not been without loss.

What was lost in that era, Melchert suggests, following R. S. Peters,[575] was the distinction between the basic sense of childhood education, relating to almost anything done with children that develops them in their growth towards adulthood, and the more specialised sense of education that emerged during the middle of the nineteenth century as an intentional activity. It is this intentionality that has been lost. Education, on this latter view, is also much more than amassing facts or the acquisition of skills, it is about the ability to make connections and open the learner to be curious to know more. It is something of value that involves 'knowing and understanding in depth and breadth.' Education involves communication, it is something that takes time and is necessarily interpersonal and relational, even when

[573] James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach* (Mishawaka, IN: Religious Education Press, 1971), pp. 6-7.
[574] John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, revised and expanded edn (Harrisburg Toronto: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), pp. 5-8.
[575] Paul Heywood Hirst and R. S. Peters, *The Logic of Education* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), pp. 19-25.

this is relating to the others written word.[576] This culture of learning must permeate the whole church. In the words of Rune Larsson:

> Teaching belongs to the very heart of a church, its *being*, and can never be reduced to some kind of activity, its *doing*. Only if education is understood as rooted in the Church's identity can it be possible to develop a trustworthy curriculum for all and overcome the often fragmentized and even inconsistent praxis of today.[577]

Nor is it enough, Melchert warned, simply to focus all our attention on the youngest. 'The virtually exclusive focus of the church's education on children has created the impression that religious education is "kid stuff," and perhaps even that Christianity is something to be outgrown as one becomes adult.'[578]

Too much of what now passes for the Christian education of children in England is what Rebecca Nye has termed 'infotainment',[579] the attempt to make everything fun and informative. Today most CofE Christian education of children in parishes is characterised by colouring sheets, Messy Church,[580] puppets, action songs, cartoons and memory verses. Bible stories are chosen either from a lectionary, designed for adults,[581] or what the children's leader thinks are the most engaging. One children's leader proudly told me that their children's activity during the main Sunday Eucharist was called ATS (Avoid The Sermon). Such paltry offerings, Nye argues, can set up deep-seated misunderstandings about the Christian faith that dumb down and 'efficiently categorise' the faith. What such thin education does *not* do is to equip the Christian to deal with the complexity of the modern world. One of the weaknesses of much catechesis of children is the lack of deeply formed adult

[576] Melchert (1974), pp. 14-16.
[577] Rune Larsson, 'Education: A Forgotten Dimension of Church Identity?', *Religious Education,* 105, 5 (2010), 519-535, p. 519.
[578] Melchert (1974), pp. 20-21.
[579] Nye (2009), p. 13.
[580] 'Messy Church', < https://www.messychurch.org.uk/> [accessed 20 August 2021]
[581] ROOTS, 'Roots: Worship Learning Resources for the Whole Church' (London: Roots for Churches Ltd), <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/> [accessed 08 April 2021]

Christians. It is not that every Christian needs to be conversant with academic theology but it should be normative for every Christian to be able to reflect theologically on their life and beliefs.[582] Ordinary Christians *should* be able to judge, assess and evaluate their own faith with a working knowledge of the scripture and tradition with, as Astley terms it, 'normative self-criticism.'[583] As Rowan Williams observes, a 'theologically educated person' is not primarily a person who has learned the right answers but one who has 'acquired the skill of . . . reading and interpreting the world, in the context and framework of Christian belief and Christian worship.'[584]

A Grove pamphlet on Godly Play in Church Primary schools suggested that it is fine for non-specialists without theological understanding to deliver Godly Play in schools. I doubt that this would be acceptable in Maths or English.[585] I conclude quite the opposite. People can easily read the scripts, but as when a priest presides at the liturgy, unless the words are inhabited by prayer and not merely said, the words ring hollow and formulaic. The spiritual formation and theological grounding of the storyteller is critical to the method. As Berryman states, 'One of the reasons the church is in disarray today is because the adults are not deeply rooted and yet open and creative about how they think about being Christian.'[586] To do Godly Play well requires grounded Christian adults who are prayerful and articulate in the faith and who are prepared to spend the time to become fluid in this method. Like its predecessor, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Godly Play is not a quick win formula that can be quickly introduced. Unlike paper-based methods it takes

[582] Charles M. Wood, 'Theological Education and Education for Church Leadership ', in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 301-14 (p. 307).
[583] Astley (2002), pp. 140-45.
[584] Rowan Williams, 2004, quoted in, Larsson (2010), p. 532.; GDC #31
[585] Jane. Lewis, *Exploring the Role of Godly Play in the Church Primary School* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2014), p. 20.
[586] Berryman, *Teaching* (2009), p. 25.

considerable time effort and money to develop the materials and train up storytellers and door-keepers.[587] The question for parishes and denominations in general is the amount of resources they are prepared to invest in the younger generation. Scottie May, reflecting upon the work of Cavalletti, concludes:

> As 21st century life in the West becomes more and more compressed and fast paced, it behooves Christian educators who work with children or equip others in churches and schools to work with them to give thoughtful, discerning consideration to her philosophy of education, especially as it evolved in the second half of her career. Recognizing that theological adjustments would be necessary, this philosophy might provide grounding for ministry approaches that can be alternatives to the "traditional" Sunday school model or to the more contemporary media-oriented, "spectator" models. (The latter models often include activity for the sake of activity itself.) A drawback for large churches is that her approach is not intended for masses of children but for settings where careful observation of the needs and development of each child can be identified.[588]

Disappointingly, the quality of the delivery of Godly Play was not always consistent in the RC primary school. Perhaps due to a common misapprehension about Godly Play, that all one needs to do is regurgitate the scripts, it is not uncommon in schools for the teachers to delegate the responsibility to other staff. As Montessori knew, this may not always be a bad thing, so long as they have received the appropriate formation.[589] In the RC primary the RE coordinator had done the three day core training but had then 'cascaded' it down to the Teaching Assistants who did most of the presentations. Some had not bothered to learn the scripts off by heart and read them. Alice [RC 6] confided "They read them, they do, they read them because I help miss … I have to act it out for her!"

[587] Berryman (2013), p. 19.
[588] May, *Cavalletti,* (2018).
[589] Montessori regarded the deeply instilled prejudices of the traditionally trained teacher as one of the greatest obstacles to allowing the child the freedom to learn. *Absorbent Mind* (1967), pp. 144-45.

7.5.1. Hearing the Children's experience of Godly Play

The children in this study were very clear that Godly Play was more engaging and that they learnt more during the session than in regular school RE. The flow of the communal process mattered, Alice [RC 6] explained that Godly Play was different, "because you get to act out the story you get to have a feast and get to do response as well and in RE they tell you a story they tell you what they want you to do and then you write in your book and then the lesson's finished and you go to another lesson or you go home." Elysia [AS a] missed Godly Play in the after school club which had finished following a change of leadership, "I would like to do it again because it's made me be free about what I like to think; we still do Godly Play [in school] but I wish we did two, because two the double the thinking… and the double of the learning."

Connie [RC 6] thought that Godly Play was more related to her life experience, she said, "I think it's different because in Godly Play, you can actually like … understand it and like … feel like it's part of our life and that, but if we are doing it in RE, we'd listen to the story and read like, do work about it, and like in Godly Play it helps me like understand it a bit more and how its linked to my life and stuff." Rebecca [CP 6b] said of Godly Play, "instead of just hearing a story I like learning and going deeper down into the story, then your just watching, listening." Malachi [CP 6b] added, "We could hear more about our Christ… We've learnt the death, he's born, different stories in-between, how he's helped other people. I've learnt a lot I think." Lacey [RC 5c] found the sequential telling of bible stories (see earlier discussion about Godly Play and salvation history) helpful compared to what she considered as the 'random choice' of subjects in RE. Kate [RC 5d] also pointed to the possible lack of Biblical narrative in their school RE. Godly Play was different she thought "…because, in RE, like we learn about the community and things like that,

but then in Godly Play we learnt about God's stories, and then like in RE, we wouldn't learn about God's stories but like, we learn about different prophets and like things like that."

Many of the children in the study talked about how the use of artefacts in story-telling helped them follow and understand the stories. There is thus real content inherent in the presentations but also the tools provided for the children to explore these themes through playing with the artefact or through artistic reflection allow them to engage more deeply with the narratives. Montessori regarded the separation of mental thought from physical experience disastrous for the younger child. 'Nature shows,' she insisted, 'that the child cannot think without his [*sic*] hands and that the hands are the instruments of intelligence.'[590] Having the artefacts to work with allows the children to make imaginative connections through play. Harrold [RC 6] thought that Godly Play was "a really inventive way of representing Bible to children and also, like younger children it's a great way of getting the message of Jesus and God across to them, because it, as I said in normal RE it's a little bit more difficult, but doing it through Godly play and doing it through acting out the story it's a much easier way to understand." Calista [AS a] found the use of artefacts very helpful, she explained "… if you're at school the teachers like have to like draw all pictures of people on the erm on the white board but here you can have actually have like, have a picture in your head of what they look like because we've got all these mini figures." Josie [RC 5a] also thought the figures made the stories more engaging, she commented "The stories told like, more like interesting like, because we use all these different figures and stuff which makes people look interested and also, we don't mind writing about it, but we don't like writing loads about it, and we get to tell stories in our different ways." Elora [RC 6] similarly

[590] Montessori *Absorbent Mind* (1967), p145.

agreed "Yes, it makes RE a lot more interesting, cos if you just heard it in church or class without Godly play, it wouldn't be as interesting or re-memorable, see in Godly Play it is a lot more enjoy and memorable cos you can see what is going on … I learnt more about God than if we just [did] normal RE, if Godly Play wasn't there … Because you can *see* the stories and *see* what it was actually like." Connie [RC 6] agreed, "… and it like shows us what like actually, what is actually happening in the story and, like how people would … would have like felt if they were there and what had actually happened." Later Connie [RC 6], added, "like when we listen to the stories, like in class, I don't understand them as well, but then when we come to Godly Play, we listen to them but we can see what's going on and then it helps me to realise what I actually have to do to be like he was and follow his ways and what he would want us to do." Alice [RC 6] concurred, "if the stories difficult to understand it's still being acted out so you can understand it in a different way." This was a common theme in other groups, Raya [RC 5c] explained "It is like different because in RE you are just sat there and just listening but at the same time not really seeing what is going on but not really understand some of things that are going on but in Godly Play like they move the erm, what are they called, like pieces of the story around so you can see what's going on instead of just listening just really not understanding." Albert [RC 5b] explained how the artefacts helped with engagement with the narratives. "It's like very helpful, cos you are allowed to play with the story, role play the story like, but it's like you do the story again but there's like wooden so it's like you re-playing the story do it like your own way doing like the actual story would." The artefacts also allowed children to recall and reinforce their learning, Anne-Marie explained "I like it how you can pick your own things because, like you don't just have to do the story that you just did, like you can re-do the stories that you don't like forgotten and like sometimes like I might be playing

with Eliza and I might say, could we do like Noah's Ark because I like forgot about it."

Although typological links are not made explicit in Godly Play, as it is in CGS, children are invited, and do begin, to make connections between the presentations and crucially with their life experience. Connie [RC 6] thought that Godly Play was different from regular school RE "because in Godly Play, you can actually like… understand it and like feel, like it's part of our life, and that, but if we are doing it in RE, we'd listen to the story and read like, do work, work about it and like in Godly Play it helps me like understand it a bit more and how its linked to my life and stuff." Malachi [CP b] talked about how hearing the presentations had helped him, "because it has guided me through different things, all the stories I have heard is about a problem and each problem is a bit related to life and sometimes I was get that problem, so I always remember the solution and try and change the solution so it will help me, so it is guiding me through the problems choosing things." Children from the RC primary tended to speak more about how Godly Play had assisted them in their moral life. Connie [RC 6] when asked which presentations were especially for her responded, "The Good Shepherd cos, it's like, Jesus is like the shepherd, and his sheep are like all of us, because sometimes we don't follow his ways and sometimes we do… and like we try to follow his ways and like we don't hear, he'll still forgive us and he will be there if we come back." Josie [RC 5a] thought that she had learnt from the presentations "like from being, like being bad and stuff you can change from who you are to someone else."

Some of the children found the stories interesting but not relevant to their life, Alice [RC 6] told me, "Well it helps me understand but it doesn't really help me in everyday life, but it helps me understand stories in the Bible."

Not everyone, however, thought that Godly Play had helped them in life. There was a bit of a gender divide in some groups.

ME Do you think that Godly Play has helped you in life?

RAYA Yes because the way the stories are like quite relatable and like, it's like in a story when someone's done something bad like God's forgave them about something, so if like I do something bad God will forgive me.

LACEY That's basically what I was going to say.

ME Boys do you think that Godly Play has helped you in life at all?

LATHAM Err … no.

ME OK that's a short answer!

7.5.2. Life to Faith to Life

What Godly Play does brilliantly, in an age-appropriate way, is that it equips children not just to know the faith but to begin to make sense of the faith in the complexity of modern life through wondering and synthesis. The grammar of the Christian language system is laid out intentionally and beautifully. It is not only the grammar of theology that a well-prepared space communicates, but also the unspoken lesson.[591] Berryman speaks about the importance of the prepared environment.

> The room communicates simply and nonverbally what your church finds most significant about Christianity. Is the room beautiful? Does it stir wonder? Is there a warmth and welcome to it? Is it well cared for? Is it safe? Does the space highlight the importance of our sacred stories, parables, and liturgy? Is there room for silence?[592]

[591] Berryman (1991), pp. 79-109.
[592] Berryman (2019), p. 2.

There were things that the children found applicable to their lives in the narratives, others found them interesting and helped them learn about RE but of little relevance to life. When asked if any of the stories were especially for them Connie [RC Y6] said "When like we listen to some stories we like some of them when we listen to the stories, some of them feel like they've got meanings to them, they like link to our lives, them others like stuff about, Jesus' life and that's just fine like for him, but then others I can imagine like it was about my life and that is what I needed to do." Harrold [RC 6] said, "Godly Play has really helped me because, it helps me to understand more like religious education. And life so, it helped me to understand the right choices in life and what to do." He wasn't sure, however, that the stories always had an obvious link to life, but he thought that "sometimes when we do Godly Play, it kind of links to our lives, so one of the questions, quite a lot of the times is, I wonder if the story, I wonder what part of the story is about you? Er so it has kinda shown me how to like, how I can live my life, and what I should do and what I shouldn't do and basically what the right thing to do is."

Harrold [RC 6] similarly connected to some stories but not others, "Sometimes when we do Godly Play, it kind of links to our lives, so one of the questions, quite a lot of the times is, I wonder if the story, I wonder what part of the story is about you? Er so it has kinda shown me how to like, how I can live my life, and what I should do and what I shouldn't do and basically what the right thing to do is." Harrold [RC 6] was beginning to grapple with an understanding of religious metaphors, "sometimes like I have already said, that I wonder if the story is about you; and especially about parables, there's sort of like it representation, so things that you see in the story aren't really the actual things in reality, so basically, for example in the parable of the sower, I've said three times now, like the seeds aren't really seeds, they could be like people, as Elora said or, I 'don't know, the sower might be like God, so its not really

a sower, err… and the ground isn't really ground it could be something else like, so what's the question again, I've gone off track now!"

Clearly the children had found Godly Play deeply engaging and enjoyable and was taking them to a deeper place than conventional school RE.

7.6. The Appropriateness of Godly Play in English Maintained School Religious Education

It is probably true to say that no subject of the curriculum has subjected its inner nature and function to examination so deeply and so consistently as religious education.

John Hull[593]

A key question for this thesis is, can a programme that was developed in the US as a form of Christian catechesis be appropriate for the modern English, often multi-religious, school? Godly Play has been widely adopted in English state-maintained schools, both those with a Church of England or Roman Catholic foundation and Community Schools.[594] One of the criticisms of Godly Play is that it is a form of stealth indoctrination which should have no part in the modern school system.[595] To what degree is this a legitimate criticism, given the statutory purposes of Religious Education (RE) in the UK? In this chapter I will examine whether it is an educationally valid methodology in the context of the English state school system.

Godly Play was developed as a form of Christian nurture in the very different culture of the USA where, for historical reasons, there is a strict separation of church and state, and no teaching about religion in public schools. The appropriateness or otherwise of Godly Play depends upon what is deemed to be the purpose of RE in schools paid for by taxpayers. Political as well as pedagogical considerations are relevant here. This is a complex and nuanced debate which takes us to the very heart of the contested purpose of RE in the state school, and more broadly to the place of

[593] John Hull, 'The Blessings of Secularity: Religious Education in England and Wales', *Journal of Religious Education*, 51, 3 (2003), 51-58.
[594] In this discussion, I am speaking specifically about the English education system as slightly different arrangements exist in the other constituent nations of the UK.
[595] Paul Stevenson, 'Godly Play: A Sinister New Religious Indoctrination Tool' (London: National Secular Society, 2008) <https://www.secularism.org.uk/godlyplay2.html%3E> [accessed 07 November 2018]

Christianity in the modern British state. For some, RE is clearly 'within the context of a secular education system serving the needs of children and young people who are members of a religiously diverse and predominantly secular society.[596]' For others, the situation is much more complex and nuanced. What does it mean to live well with religious diversity? What does 'secular' mean? Does history have value in understanding the present? Is it possible to find a compelling secular narrative either for 'British values', or for most people's self-understanding? The debate around the future of RE remains vital. In 2007 Ofsted noted;

> The notions, common until recently, that religion was quietly declining and RE had little relevance to modern life now look naïve. It is widely recognised that children and young people need to develop a more profound understanding of the significance of religious commitment and diversity. They need the opportunity to reflect on issues of personal identity, meaning and truth.[597]

7.6.1. The Roots of Religious Education in English Schools

The links between the Church and education in the British Isles run very deep. From the age of Bede until 1650 education was governed by canon law, and all teachers had to be in orders. For all but a tiny elite of boys, destined for the church, the law or the landowning classes, education for most consisted in learning the basics of the Christian faith from the parish priest.[598]

[596] Michael Grimmitt, 'Introduction', in *Pedagogies of Religious Education,* ed. by Michael Grimmitt (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2000) (p. 17).
[597] Ofsted, *Making Sense of Religion*, (London, 2007), p. 39.
[598] Ian Ramsey ed., *The Fourth R: The Durham Report on Religious Education* (London: National Society / SPCK, 1970), pp. 1-2.

7.6.2. Religious Toleration

The unfolding of the unwritten British constitution has bequeathed a complex relationship between Church and state which differs substantially in each of the constituent nations of the UK.

The rights of non-Anglicans in England were hard won. The privileged relationship of the Church of England was hotly contested, often descending into bloodshed. From Henry VIII onwards, the relationship between Church and state, in which Henry declared himself head on earth of both Church and state, has been challenged. The challenges were initially from Recusants, those who remained loyal to the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and Non-Conformists, Protestants who regarded the Church of England as only partly reformed, and latterly by secularists. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, there was a hardened sense of being a Protestant nation, making life more hostile for the remaining Roman Catholic minority.

The beginnings of what became the British tradition of religious tolerance were first seen in the American colonies, where diverse Protestant groups found ways of co-existing.[599] During the Commonwealth, persecution of Roman Catholics again intensified, but Oliver Cromwell did invite back the Jewish community which had been expelled from England in 1290. The expulsion of 1,760 Puritan ministers from Church of England livings after the restitution of the monarchy in the aftermath of the Civil War left a bitter taste.[600] A few years later, the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 even led some Anglicans who were loyal to James II, to become dissenters, but the new regime generally led to Protestant toleration.[601]

Life for Roman Catholics continued to be difficult, but as they were no longer seen as a threat to the Protestant state, their situation slowly began to ease. The last

[599] David L Edwards, *Christian England*, combined edn (London: Collins: Fount, 1989), pp. 251-55.
[600] Ibid. pp. 296-313.
[601] Ibid. pp. 455-68.

prosecution of a Roman Catholic priest for saying Mass in England was in 1767. The Papist Act of 1778 finally allowed Roman Catholics to own property. The Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1791 opened some legal and military posts and was followed by the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 allowing Roman Catholics to take up most civic offices. The Universities Test Act of 1871 allowed non-Anglicans, including non-Christians, admission to English universities. Most, but not all, of the remaining restrictions were finally removed by the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1926. It is against this long struggle for religious tolerance that the beginnings of modern RE emerged.

7.6.3. Educating the Masses

The first serious attempt at mass education had been the founding in 1698 of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The SPCK began establishing charity schools throughout England and by 1760 was teaching around 30,000 children. The beginnings of industrialisation and the demand for child labour in the mills, however, led to the decline of many schools as the 18th century progressed. Alongside the day schools, in 1780 Robert Raikes founded the Sunday School movement in Gloucester so that children and adults could learn to read the Bible.[602]

The economic and political turmoil of the early nineteenth century exposed the need for more extensive and systematic school provision. A group of Non-Conformists [603] came together in 1808 to found the 'British and Foreign School Society,' closely followed in 1811 by its Anglican counterpart, headed by Joshua Watson, 'The National Society for the Education of the Children of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church.' These societies, funded entirely by voluntary

[602] Ramsey, pp. 2-3.
[603] Independent Protestant denominations by this time preferring to be referred to as 'Free-Church.'

donations, rapidly set about setting up elementary schools. Aiming to set up a school in every parish to offer education based on the teachings of the Church of England, the National Society rapidly founded 3,678 schools by 1830. Alongside the schools, teacher training colleges were founded and a system of school inspections was developed. The first direct state involvement in public education was in 1833 when a grant of £20,000 was distributed between the two societies to aid school building programmes. By 1861 the National Society alone had an impressive 12,000 parish schools across England and Wales.[604] But still only a minority of poor children were receiving an education.

7.6.4. The Cowper-Temple Clause: 1870 – 1945

The roots of the current shape of English RE[605] date back to the compromise of the Elementary Education Act of 1870. By the mid-century, it was clear that without state aid the system was becoming overwhelmed by rapid urbanisation. A compromise had to be found that would allow support for the existing voluntary schools and yet make provision for new schools in the rapidly expanding industrial cities. The provision of the 1870 Act allowed voluntary schools, with their distinctive religious foundations, to continue but founded Board schools to fill the gaps in voluntary school provision. The teachings of the Church of England, or any other distinctive doctrine and practice in these schools was banned.[606] The Act enshrined the principle of the 'Cowper-Temple clause' that in the newly provided Board schools 'no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive to any

[604] Church of England: Board of Education <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools> [accessed 30 March 2019]
[605] Over the years the terminology in British education has shifted to reflect the increasingly non-confessional nature of the subject from Religious Knowledge or Instruction (RK, RI) to Religious Education or Studies (RE, RS), and in some schools more recently Religion and Worldviews, to reflect non-theistic belief systems such as Humanism and Marxism.
[606] Ramsey, pp. 1-8.

particular denomination shall be taught.'[607] Parents in places where they could not send their children to a school of their own religious convictions had the right to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship, a right which still remains. The effect of the Act was that Religious Education for many of the urban poor became a pan-Protestant diet of scripture, hymnbook and morality.

Due to rapid social change driven by industrialisation, and partly because of the Act, by 1880 many of the voluntary schools were struggling financially. The Education Act 1902 amalgamated the school boards into newly formed Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and offered a degree of rate assistance to the struggling voluntary schools creating the 'dual system' of state-maintained denominational and non-denominational schools. The Baptist leader, Dr Clifford, decried the development as 'Rome on the rates.' though at the time most English schools were Anglican. Some Protestant objectors were even imprisoned for refusing to pay their rates.[608]

7.6.5. The Place of RE in the 1944 Education Reforms

The implementation of the 1944 Education Act together with the founding of a National Health Service was at the heart of major post-war social reforms. For the first time general provision was made for secondary school education, but the dual system was consolidated. This was partly pragmatic: the state could not afford to buy up the Church's schools and the Church was not able to repair its war-damaged and dilapidated building stock. Most Church of England voluntary schools became either Voluntary Aided (VA), where the diocese retained control of the RE curriculum and the majority of recruitment and admissions in return for a

[607] Elementary Education Act 1870, s14(2).
<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/1870-elementary-education-act.html> [accessed 07 November 2018]
[608] Ramsey, pp. 8-9.

contribution to their maintenance, or weaker Voluntary Controlled (VC), where the church relinquished financial responsibility but still maintained some influence over collective worship but not RE.[609] The Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales opted entirely for VA status.[610] Despite the demise of the LEAs with the academisation of most schools, the dual system remains. Recent years have even seen a resurgence of Church of England schools in the secondary sector, where it has been historically weaker than the Roman Catholics. The special status of 'schools with a distinctively religious character' within the maintained sector, what are often (sometimes disparagingly) termed 'faith schools,' is regularly contested by secularists,[611] but the educational effectiveness and popularity of such schools with parents have thus far assured their survival.[612]

The 1940s was still an era where RE was essentially seen as a faith fostering activity. As John Hull describes its nature, 'it sprang from faith and it spoke to faith, it took place in schools which were regarded as being Christian Communities, and the Bible was its textbook.'[613] Schools were seen as part of the moral shoring up of the state. As Barnes explains, 'by teaching a broad and non-denominational version of Christianity in a nurturing environment it was hoped to inculcate Christian beliefs and values in the young and thus lay down a firm moral foundation for later life. The apparatus of the church and state worked together to further Christian discipleship and civic virtue.'[614] Reassured by the pan-Protestant provision of Bible

[609] Ibid. pp. 1-16.
[610] The classic aim of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales has been 'every child from a Catholic home to be taught by Catholic teachers in a Catholic school.' Today 68% of the over 800,000 pupils in Catholic Schools are registered as Catholic. Catholic Education Service, <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/> [accessed 11 November 2018]
[611] Giles Harrison, 'Stop Funding Faith, Says BBC Presenter Alice Roberts with Children at Church School', *The Sunday Times*, 11 November 2018.
[612] Sian Griffiths, Alastair McCall and Kweku Bimpong, 'Schools Guide 2019: Church Primaries Challenge Top Fee-Paying Preps', *The Sunday Times*, 18 November 2018.
[613] John Hull, 'The Bible in the Secular Classroom', in *The Contours of Christian Education*, ed. by Jeff Astley and David Day (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1992), pp. 197-215 (p. 207).
[614] L. Philip Barnes, 'Working Paper 36, Christian Confessionalism and Phenomenological Religious Education', *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 6 (2002), 36.

teaching of a non-denominational nature that was enshrined in the Cowper-Temple clause, in contrast to the CofE and RC churches, most Free Church schools were relinquished to the newly formed LEAs.

7.6.6. The Agreed Syllabus and SACRE

The 1944 Act provided that every LEA was to hold an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) with representatives of the Church of England other denominations (latterly, other faiths), and representatives of the LEA and teacher organisations, to adopt an 'agreed syllabus' for RE.[615] The idea of the local conferences was to reflect the local religious makeup of the Local Authority area. In practice these syllabuses were often adopted from other authorities, Cambridge and Birmingham being particularly influential. Largely due to the dual system, and despite RE being a statutory requirement, it was not included in the National Curriculum, though non-statutory guidance for it was given.

Every LEA had a statutory duty to have a Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE), with a similar composition to the syllabus conference from the 1988 Educational Reform Act, which seeks to support RE and collective worship in non-denominational schools.[616] The decline in subject support available from LEAs following the academies programme, coupled with the perennial lack of specialist RE teachers, has made the effective provision of RE increasingly difficult. As a 2018 Church of England response to the government review of RE makes clear, the quality of SACREs is very patchy leading to large national inconsistencies. There is a strong case for a national statutory framework for non-denominational schools and a review of the rationale for a parental right to withdraw from a subject that is now conceived in educational, not faith conferring, terms.[617]

[615] Required by Schedule 31(2), Education Act 1996.
[616] Section 390, Education Act 1996.
[617] Derek Holloway, 'Commission on Religious Education; Interim Report: Church of England Education Office Response' (London: Church of England, 2017).

7.6.7. Changing RE in a Rapidly Changing Britain

As Terence Copley argues in *Teaching Religion,* where he outlines the development of RE in England and Wales from the 1944 Education Act to 2007, the dramatic social changes following WWII meant that the Christian confessional expectations of the settlement of the 1944 Act were coming under strain as early as the 1950s.[618] The publication by Harold Loukes of *Teenage Religion* in 1961 highlighted the inappropriateness of the inherited model of scripture lessons that were increasingly not connecting with young people.[619] The influence of Loukes and others began to press for a more issue based, or 'problem-centred' approach to RE.[620]

A hugely influential figure was Ronald Goldman. Goldman argued from Piagetian principles and his own research, that due to their developmental ability young children were simply not capable of making sense of the Bible or abstract theological reasoning. For Goldman, early childhood was therefore designated a pre-religious period.[621] Goldman concluded that children both lacked the life experience to understand the purpose of religion and were incapable of grasping its conceptual framework.[622] Noting verbal mistakes made by young children such as 'Harold be thy name,' Goldman concluded that children below 13 were incapable of religious thought. It was, he concluded, 'an impossible task to teach the Bible as such, to children before adolescence.' The symbolic language of religion was simply beyond them.[623] Instead, he proposed that children should explore 'life themes' from their everyday experience: the wonder of growing things, family and the senses.

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[618] Terence Copley, *Teaching Religion: Sixty Years of Religious Education in England and Wales*, New ed. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), pp. 43-60.
[619] Harold Loukes, *Teenage Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1961).
[620] Copley (2008), pp. 69-76.
[621] Ronald Goldman, *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 33.
[622] Ibid. pp. 49-50.
[623] Ibid. p. 8.

Goldman's assumptions would cast a long shadow over RE, resulting in religious themes simply not being introduced to young children.[624]

The decades of the 60s and 70s constituted a period of social and theological revolution. It was a hedonistic and materialistic age. The greyness of the old world was cast off and a new libertarian spirit emerged. Traditional Christian norms around sexuality and marriage were challenged, whilst church attendance and Sunday School membership (which had risen in the 1950s) began to decline. Old certainties were breaking down in the Churches as the scholarship of German Protestant theologians was popularised by John Robinson's *Honest to God* and, to the surprise of many, Vatican II began a liturgical revolution that also affected mainline Protestant churches. In Britain, increasing numbers of people began arriving from the newly defunct Empire, transforming the industrial towns and cities into multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. Unlike the increasingly secular English, these new arrivals took their religion seriously. Despite alarmist warnings of 'rivers of blood', Britain has generally managed to adapt successfully to this diversity, arguably partly as a result of a changing RE that sought to foster multi-faith understanding.[625]

[624] John Hull, 'Religion at the Service of the Child Project: The Gift Approach to Religious Education', in *Pedagogies of Religious Education,* ed. by Michael Grimmitt (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2000), pp. 112-29.
[625] Copley (2008), pp. 61-114.

7.6.8. From Confessional to Professional

'The intention of education cannot be to promote the Christian faith; this must be adhered to regardless of the consequences.'

John Hull[626]

In the late 1960s, RE teachers began to break away from ecclesiastical control. Secularity and the increasing awareness of religions other than Christianity became key concepts in the development of RE. One of the leading influences, through his editorship of the *British Journal for Religious Education* from the 1970s through to the 1990s, was John Hull. For Hull, the secular nature of the subject was the cornerstone of the rationale for RE in non-denominational schools.[627] In a radical shift from the past, the rationale for RE must now, in Hull's view, be utterly secular (in the sense of non-confessional) and wholly educational in purpose. In this emerging RE, religious commitment was now not a pre-requisite for the good RE teacher but rather a potential problem. RE's primary rationale was to be educational and those committed to religion ran the danger of lapsing from education into nurture. The *study of* religion came to the fore as a discipline, which understood religion in *educational* terms as a belief system, social phenomenon or stance for living.[628] For Hull, the former sponsors of RE had now become the 'objects of religious study,' with their 'wonderful collections of learning resources.'[629]

7.6.9. The Rise of Phenomenology

The dominant response to the emerging multi-faith context was the phenomenological approach to RE. In 1967 Lancaster University, in a break from

[626] John Hull, *School Worship: An Obituary* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 91.
[627] Hull (2003), p. 52.
[628] Michael Grimmitt, 'When Is "Commitment" a Problem in Religious Education?', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 29 (1981), 42-53.
[629] Hull (2003), pp. 51-58.

establishing traditional departments of theology, appointed Ninian Smart as the first professor of Religious Studies in a UK university. Brought up a Scottish Episcopalian, Smart, who had been an Army intelligence officer in Sri Lanka during WWII, was familiar with Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. Smart proposed a radically secular way of examining religions through the lens of phenomenology based on the new field of Religious Studies.[630]

Phenomenology is an idealist strand of philosophy derived from the writing of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). In the tradition of Descartes, Husserl contrasted the structures of inner consciousness with the physical structures of the material world.[631] He proposed that one could 'bracket' all those elements of experience that do not belong to consciousness itself. Experience is then reduced to pure forms of timeless consciousness. Husserl saw Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy* as a masterly analysis of the religious consciousness.[632] In *Religion in Manifestation and Essence*, Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1960) developed this method so as to distil the essence of religion in phenomenological terms.[633] Through eidetic reflection, attention moves from particulars to the essence of consciousness. Now religions could be structurally analysed in secular terms in their external manifestations but also 'entered' into empathetically through the imagination to glimpse the inner life of the believer.

Using the tools of phenomenology, Smart devised a model of RE that was utterly non-confessional but aimed at an empathetic experience of faith through the human capacity for self-transcendence - in phenomenological terms 'bracketing' the truth and value of religious beliefs and their expressions. All religions, regarded as

[630] Ninian Smart, *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (London: Faber, 1968).
[631] Ninian Smart, 'Phenomenology', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 444-46.
[632] Otto (1936).
[633] G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

human phenomena, were to be considered in six dimensions: doctrinal, mythical, ethical, ritual, experiential and social.[634]

Under Smart's guidance, the hugely influential *Schools Council Working Paper 36* commended the phenomenological method as an undogmatic educational approach that was also capable of transcending the 'purely informative.'[635] *Working Paper 36* was enthusiastically embraced by many in the profession and rapidly became a new orthodoxy, at least in secondary schools. A slow revolution in agreed syllabuses began, with RE developing a non-confessional 'world religions' focus that increasingly moved towards theme teaching of religions, identifying phenomena such as rites of passage, sacred buildings, sacred texts, etc. For the teaching profession, religious commitment had now become a problem: a good teacher was to be neutral and objective. The exemplary RE teacher was, in the words of Grimmitt, akin to a shopkeeper 'anxious for customers to examine, appreciate and even "try on" but not feel any obligation to buy.'[636] Or, more optimistically, Hull proclaimed that RE had become, 'impartial but not arid, personal but not proselytizing.'[637]

The implementation of *Working Paper 36* did not always match its intentions.[638] What often resulted in the classroom, exacerbated by the perennial problem of a shortage of specialist teachers, was a rather dull and confusing RE with little real engagement. Though the curriculum resources produced favoured a systematic approach, enthusiasts of phenomenology tended towards more thematic teaching that tended to confuse pupils.[639]

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[634] Copley (2008), pp. 100-05.
[635] *Schools Council Working Paper 36* (London: Evans Brothers and Methuen Educational, 1971).
[636] Michael Grimmitt, *What Can I Do in RE?*, 2nd. edn (Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1978), p. 26.
[637] John Hull, *New Directions in Religious Education* (Lewes Sussex: Falmer, 1982), p. xiii.
[638] Barnes (2002).
[639] W. K. Kay, and D. L. Smith, 'Religious Terms and Attitudes in the Classroom (Part 1)', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 22, no. 2 (2000).

Beyond the poor implementation, there are deeper problems with the phenomenological approach.[640] Underlying phenomenology lie the Liberal Protestant theological assumptions, stretching back to Schleiermacher, that at the heart of religion is a pre-reflective experiential-expressivist core, and that the manifestations of religion are evocative expressions (non-discursive symbols) of this inner experience.[641] The differences that divide religions may be regarded as simply different ways of expressing a common inner reality. Religion is then removed from the public realm into sacred, private subjectivity.[642] Further, phenomenology, by bracketing truth and value, avoids critical engagement with religious truth claims.[643] As Barnes laments, 'Religious believers can be persuaded that their ultimate commitments will be unchallenged in the educational domain and liberal religious educators can persist in their assumption that the different religions participate in or point to some deeper spiritual reality.'[644] Ironically, it may be argued that there is a sense in which phenomenology in its very 'neutrality' is itself a form of subtle confessionalism with the implicit message that all religions are simply different expressions of the same underlying sacred truth.[645] As Cooling warns, 'the greatest danger from experiential approaches to religious education lies not in indoctrination into a distinctive faith position, but in assimilation into a syncretistic or relativized understanding of the world's religions which is secular at root.'[646]

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[640] Barnes (2001), pp. 61-77.
[641] G. A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 21.
[642] L. Philip Barnes, 'Religious Education and the Misinterpretation of Religion', in *Inspiring Faith in Schools: Studies in Religious Education,* ed. by M. C. Felderhof, David Torevell and Penny Thompson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[643] L. Philip Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education', *Religion,* 30 (2000), 315-332 (pp. 324-28).
[644] Barnes (2001), pp. 445-461.
[645] Barnes (2002), 73.
[646] Trevor Cooling and Margaret Cooling, 'Christian Doctrine in Religious Education' *British Journal of Religious Education,* 9 (1987), 156.

7.6.10. The 1988 Education Reform Act

The 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent Government Circulars (3/89 and 1/94) caused a furore in the RE establishment. Many saw them as an attack on the profession from meddling and reactionary politicians. Grimmitt regarded the act, with its specific mention of Christianity and its advocacy of the systematic approach (where the intention was that religions were considered separately in their own terms), as dismantling the 'widely admired' new liberal humanistic consensus. For Grimmitt, the Act was tantamount to 'putting back the cause of educational RE some thirty years.'[647]

The principal shift caused by the Act, which so infuriated the RE establishment, was the creation of a major role for the faith communities in determining the content of the model RE syllabus. The effect was a movement towards a study of religions and away from the study of religion as phenomena.[648] What the 1988 Act did was to honour religions (increasingly referred to as 'faith groups') as *Weltanschauungen* in their own right. The content of the curriculum for each religion was now to be largely determined by its adherents rather than by scholars and researchers of Religious Studies. This honoured the integrity of the individual religions studied but, in the view of many in the RE profession, ran the danger of making RE educationally weaker.

By contrast, Trevor and Margaret Cooling, the principal advocates of the systematic approach to RE in relation to Christianity, stressed the importance of the key concepts and doctrines of a religion being clearly identified and laid out in a coherent manner for the child.[649] I generally agree that there is great merit in a systematic approach which offers to the child a degree of conceptual clarity about

[647] Grimmitt, *Pedagogies* (2000), p. 12.
[648] Ibid, p. 14.
[649] Cooling and Cooling (1987), p. 157.

the religion being studied. But, is not without difficulties: First, it is faced by the 'Cowper-Temple' problem: which particular form of a religion should be taken as authoritative or authentic, and even within a religion what degree of participation and doctrinal assent makes someone a 'believer' or not? Lived religions are not tidy.[650] Even if it were possible to determine a singular authoritative source, if the content is driven by the religion's official understanding there is the danger of underplaying the diversity within particular religions. Even within a Christian denomination there is often great diversity of belief and practice. Secondly, where religions are treated entirely separately, there is a disconnect for those now living in a multi-faith nation in examining and evaluating the connections and contradicting truth claims between religions. For most children growing up in an inner urban context, their communities, school and often families are multi-faith contexts. And thirdly, an assimilative difficulty arises when religions are taught in isolation: for the pupil, as Grimmitt puts it, has to 'assimilate and accommodate the content as understood within its faith context but then re-contextualise it within their own self-understanding for the purposes of values clarification, existential analysis, illumination of constructs, etc.'[651] Or, to put it another way, how can RE still be *education* and not simply religious information-giving?

7.6.11. Important … but Under-resourced

The disruption to the RE profession created by the 1988 Act led to some hot debates and many creative responses at an academic level, often revolving around how to reconcile content and experience, but as a non-National Curriculum subject, RE was often allocated little priority or resources. There were however some gains, notably a significant increase in the take up of short course GCSE; but RE was

[650] Astley, *The Real Christianity* (1992).
[651] Grimmitt, (2000), p. 18.

beleaguered by a lack of specialist teachers, low resource provision and lack of curriculum time. In 2007, Ofsted noted the rise of the significance of RE in promoting community cohesion post 9/11 and 7/7, and some improvement in teaching quality, but also significant weaknesses at KS3[652] level and in subject leadership.[653] The perennial problem of initial teacher training in RE for primary school teachers was also highlighted. The criticism of the lack of subject knowledge from their initial teacher training, as Copley notes, 'could have been written in any year from 1944.'[654] The teaching of Christianity was found by the inspectors to be particularly weak. The inspectors noted, 'Although schools organise carefully sequenced units of work on other faiths, their approach to Christianity is often much less rigorous and more fragmented; work on specific aspects of Christianity, such as the life of Jesus or the Bible, is isolated from an investigation of the religion itself.'[655] The later report in 2010 noted that 'Many primary and secondary schools visited did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive and systematic investigation of the core beliefs of Christianity.'[656] This is hardly a surprising conclusion, given that the average primary school teacher receives around three hours of RE training.[657] To make an unfair comparison, a Godly Play storyteller, who undertakes the initial three day course, will receive 25 hours in their own initial training.[658]

The Ofsted subject report of schools without a religious character in 2013 found RE to be to be less than 'good' in 50% of secondary schools and 60% of the primary schools inspected.[659] In contrast, a review the following year found the

[652] Key Stage 3 is the legal term for the three years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales normally known as Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9, when pupils are aged between 11 and 14.
[653] Copley (2008), pp. 180-97.
[654] Ibid. p. 196.
[655] Ofsted (2007), p. 27.
[656] Ofsted, 'Transforming Religious Education in Schools 2006-09' (London: Ofsted, 2010), p. 33.
[657] Commission on Religious Education, 'Final Report Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward: A National Plan for RE', ed. by Amira Tharani (London: Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2018), p. 7.
[658] 'Godly Play UK Training'<https://www.godlyplay.uk/courses/> [accessed 22 November 2018]
[659] Ofsted, 'Religious Education: Realising the Potential' (London: Ofsted, 2013).

situation much better in Church of England secondary schools, 70% of RE departments were found to be good or better. The situation in Church of England primary schools, however, was generally poor. Only 40% of RE in Church of England primary schools was found to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. The quality of RE was found to be very variable and, in the majority of cases, superficial. Governors had an overinflated view of the quality of RE compounded by poor senior monitoring and leadership, and some general confusion about the role of RE and its relationship to the religious ethos of the school.[660]

If RE is weak in Church of England primary schools, it is in danger of extinction in those secondary schools that are without a religious character. As a subject that is not included in the National Curriculum and not part of routine Ofsted inspection,[661] not included in the EBacc, and with RE short courses not included in school performance levels, the priority of RE for secondary schools has substantially diminished. In 2016, RE had disappeared from 34.1% of schools without a religious character at KS3 level, and 43.7% at KS4.[662] The virtual collapse of Local Authority subject support because of the academies programme is increasingly making local agreed syllabuses irrelevant, as most academies, with few other local reference points beyond safeguarding and admissions, tend to ignore them, thus completing a process that began with the 2004 *Non-Statutory Framework*. Because of these weaknesses, there has been a renewed call from the Religious Education Council for England and Wales for a nationally agreed syllabus applicable to all publicly funded schools, proper resourcing and a name change to 'Religion and Worldviews'.[663] This report has been broadly welcomed by the Church of England

[660] Church of England, *Making a Difference: A Review of Religious Education in Church of England Schools* (London: Education Division, 2014).
[661] A response to an enquiry by NASACRE in November 2019 revealed that RE was rarely chosen as a 'deep dive' subject for school inspection. Sean Harford, 'A Response to an Enquiry by NASACRE' (London: Ofsted, 2019).
[662] *Making a Difference*, pp. 7-11.
[663] Ibid. pp. 11-18.

Chief Education Officer and (with severe reservations) by the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales.[664] In May 2021 Ofsted published a summary of the current state of RE in Britain again highlighting the poor quality of much classroom practice.[665]

31 of the 32 children interviewed thought that they learnt more from Godly play than they did from conventional RE. Salma [AS 2] was probably the most blunt of the children. When asked about the quality of school RE she told me;

SALMA RE is rubbish at school, but Godly Play is fun.

ME You think it's rubbish at school?

SALMA Yes, RE is *real* rubbish!

ME Why is it really rubbish?

SALMA We've got a teacher called Mrs X, and she doesn't even know what she's doing!

7.6.12. The Statutory Purposes and Principles of English RE

There is still much that remains contested in English RE teaching, but we are approaching something of a mature national consensus in our understanding of what RE is supposed to do. Perhaps the most fundamental change in RE since the 1944 Act, as clarified by *Circular 1/94*, is that RE in maintained schools 'must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on

[664] Both Churches stated that they would like to see more detail in the proposed entitlement. The Catholic Education service is concerned that the change to include worldviews makes the subject too broad. See Catholic Education Service. <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/component/k2/item/1003658-catholic-education-service-response-to-the-commission-on-religious-education-report> [accessed 22 November 18]; Nigel Genders, CofE Chief Education Officer < https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/response-religious-education-commission > [accessed 22 November 18]

[665] Ofsted, 'Research review series: religious education' (London: Ofsted, 2021). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education> [accessed 14 September 2021]

pupils.'[666] This is a principle later enshrined in the 2004 QCA *Non-statutory National Framework* for religious education.[667]

The purpose of RE has changed radically, but the current legislative framework still echoes something of the social vision enshrined in the 1944 Education Act. RE has retained its moral purpose, even its formative purpose, but this is now generally seen in terms of its opening children up to religious diversity rather than as an induction into Christianity. There is an expectation that, in the words of Michael Grimmitt, children not only learn *about* religion but also learn *from* religion about oneself.[668] According to the framework, RE beyond learning *about* religions was to contribute to learning about themselves; self-awareness, respect for all, open-mindedness, appreciation and wonder. It was also to contribute to promoting children's' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC), citizenship, their Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE), language and communication skills and their use of Information Technology. We might say, with this emphasis on encouraging the child's personal reflection on life, that implicit in the values underpinning British school RE is, in Thomas Groome's terms, an invitation for the child to do theology by relating their understanding of religion to their own experiences.[669]

What remains unresolved for the local Agreed Syllabus Committees is the dilemma enshrined in the 'Cowper-Temple' clause of 1870, as in what constitutes 'mainly and broadly' Christianity, and what criteria should be used to determine the balance given to, 'other major religious traditions', given the plethora of possibilities represented in this country? There is the expectation that the curriculum for a

[666] Department of Education, 'Religious Education and Collective Worship: Circular 1/94' (London, 1994), p. 15.
[667] QCA, *Religious Education: The Non-Statutory National Framework* (London: DfES, 2004).
[668] Grimmitt (1981), pp. 24-53; Michael Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1987), pp. 165-216.
[669] Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 229.

maintained school must be a balanced and broadly based one which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.'[670] Further: 'Every agreed syllabus shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'[671] This statement ultimately derives from the 1988 Educational Reform Act which both, controversially, re-asserted the historical and cultural importance of Christianity, and for the first time specifically mentioned the study of other religions, without stating what those religions were to be.[672]

The first principle, as was argued many years before in *The Fourth R,* is that there is a strong *educational* case for the continued prominence of Christianity in the teaching of RE in England.[673] And though it remains contested, there is great sense, I would argue, that the place of Christianity, which has played such an important part in the formation of the culture, literature and values of our nation, must still be given prominence. As Rowan Williams asks in *Lost Icons*, 'How are people to acquire a language in which they can *think* about the character of their society? For that requires both a fluency in the traditions, even the mythology, of the society you're in *and* a confidence sufficient to test and challenge its inconsistencies or deceptions.'[674] Christianity has been so integral to our national story and identity that 'Britishness' simply cannot be understood without some grounding in this religion. The second principle is that of inviting children to come to know and also to *learn from* the other major religious traditions that make up our nation for their personal development.

[670] School Standards and Framework Act, Section 79 (1).
[671] Education Act 1996, Section 375.
[672] Education Reform Act 1988, 8 (3).
[673] Ramsey, pp. 98-103.
[674] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (London: Continuum, 2000), p36.

In this sense, there remains some element of national-cultural formation, if not religious nurture, going on in twenty-first century RE.[675]

[675] See discussion in Jeff Astley, 'Theology for the Untheological? theology, philosophy and the classroom', ed. by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, *Christian Theology and Religious Education: Connections and Contradictions* (London: SPCK, 1996), Ch 4.

7.7. Is Godly Play a Form of 'Sinister Stealth Indoctrination?'

'It is almost impossible to establish a clear line between legitimate nurture and oppressive control.'

Rowan Williams[676]

Having examined the statutory purposes of RE in the English context we may now return to the accusation of the National Secular Society that Godly Play represents an inappropriately manipulative and underhand methodology for the English classroom.[677] Is Godly Play suitable in English Primary Religious Education?

All education has formative force and particularly in its early stages, as Jeff Astley reminds us, 'formative initiation into the ways of a culture or tradition is inevitably the major element in the education of young children.'[678] It is not only inevitable, but it is also imperative that education *should* change people. Part of the intrinsic purpose of education is to change the individual and subsequently society in some positive way. As Lesslie Newbigin insists, the teacher actually has a moral '*duty* to encourage children to adopt some kinds of "stance for living" and to avoid others.'[679] In this respect, at least, there can be no educational neutrality. As Grimmitt summarises, 'Education is not a value-free process; nor does it seek to create a value-free context within which to engage in… The value-laden context of education derives from its intention to bring about changes in the way in which pupils understand themselves and the world; thus, education aims and objectives are, by nature, value-laden; they cannot be value-free or "neutral" and remain

[676] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons* (2000), p. 48.
[677] Paul Stevenson, 'Godly Play' (2008).
[678] Jeff Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1994), p. 73.
[679] Lesslie Newbigin, 'Teaching Religion in a Secular Plural Society', *Learning for Living*, 17 (1977), 86.

educational.'[680] But which values? The difficulty for our society and, in this context, for RE is that in the words of Rowan Williams, 'we currently don't seem to know, as a society, what we want to "induct" children into or what we consider to be the foundation of our society's moral legitimacy.'[681]

7.7.1. What is Indoctrination and Why does it Matter?

Having seen that all education worthy of the name is *necessarily* formative, what is meant by 'indoctrination' and how is that different from a legitimate nurture? Like most words, the meaning of 'indoctrination' has shifted over time and context.[682] Indoctrination was once a word roughly equivalent to education but today it has, in most contexts, derogatory connotations and has come to mean the antithesis of true education.[683] But indoctrination is subtle and not about coercive force or an explicit violation of freedom in a conventional sense. There is no explicit conflict of wills when someone has been indoctrinated, it is not the same as forcing people to say things. Indoctrination is in a sense freely accepted, as the beliefs and values of those seeking to indoctrinate have been internalised. This is what makes indoctrination so difficult to accomplish and yet so dangerous. Neither is indoctrination necessarily irrational. Beliefs are being implanted by providing the believer with arguments that present what seems to be a compelling case, but are then treated uncritically so as to close down further discussion.[684] (The Islamist suicide bomber, the Hitler Youth member or fundamentalist Christian are all believers able to sincerely articulate their causes).

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[680] Michael Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development: The Relationship between Studying Religions and Personal, Social and Moral Education* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1987), p. 44.
[681] Williams (2000), p. 35.
[682] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1967), p. 11.
[683] Richard H. Gatchel, 'The Evolution of the Concept', in *Concepts of Indoctrination,* ed. by I A Snook (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 9.
[684] H McCauley, 'Education and Indoctrination', *The Irish Journal of Education,* 4 (1970), 131-34.

Where, Thiessen asks, is the line between legitimate initiation and indoctrination? There is no agreed definition of what indoctrination is. Thiessen summarises the extensive literature that seeks to define indoctrination in education into four categories: content, methods, intention and consequences.[685] For some any *content* that is not empirically verifiable (such as is found in religion, politics, morality etc) is by definition a 'doctrine' and therefore to teach it as true is indoctrination. For others, indoctrination is any non-rational teaching *method* where truth claims are avoided or contrary evidence withheld. Yet others focus on the *intention* of parents or teachers to inculcate *unshakable* beliefs that are unyielding to evidence. Lastly, we point to the criterion of *consequences,* the flip side of intention, where there is a failure to produce an open-minded and critical attitude.[686]

The aim of liberal education is seen as the achievement of rational autonomy. But rationality is only one aspect of our human nature, intimately bound up with the emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of our being. We are social creatures and generally take for granted the largely unspoken assumptions of the cultures we inhabit. The principal difficulty with such accounts, according to Thiessen, is their questionable foundationalist epistemological assumption, that through objective methods some agreed 'basic' facts can be known with absolute certainty.[687] And, as Theissen states, 'the development of the mind never occurs in isolation from others.'[688] All children, and I suggest most adults, also learn in non-rational ways. This is inevitable. Children are not wholly 'autonomous' in relation to religion *or anything else*: indeed, none of us are, or even could be, completely rational and autonomous.[689] Theissen argues that children must first be initiated into and

[685] A longer examination is presented in Astley (1994), pp. 44-50.
[686] Elmer J. Thiessen, 'Christian Nurture, Indoctrination and Liberal Education', in *The Contours of Christian Education* ed, by Jeff Astley and David Day (Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmonds, 1992), pp. 66-86 (pp. 68-69).
[687] Ibid. p. 70.
[688] Ibid. p. 79.
[689] Ibid. p. 71.

grounded in a particular stable and coherent 'primary' culture before they are able to expand their horizons, criticise other views (and their own) and negotiate complexity.[690] Inevitably these latter skills and attitudes will involve an earlier stage of initiation, socialisation, and transmission. This may be recognised as an entirely necessary and legitimate aspect of education. The primary place where this happens is the family; secondly, in modern society, schools also fulfil part of this role.

Thus Thiessen advocates a holistic approach that finds a balance between the affective and cognitive. As Newbigin has argued, 'No advance in knowledge is possible which does not begin by uncritical acceptance of something which is given… if the capacity to believe is not developed along with the capacity to criticise, the result can only be fanaticism or nihilism.'[691] In other words, induction must proceed abstraction which then allows synthesis and critical evaluation.

From these secure groundings children should, at the appropriate stage, be encouraged to grow in their skills of analysis and synthesis.[692] Children should not be expected to be detached observers, however, as it were examining exotic locations at a travel agency or exhibits in a museum.[693] In particular, as Newbigin reminds us, religion is about a search for meaning, so we should 'approach the subject as those who are deeply concerned about what is really the case about the human situation.' Good RE should therefore invite children to examine, 'the meeting point between ancient traditions and the demands of modern life.'[694]

In the RE literature there is relatively little discussion given to distinctive approaches for RE in schools with a religious character. Yet schools with a distinctive religious ethos are, I would argue, actually better placed to do RE well. In

[690] Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice and the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), Ch. 5.
[691] Ibid. p. 87.
[692] Thiessen, pp. 81-84.
[693] Cooling and Cooling (1987), p. 156.
[694] Newbigin (1977), p. 88.

particular, schools with a religious character offer coherence to the child when the same messages from home, school and church reinforce one another in a virtuous circle.[695] The religious ethos of the school offers a holistic model for the child about what it is to be human. 'Being clear about what it means to be a Church of England school (or indeed a school designated as another faith) is the first step to forging open, positive relations with all other elements of the local, national and global community.'[696]

What is perhaps different about schools with a distinctive religious ethos, compared with their secular counterparts, is that their epistemology is openly declared. Parents and pupils have a better idea where a Church of England or Roman Catholic school is 'coming from' and are in this sense freer *in practice* to choose. In contrast, secularist assumptions in schools are often unarticulated or concealed in an illusion of objectivity.[697]

To return to my research area, I believe that Godly Play strikes this balance between religious nurture and growth in critical thinking very skilfully. The environment, stories and structure all undoubtedly have affective force. Unlike the plastic cartoon depictions of biblical stories seen in so many schools and churches, the GP materials and scripts invite children to enter into the narratives and take them seriously. On the other hand, the open wondering questions and free response time also provide space and time for individual reflection. The time of wondering after the presentations begins to model a community where, even at a very simple level, there are a variety of opinions. With younger children, this could be as simple as asking which part was their favourite or beginning to reason about which part was the most important. For older children, the synthesis work, where materials are

[695] Thiessen, p. 79.
[696] Church of England, *Strong Schools for Strong Communities: Reviewing the Impact of Church of England Schools in Promoting Community Cohesion* (London: Archbishops' Council, 2009), p. 8.
[697] Newbigin (1977), p. 83.

laid alongside one another encourages a form of non-verbal reasoning that serves as a foundation for later abstract thinking and theological reasoning.

In practice, when delivering Godly Play in a school, especially those without a religious character, it is important to avoid talking about what 'we' do or believe and to use distancing language so as to appropriately frame the presentation. For example, when introducing a sacred story, it is important to say, 'this is a story that is important for Christians,' or when showing one of the liturgical action presentations to say, 'this is something that Christians do in church.'

In any case, if Godly Play *is* a form of 'stealth indoctrination', we have not been very effective at it! My experience has been, over more than a decade of offering Godly Play successively to each year two class for a whole school year, is that in most years only one or two children from our local Community Primary Academy have come to the point of wanting to be baptised. And without family support, few continue to practice. On the other hand, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, many more who have not come to a commitment to Christian faith, have none the less found some meaning for their lives in the process through the experience of participating in Godly Play and that, too, may be regarded as 'successful' Christian education?

7.8. Why Might Godly Play Offer an Appropriate Pedagogy for Primary RE?

'I only know of one genius in Religious Education. It is Jerome Berryman.'

John Hull[698]

We turn now to the question: Is Godly Play pedagogically appropriate? Can younger children grasp the Christian concepts contained within Godly Play?

In an age in which the concepts of Christianity are increasingly unfamiliar, even to those brought up in the UK, the teaching of Christianity in RE could be thought of as cross-cultural encounter. In *Concept Cracking*, Cooling describes the dilemma.

> The ideas involved in Christian beliefs are largely alien to children in the western world because they do not form part of their everyday experience. There is, therefore, a great challenge for RE in finding ways of relating these beliefs to children's experience so that they can begin to make sense of them. The skill is to find a way of building a bridge between the world of Christian belief and the world of children's experience. Using story, including biography, and designing creative learning activities are important ways of achieving this. The aim is to translate the religious ideas so that they are communicated effectively to children. To do this it is necessary to take ideas from one culture (Christian) and to find the parallels in our pupils' culture (in most cases western, secular) which enable them to make some sense of the Christian world.[699]

In 1987, Trevor and Margaret Cooling proposed the work of Jerome Bruner as a basis for a new approach to teaching Christianity from a doctrinal perspective.[700] They began with the question, can doctrine be taught to children? Drawing on the insights of Margaret Donaldson,[701] they argued that young children had a much greater capacity to be enthusiastic learners than had been realised. Further, the research into early childhood religious experiences by Edward Robinson[702] and

[698] Quoted from a personal conversation, Schweitzer, p. 142.
[699] Trevor Cooling, *Concept Cracking: Exploring Christian Beliefs in School* (Nottingham: Stapleford Centre, 1994), pp. 9-10.
[700] Cooling and Cooling (1987).
[701] Margaret Donaldson, *Children's Minds* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).
[702] Robinson (1977).

David Hay[703] arguably revealed an innate capacity in children for religious experience. What Goldman and others had missed, by focussing on verbal reasoning, was the importance of the affective domain in learning and (in the words of John Greer) that 'in their apprehension of religion human beings are cognitively feeling.'[704]

The Coolings comment:

> The conclusion to be made from this is that if in some way this latent interest in spirituality can be linked or connected to the theological concepts of Christianity then the road is open towards effectively teaching such, so that children can understand them. An approach is needed which connects the theological cognitive concepts with the feelings of human spirituality in an experience of cognitive feeling.[705]

The first principle is to involve children in 'first order experience:' Children should be invited to *do* the subject not simply learn *about* it. Secondly, to note the fundamental importance of understanding the structure of the subject to identify the key concepts, so that they can be translated in a developmentally appropriate way.[706] Goldman had seen that children could not understand concepts when they were taught abstractly. Bruner argued, however, that younger children *could* understand concepts if they were translated into the thought patterns of the child. The younger child could not relate to abstractions, but they could make intuitive sense of complex concepts if they are translated appropriately.[707] Bruner proposed three ways in which

[703] D. Hay, *Exploring Inner Space* (London: Penguin, 1982).
[704] John E. Greer, 'Fifty Years of the Psychology of Religion (Part 2)', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 7:1 (1984), 23-28.
[705] Cooling and Cooling (1987), p. 154.
[706] This is relevant to the debate over *Heilsgeschite* / Kerygmatic teaching of the Bible, where RE is the 'handmaid' of Theology. Rather, as James Michael Lee argues, in Lee (1971), pp. 2-3., religion must be presented according to the mode of the learner, not the subject. See the discussion in Theological Themes in Godly Play above.
[707] It is a curious suggestion that theology needs to be 'translated' from the abstract, given the metaphorical nature of religious language; as Rahner states 'the whole of theology is incomprehensible if it is not essentially a theology of symbols.' Karl Rahner, 'The Theology of the Symbol', in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 2: *Man and the Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1959), pp. 221-52 (p. 235).

religious concepts could be translated in a developmentally appropriate way for children.

- Enactive: mental models are created through enactment. (In Montessori terms, this is termed kinaesthetic learning).
- Iconic: mental models are made through visual or sensory organisation. (In Montessori terms, through a prepared environment).
- Symbolic: where the combination of words and action represents a concept. (In Godly Play terms, most obviously in liturgical action presentations).

The Coolings developed these insights into one of the major examples of the systematic teaching of RE, the Stapleford Project.[708] But they could be describing Godly Play. In a similar vein to the Stapleford project, Godly Play does not aim to be a comprehensive multi-faith system of RE. Godly Play is very clearly and openly an experience of the *Christian* language system; it does not pretend to be anything else. Other than the inevitable overlap with Judaism, there are no stories from religions other than Christianity in a Godly Play room.[709] This is sometimes seen as a criticism of the method but is rather a respectful stance. To include narratives from other religions in a Godly Play room would be to comprehend them within the Christian language system. The methods of Godly Play could indeed be used to introduce other religions, but it would be not only confusing but also disrespectful to include these within the Christian language system. To do so in the context of a Godly Play room would be to subordinate them to the Christian meta-narrative.

Though I hugely admire the theology of Godly Play's predecessor, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), and in a parish setting prefer it, it is much more clearly catechesis (i.e., induction into the Christian Church) than is Godly

[708] *'The Stapleford Project'*. For a summary and evaluation see, Cooling (2000), pp. 153-169.
[709] Cavalletti, from her Italian perspective, is much more alert in her materials to the dangers of supersessionism, the belief that Christianity replaces Judaism, than is Berryman.

Play.[710] However, the direct aims of CGS are simply educationally inadmissible in the UK setting, except perhaps in Catholic schools where there is arguably more of an emphasis on Christian nurture. The open and child-centred process of Godly Play, by contrast, allows it to carefully negotiate the line between the invitation freely to enter into the Christian language system and unacceptable coercion. Far from 'stealth indoctrination,' Godly Play is an open invitation which invites the child not only to *learn about* but also to *learn from* the Christian tradition, by reflecting upon those ancient narratives in the context of their own lives.

However, Godly Play goes further than Grimmitt's use of these terms envisaged. He expressed learning from religion in this way: to 'help pupils to come to terms with questions about their *own* identity, their *own* values and lifestyles, their *own* priorities and commitments, and their *own* frame of reference for viewing life and giving it meaning [italics mine].'[711] What Grimmitt describes is laudable but highly individualistic and shaped through the lens of a Western individualistic society. Religion, on the other hand, is all about connection and community. Westerhoff argues that verbal communication has dominated Christian education for too long. He advocates a return to the corporate and enacted learning of the early church where 'the great truths of the community were enshrined in shared experience.' [712] What Godly Play does, I believe, which most contemporary RE pedagogies do not, is to model Christian community in its unspoken lesson. Religious meaning-making is not a solipsist activity but something that only really makes sense when it is done, enacted, together. The corporate experience of listening and then responding to the presentations was clearly valued by the children.

[710] Black (2018), pp. 211-220.
[711] Grimmitt (1981), p. 49.
[712] Westerhoff (1976), p 84.

Children considered that they had learnt more from doing Godly Play than regular school RE.

7.8.1. When Godly Play was Not so Good

There were, of course, some things about Godly play that a few children found uncomfortable, for Malachi [CP Yr6] taking his shoes off as he entered the room made him feel uncomfortable, "it made me a bit nervous and all that. I felt a bit like, shy or like, embarrassed or something like that. But I got over it." In the RC primary Magnus [RC Y5c] complained that it was "really claustrophobic… you can't really breathe… like we are all squashed up together and like there is nowhere to move." This was hardly surprising given the size of the space.

Alice, who had also been part of the Church's Sunday morning Godly Play group complained that Godly Play could be rather repetitive.

Although children generally welcomed the opportunity to do something other than read and write in response time the lack of written guidance materials was a problem when children wanted to re-visit the materials. Josie [RC Y5a] suggested "To improve Godly Play I think like children should like also be able to like understand it more they could read out the story." In CGS nearly all presentations have either the accompanying Biblical text or references to enable the child to work with the materials. A Bible is present in a Godly Play room but most of the materials do not guide the children as to where to find the story. Mabel [RC 5b] also thought that it would be helpful to have written reference materials to help in response time. "I wish I could ... read [the] catalogue of the story when its response time so I could remember the stories." In contrast all CGS materials have an accompanying scripture booklet.

To conclude, Godly Play may not be perfect, and will not do everything that primary RE should do, but I argue that it does represent, a legally, pedagogically and ethically appropriate method of deep and respectful engagement with Christianity for primary school children in state-maintained schools in England.

7.9. Godly Play and the Future of the Church

Will our children have faith?[713]
John H. Westerhoff, III

The title of John Westerhoff's 1976 book, *Will our Children have Faith?*, poses a question which continues to alarm those of us who care about these things. Is Christianity dropping out of culture? One of my clergy colleagues asked her granddaughters why people no longer go to church in the way they once did; they replied that it is, 'not a cultural norm.' As has been well documented, with varying degrees of glee or panic, in Britain and throughout Christianity's European heartland, and most of the affluent West, there has been a religious paradigm shift: a change which came of age in this country with the 'baby boomers' in the late 1960s.[714]

The scale of this religious change in the 1960s, Callum Brown argues, was like nothing seen since the Reformation and may perhaps turn out to be of even greater significance.[715] Between 1960 and 1980 the Anglican churches of Britain lost a quarter of their communicants.[716] The percentage of the population that identified as Anglican has fallen from 44.5% in 1983 to 19% by 2014.[717] By the 2000s, the rate of decline was easing as statistician Peter Brierley noted, 'We are coming out of the nosedive, but no U-turn is yet in sight - we are still dropping.'[718] But the situation varies from region to region. In areas of immigration and mobility, notably London

[713] Westerhoff, p. 2.
[714] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging', *Sociology*, 39 (2005); Bullivant, pp. 25-55.
[715] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), p. 29.
[716] Clive D. Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 51.
[717] Stephen Bullivant, 'Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data' (London: St Mary's University: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016) (p. 5).
[718] Peter Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive* (London: Christian Research, 2006), p. 18.

and the South East, there have been signs of growth.[719] And as the statistical measurement of New Churches is more difficult, because they lack a method of centralised data gathering, which David Goodhew argues tends to lead to an underestimation of their numbers.[720]

In the North East, the decline in Church of England attendance over recent decades has been particularly high.[721] Locally, York has seen some growth within New churches and Anglican congregations, often associated with St Michael-le-Belfry, but as David Goodhew again observes, there has been a much more limited impact in the neighbouring, financially poorer and less socially mobile areas, such as Hull and Middlesbrough.[722]

By the middle of the second decade of the 21st century the stubbornly default notional Christian identity, as Linda Woodhead has noted, was giving way to 'the rise of the nones': no religion had become 'the new normal'. Woodhead states starkly that Christianity is literally dying out, as the younger you are the more likely you are to be a 'none'.[723] A large proportion of cradle Christians end up with no religion, but very few 'cradle nones' end up with a Christian affiliation. There is much, and often conflicting, speculation and about why this is the case. For Bullivant, it is because the church has become too liberal and not kept to its traditional morality and ways of worshipping; for Woodhead it is because it has not modernised and liberalised in its moral teaching sufficiently.[724] There are, of course, variations and individual parishes

[719] P. W. Brierley, *Capital Growth: What the 2012 London Church Census Reveals*,(Tonbridge: ADBC Publishers, 2013).
[720] David Goodhew, 'Introduction', in *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, ed. by David Goodhew (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 3-20 (p. 12).
[721] Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth* (London: Church House, 2002), pp. 37-40.
[722] Goodhew, p. 191.
[723] Linda Woodhead, '"No Religion" in Britain: The Rise of a New Cultural Majority.', *Journal of the British Academy*, 4 (2016), 245-261; Linda Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion": Towards an Explanation', *Sociology of Religion*, 78 (2017), 247-262 (pp. 247-48); Editor, 'The Guardian View on "Post-Christian" Britain: A Spiritual Enigma', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2021.
[724] Woodhead (2016).

growing as well as declining but as Bullivant starkly points out overall 'for every one Catholic convert in England and Wales, ten cradle Catholics no longer identify as Catholics. For every one convert to Anglicanism, twelve cradle Anglicans now no longer identify as Anglicans.' What is even more alarming about these figures is that only a tiny handful of 'joiners' come from 'no religion'; the vast majority of joiners are people raised in one Christian tradition choosing to affiliate to another. In fact, approximately only one in 50 Anglicans come from a non-religious background and one in a thousand from a non-Christian religion.[725]

What is particularly pertinent for my research area is the cataclysmic fall in the engagement of children with what had become the Sunday school movement. From its inception just before the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Sunday school movement from 1860 to the brink of the First World War was engaging over 50% of England's under 15s. Although decline began after 1918, in the 1950s roughly 30% of children were still involved; but by 2000 this had fallen to 5%.[726] As Christie Davies demonstrates in *The Strange Death of Moral Britain,* this rise and fall of the Sunday school movement maps onto the fall and rise in crime and antisocial behaviour over the same period.

For Raikes and the other early pioneers of the Sunday school movement, church attendance was not their primary aim. This was, rather, moral improvement through the teaching of the Christian faith (especially in its moral dimension). Davies charts the growth of the Sunday School movement and shows that it does seem to have been successful in this aim. Whilst the movement does not seem to have had any great effect on church attendance, it does correlate with generations that valued those characteristics often associated with being of an upright character –

[725] Bullivant, pp. 11-13.
[726] Peter Brierley, 'Major UK Religious Trends, 2010 to 2020' (London: Christian Research, 2000), Table 2.15.

'comparative cleanness, truthfulness, kindness and beneficence', as the leader of the Sunday School Union described the people of Great Britain as showing in 1910. The number of crimes recorded at the end of the 1999 was over 5 million - sixty times greater than the 78,000 recorded in 1900. Most of this increase took place from approximately 1957 onwards, slowing around 1977. A similar picture can be seen in drug and alcohol misuse. Davies states, 'Respectable Britain was created in the first half of the nineteenth century, faltered at the time of the First World War, enjoyed an at times uneasy stability but with signs of decay until the late 1950's and then went into rapid decline.'[727] Davies himself moves on, however, to lay the blame of the post war moral decline squarely on the move away from individual responsibility to the instigation of the Welfare state, social liberalism and Human Rights legislation.[728] Secularisation or social liberalism may not, of course, be the only plausible explanation for the rapid rise in violent crime and antisocial behaviour in the post war period. The post war rise of violent crime, and its more recent decline, has also for example been linked to environmental lead pollution, which is often much worse in poorer urban communities.[729] Nevertheless, the U-curve correlation of crime with the rise and fall of the Sunday school movement remains persuasive.

This comment, from my clergy colleague's granddaughter was salient in this context:

> Christianity doesn't play a big part in upbringing of children compared to some other religions. It's not an option they are given unlike in past generations where all children went to Sunday school and learned the Christian faith in schools. Prayers said at the end of the school day from being in reception throughout primary and junior schools no longer happens.

[727] Christie Davies, *The Strange Death of Moral Britain* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), pp. 1-3.
[728] Ibid. pp. 63-137.
[729] Amber L. Beckley and others, 'Association of Childhood Blood Lead Levels with Criminal Offending', *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172 (2018), 166-173; Paul B. Stretesky and Michael J. Lynch, 'The Relationship between Lead and Crime', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 45 (2004), 214-229.

There is much to unpack in this statement. First, despite, collective worship of a 'mainly and broadly Christian nature'[730] remaining the law, in most schools without a religious foundation it has all but disappeared. Although, the legislation has always permitted parents to withdraw their children in the multi-faith context of many of our urban schools it has become practically untenable to insist on Christian worship. The consequence of this is that, if there are parents who do want their children to know about Christianity, and the persistence of a significant minority still wanting their children baptised suggests that there are, they will need to attend to the Christian nurture of children themselves.[731] As this granddaughter observes, assuming Christian parents have been relatively weak at passing on the faith compared with other religions in the UK, relying on the school and the Sunday school to do the work for them. Hopefully, for many families, the enforced lockdown of 2020/21 has helped Christian parents discover themselves in the words of *Lumen Gentium* to be 'the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children,' and the family as the 'domestic church.'[732] As there are, as has been seen above, so very few people joining the church from non-Christian backgrounds, there is an urgency to helping parents better pass on the faith to their children and to our doing everything we can in our parishes to help them. There is little opportunity for children growing up today to absorb Christianity from the culture which, as Bullivant laments, is for many out-narrating Christianity.

> A plausibility structure that consists primarily of a few perfunctory lessons during high school plus perhaps - though by no means guaranteed - the odd remark heard during a homily and parental reinforcement at home will understandably struggle in competition with a plausibility structure consisting of the prevailing consensus, explicit or implicit, of one's friends,

[730] DFE, 'Circular Number 1/94: Religious Education and Collective Worship in England', in *Circular 1/94,* (London: DFS, 1994) (p. 21); Education Act 1996, sections 385, 386.
[731] GDC (1998) §226, §255.
[732] *Lumen Gentium*, in Flannery, *Vatican II*, p. 362; Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, rev edn (London: Burns and Oates, 1999), §2685, also §1655-58.

> extended family, plus favourite magazines, books, song lyrics, films, adverts, and sitcom characters.[733]

What was striking between the three contexts I researched was the effect of the reinforcing culture in the Roman Catholic school compared with the other two contexts. The culture of the school and the practice or residual Catholic identity surrounding the child meant that their children were more likely to relate what they were learning to the rest of their experience. This was even evident in the access levels where the teachers had organised the dissemination and collection of consent forms. I would hope to find the same reinforcement in Church of England primary schools.

To conclude, in Chapter five of this thesis I contended that Godly Play offers children a rich description of Christianity that is able to offer a powerful counter-narrative to the predominantly secular world in which most children in the England now grow up. In the research findings discussed in this chapter I demonstrate that Godly Play not only leaves children with a working knowledge of Christian theology but also provides them with tools for life to sustain and empower them as they grow up in communities where life is tough.

I argue at length in Chapter 7.6 that Godly Play can legitimately be employed in the context of English state maintained primary schools. Finally, I argue that a serious investment in Godly play could contribute towards the renewal of the church in the twenty-first century. Such investment could offer children both the opportunity to hear the Christian story but also, as these children have done, to learn and grow through that encounter.

[733] Bullivant, p. 209.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Godly Play in School Settings

This thesis is the fruit of two decades of practice and reflection upon Godly Play. I conclude, and hope this thesis convincingly demonstrates, that Godly Play represents a sophisticated, theologically and pedologically well-grounded approach to Christian Religious Education particularly appropriate in a parish setting and in state schools with a distinctive Christian religious ethos. The recommendations relate principally to my own denomination, the Church of England, but many are more widely applicable to other denominations.

The evidence of the empirical study strongly suggests that Godly Play is a more powerfully effective method of education than conventional school RE. The study demonstrates that the use of prepared artefacts and repetition in Godly Play leads to a high levels of pupil retention. Children remembered the details of presentations they had seen sometimes four years previously in remarkable detail. The subsequent playful reflection during the response time is also highly significant. Though difficult to capture in attainment targets there is something deeper going on than the retention of facts. The empirical research suggests a degree of theological reasoning is going on in Godly Play. Through their playful synthesis children are making connections and discovering the metaphorical grammar of Christian theology as laid out in Godly Play. As well as discovering the internal interrelation of Christian narratives the children studied most living in challenging circumstances, related the Biblical narratives to their own 'existential limits.' Children spoke of the ways that the experience of Godly Play had given them a

freedom to choose. For some the confidence that they found in being able to express their own opinions in Godly Play had contributed to some of them making one of their first major life decisions in the choice of secondary school.

In all three settings Godly Play was delivered in near ideal settings. As a form of nurture the personal spiritual formation and preparedness of the catechist is deeply important to good Godly Play. There was evidence that the experience of Godly Play was the least optimal in the Roman Catholic primary school. One of the teachers had done the three day formation but had 'cascaded' the delivery to Teaching Assistants. Children in this setting complained at the lack of preparation on the part of the story tellers (who had not memorised the presentations) and at overcrowding in the Godly Play room. Despite these complaints of sub-optimal delivery the study demonstrated that Godly Play had deeper devotional engagement for many children in the Roman Catholic context where it found reinforcement from school, home and parish.

I commend Godly Play to primary schools with a distinctive Church of England and Roman Catholic religious ethos as an integral part of the their RE curriculum, ideally in partnership with their local parish. Godly Play offers what Berryman calls a playful orthodoxy. There are however some theological issues that adopters should be aware of, not least Godly Play's playing down of eschatological hope.[734] RC schools in particular should therefore also consider incorporation of elements of CGS materials which have a stronger emphasis on eschatology. To strengthen their sacramental preparation, I recommend to Primary Schools in the RC sector to look to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to supplement the offering of their Godly Play room.

[734] See discussion in, Black (2018), pp. 211-20.

Having reflected on the purpose of RE in the English legal framework (Chapter 7.6) I also conclude that used with care and sensitivity, Godly Play can be appropriate, in an English context, in Community primary schools in multi-faith setting.

8.2 Godly Play in Parish Settings

In relation to parishes, Godly Play represents a good way to nurture primary school age children in the Christian faith within the context of the parish. As Berryman recognises Godly Play is not a comprehensive parish programme but can offer the backbone of child catechesis. The approach is particularly powerful for children in the 6-9 year old age group but can be used in a wide range of ages that make it particularly useful in the typical mixed age range Sunday group. The initial setup costs of Godly Play is relatively high, to purchase all the artefacts costs around £1500 plus the additional costs of shelving and preparing a space. The initial outlay is relatively high and the cost and the setting aside of space is often seen as a barrier especially when such ministry is often a very minor part of most PCC's budgets. The ongoing costs of periodically replenishing paper and art materials is very low.

The costs of preparing the materials and space should be seen as a long-term investment. The materials are robust and will last many years. The catechist unburdened of generating new curriculum or preparing craft activities week by week will be freer to attend to their own spiritual preparation. The room we prepared in Middlesbrough has been in weekly use for 15 years. Generations of children will appreciate the value that a special space and loving prepared materials represent. Many of the materials are easily made by skilled people. The making of materials by the catechist and wider parish community is a Montessorian ideal and works to deepens the value and engagement with the materials.

When used as a children's Liturgy of the Word during the Sunday morning Eucharist there will inevitably not be enough time to conduct a full session. Some parishes are concerned that Godly Play does not follow the *Common Worship* Sunday

Lectionary.[735] Some programmes do follow the lectionary, but this is essentially a lectionary, ultimately devised during Vatican II, to expand the diet of scripture for adult worshipers. The idea of such lectionary-based curricula is that parents and children will have reflected on the same scripture and feasting of the word will continue in conversations over Sunday lunch. Godly Play follows the flow of the liturgical year and the shape of the liturgy but is built round a curriculum to be at the service of the child.

[735] The *Common Worship* lectionary is a minor adaptation of, The Consultation on Common Texts, *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1992).

8.3 The Church of England

As numbers have declined (Ch 7) recent years has seen increasing anxiety as the General Synod of the Church of England talk of re-imagining church and 'Fresh Expressions of Church' aimed at reaching those we currently struggle to engage. Much effort and money has been spent through Strategic Development Funding on 'transformation' projects and 'resource churches' aimed at young adults. We know from decades of research (See Ch5.7) that the age when people are most likely to encounter God is as children and yet relatively little resource has this far been given to properly resourcing this are of ministry. Thankfully recent strategic thinking is beginning to focus on children. One of the three priorities identified was, 'to be a church that is younger and more diverse.' The first goal of the strategy being, 'doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.' [736]

Over many decades the national church has relied upon diminishing para-church organisations to support youth, children and families ministry in our parishes. The effect of this has been that this ministry has been seen by many as secondary. The formation, training and support of child and adult catechists should be taken much more seriously by the Church of England and a national framework of Christian Education adopted. Greater emphasis should be given to the practice and priority of child catechesis in the training and formation of clergy and a national framework of selection, training, deployment and support for youth, children and families ministers be developed. Where appropriate such ministers should be authorised and licensed as lay ministers in the same way that Readers and Church Army Officers currently are. In this thesis I demonstrate the ability of Godly Play ---

[736] Church of England, *Vision and Strategy* < https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy#na> [accessed 24 March 2022]

-- to develop children's spirituality and discipleship. Though there has been some interest in Godly Play so far the national church has sponsored work and research into what could be regarded as low hanging fruit through Messy Church but has not invested in deeper forms of catechesis such as Godly Play. Based on the evidence outlined in this thesis I commend a serious consideration of Godly Play as an integral part of national strategy and call upon the Church of England Education Department to work more closely with Godly Play UK in the development and dissemination of Godly Play in schools and parishes.

While Godly Play is no magic bullet for the reversal of the fortunes of the Western church, it does offer a well thought through quality programme for children in Church Schools and in the parish context. Godly Play is a well-considered programme, theologically and pedagogically and as this research demonstrates is deeply engaging for children, including, perhaps especially for those living in challenging circumstances. Such a programme is a gift for the primary educator in Church Schools. In a parish setting for decades parishes have relied on para-church organisations such as Scripture Union and CPAS to train and resource children and youth work. Many of these organisations are now much diminished. It is now time, I believe, for the Church of England to begin to nationally recognise, resource and train the ministry of catechists. Serious consideration should be given to the implementation of Godly Play in these settings. The only way this is going to happen is through a structural shift in the priorities of the church at the national level accompanied by serious resource allocation. I therefore recommend that serious consideration should be given to the allocation of Strategic Development Funding towards the development, resourcing and dissemination of Godly Play.[737]

[737] For a summary of conclusions and recommendations see Appendix 4.

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Appendix 1 - Research Groups

Below is a summary of the interview groups. All the interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by me. As a well known public figure in the community since before they were born I knew most of the children from Middlesbrough prior to the interviews which seemed to help them feel more at ease. I had not met the Hull group before the interviews but had the familiar figure of the story teller with me. All names are pseudonyms.

Community Primary School, Middlesbrough.

A relatively small sample from the 25-30 pupils per year that had participated in Godly Play participated in the study. At the request of the school the interviews were conducted post year 6 SATS (Standard Attainment Tests). The school was happy to distribute the information and consent forms and gave me the opportunity to briefly explain the study to the children. The interviews were conducted in a small office on the main school site. None of the children from the Community Primary had a family connection to the church but had been involved in other ways through the church's community engagement.

Group a – Year 6, July 2016 – 28 minutes
Marie, Jeffrey, Lawrence, Larry.
Group b – Year 6, July 2017 - 25 minutes
Malachi, Rebecca.

RC Primary School, Middlesbrough.

I worked with the RC primary school where our two boys attended to establish a Godly Play room in the school chapel. The RE coordinator had completed

the three day formation course but the majority of the sessions were delivered by two teaching assistants. The school had seen the positive impact of Godly Play over a number of years and the warm approval of denominational inspectors leading to the adoption of Godly Play in a number of RC primary schools throughout the Middlesbrough Diocese. The school enthusiastically welcomed the study and actively engaged pupils and parents in the dissemination and collection of consent forms leading to a much higher participation rate. Most of the participants however came from year five not the post SATS year six pupils who had begun to disengage from their primary education. Most, but not all the children were from RC background families some of whom were regular mass attenders. Some were connected to the C of E church where I was vicar and a small number were from a Muslim background. The majority of those interviewed were from white working class Irish backgrounds. Interviews were conducted in the school Godly Play room.

Year 6 – July 2017 – 29 minutes
Harrold, Alice, Elora, Connie.
Year 5 – July 2017
Group a – July 2017 - 27 minutes
Josie, Eden, Kael, Bernard.
Group b – July 2017 – 21 minutes
Eliza, Albert, Mabel, Anne-Marie.
Group c – July 2017 – 22 minutes
Magnus, Latham, Raya, Lacey.
Group d – July 2017 – 16 minutes
Carsten, Leah, Noosheen, Kate.

After School Club, Hull.

The Hull group were the most ethnically and religiously diverse. Most were from first generation migrant Asian and East European families were English was a second language. The story teller was an experienced Godly Play practitioner who over the period of three years had delivered Godly Play in a separate room to a church run after school club during term time. Interviews were conducted in a corridor during the after school session with the storyteller in attendance supporting the children.

Group a – July 2017 – 19 minutes
Calista, Elysia, Magnus.
Group b – 2017 – July 2017 – 19 minutes
Salma, Kahlan.

NVivo Codes

The following is a summary of the codes (in bold) identified using NVivo as a tool to analyse the interview transcripts which form the basis of the discussion. Retention of presentations and connection to life were my inductive starting points the other themes emerging from analysis of the data.

Retention: The first coding search was for references to Godly Play presentations. What was surprising to me was that though for some the memory of working with the **desert stories** was vivid relatively few **OT stories** where recalled with the notable exception of **Noah's Ark**.

Life of Jesus: A strong theme that emerged was the life of Jesus grouping particularly into **Christmas** and **Easter**.

Learning: Many children spoke of their learning through Godly Play the main themes that emerged were **retention** and **engagement**. There was much **comparison with school RE** many saying that it was **easier to understand**.

Connection with Life: I searched for connections with life some children did draw direct analogies but mostly the connections were affective engagement (**emotions**) especially with the **life of Jesus**. Some talked about **Sin and forgiveness**.

Emotions: I began by noticing that nearly all the children talked about Godly Play in emotional terms, I noted some **negatives** but the majority clustered around feelings of **freedom** through **creativity**, **choice** and **self-expression**. Many children talked of **peace and calm** when in the room. Many children spoke of feeling free (**freedom**) when doing Godly Play.

Freedom: Further analysis of the theme of freedom showed that the freedom experienced in the Godly Play room had often led to **confidence** and the ability to **express themselves** and **make decisions**. This was a very significant finding for children growing up in communities where life choices are curtailed.

Devotion: I noticed, particularly, but not exclusively amongst the RC group that they had experienced **encounter** and had grown in **devotion** through Godly Play.

Appendix 2 - Godly Play Curriculum

Below is an outline of the eight volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play,* including an outline of the curriculum as it was presented to the Children in this study. The children from the Community Primary School and After School setting would have seen most presentations from vols. 2-4, over the course of a year. The RC Primary groups less systematically over the course of their school career.

Volume 1 – How to lead Godly Play Sessions (2002)

A general theoretical introduction to Godly Play.

Volume 2 – 14 Presentations for Fall (2002)

Lesson 1: The Circle of the Church year [adapted from CGS]

Enrichment lesson: The Holy Family

Lesson 2: Creation

Lesson 3: The Flood and the Ark

Lesson 4: The Great Family [Abraham and Sarah Genesis 12-15, 24]

Lesson 5: The Exodus

Lesson 6: The Ten Best Ways

Lesson 7: The Ark and the Tent

Lesson 8: The Ark and the Temple

Lesson 9: The Exodus and Return

Enrichment lesson: The Prophets

Enrichment lesson: Jonah the Backward Prophet

Enrichment lesson: The Books of the Bible [adapted from CGS]

Volume 3 – 20 Presentations for Winter (2002)

Enrichment Lesson: The Holy Family

Lesson 1: Advent I – The Prophets

Lesson 1: Advent II – The Holy Family

Lesson 1: Advent III– The Shepherds

Lesson 1: Advent IV – The Wise Men and Christmas

Enrichment Lesson: A Children's Liturgy for Christmas Eve [only used in church]

Enrichment Lesson: The Mystery of Christmas [rarely used]

Lesson 5: Epiphany

Lesson 6: Holy Baptism

Lesson 7: Parable of the Good Shepherd

Lesson 8: Parable of the Good Samaritan

Lesson 9: Parable of the Great Pearl

Lesson 10: Parable of the Sower

Lesson 11: Parable of the Leaven

Lesson 9: Parable of the Mustard Seed

Enrichment Lesson: Parable of Parables

Enrichment Lesson: Parable of the Deep Well [Rabbinic Midrash]

Enrichment Lesson: Parable Synthesis 1 – All the Parables

Enrichment Lesson: Parable Synthesis 2 – The "I am" Statements

Volume 4 – 20 Presentations for Spring (2003)

Enrichment Lesson: The Holy Family

Lesson 1: The mystery of Easter

Lesson 2: The Faces of Easter I – Jesus' Birth and Growth

Lesson 3: The Faces of Easter II – Jesus is Lost and Found [in the Temple]

Lesson 4: The Faces of Easter III – Jesus' Baptism

Lesson 5: The Faces of Easter IV – Jesus' Desert and Discovery Experience

Lesson 6: The Faces of Easter V – Jesus as Healer and Parable-Maker

Lesson 7: The Faces of Easter VI – Jesus Offers the Bread and Wine

Lesson 8: The Faces of Easter VII – The One Who was Easter and Still Is

Enrichment Lesson: The Crosses

Enrichment Lesson: Easter Eggs [Ukrainian folk tale]

Lesson 9: Jesus and the Twelve

Lesson 10: The Good Shepherd and World Communion [adapted from CGS]

Lesson 11: The Synagogue and the Upper Room [adapted from CGS Cenacle]

Lesson 12: Circle of the Holy Eucharist

Enrichment Lesson: Symbols of the Holy Eucharist

Lesson 13: The Mystery of Pentecost

Lesson 14: Paul's Discovery

Lesson 15: The Holy Trinity (synthesis lesson)

Enrichment Lesson: The Part that Hasn't Been Written Yet [an empty book]

Volume 5 – Practical Helps from Godly Play Trainers (2003)

Volume 6 – 15 Enrichment Presentations for Fall (2006)

Presentations of Individual figures from the Old Testament. Apart from the few children that came to the Sunday morning sessions most children in this study will not have seen these presentations.

Volume 7 – 16 Enrichment Presentations (2008)

Presentations of the lives of the saints. These were presented to the children in the RC primary School but not in the Community Primary or After School setting.

Volume 8 – 15 Presentations (2012)

Further presentations mostly of the life of Christ. The children in this study did not see these presentations.

Appendix 3 - Godly Play room typical organisation

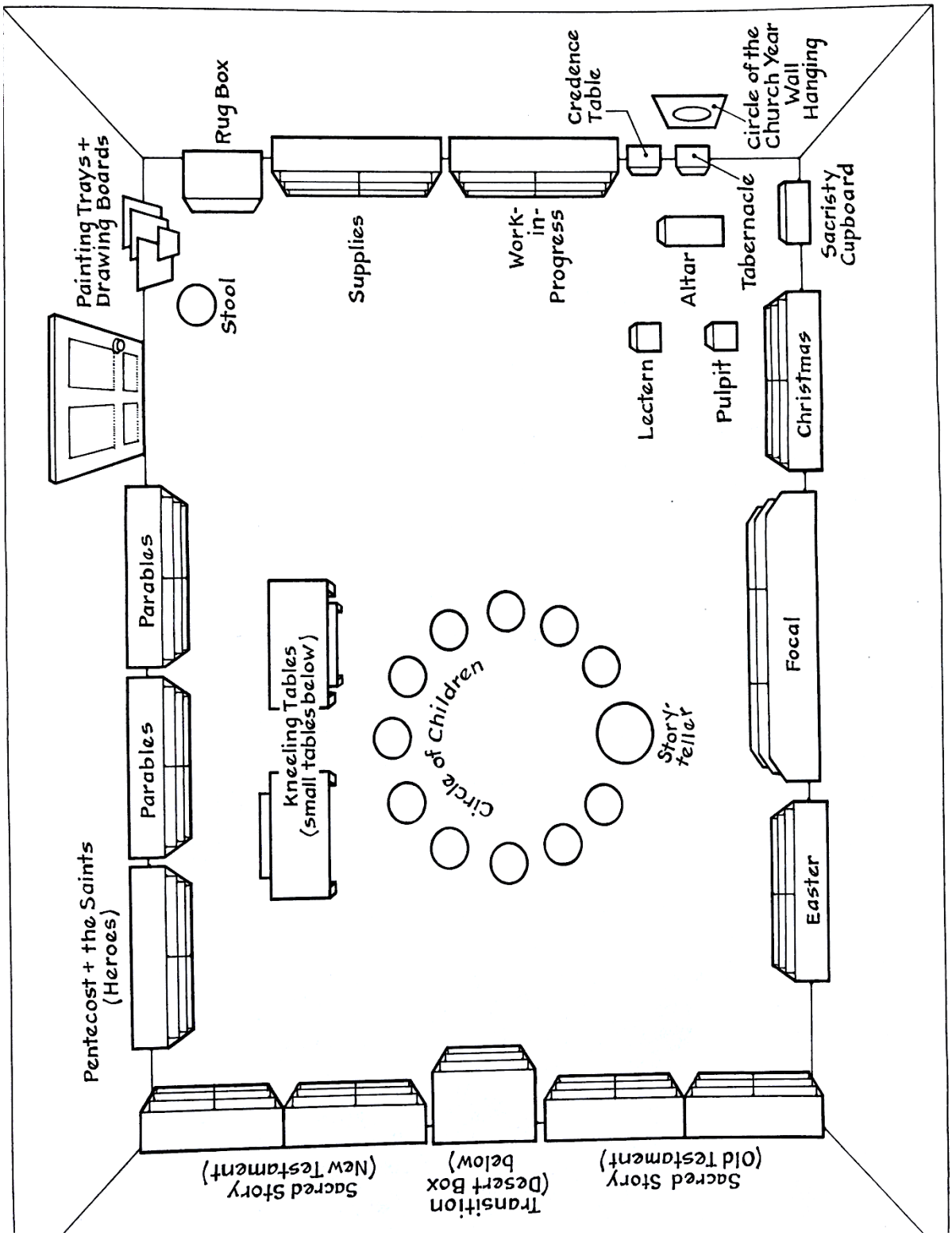

Figure 2. From Berryman (2002)

Appendix 4 - Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. That Godly Play represents a sophisticated, theologically and pedologically well-grounded approach to Christian Religious Education appropriate in a parish setting and in state schools with a distinctive Christian religious ethos.
2. That used with care and sensitivity, Godly Play can be appropriate, in a UK context, in Community primary schools in multi-faith setting.
3. That the evidence of this limited study suggests that Godly Play is a more powerfully affective method of education than conventional school RE.
4. Godly Play has deeper engagement where it finds reinforcement from school, home and parish.
5. That the use of artefacts and repetition in Godly Play leads to a high levels of pupil retention.
6. That the results suggest a degree of theological reasoning is going on in Godly Play, not simply the attainment of facts.
7. Children living in challenging circumstances do relate to many of the Biblical narratives to their own 'existential limits.'
8. That the personal formation and preparedness of the catechist is deeply important to good Godly Play.
9. That theology matters: the theological shape of a form of catechesis, the theology of education, the theology of safeguarding and, most of all, children's own theologising.

Summary Recommendations

These recommendations relate principally to my own denomination, the Church of England, but many are more widely applicable.

Godly Play and the parish

1. That local parishes consider Godly Play as part of their catechetical programme for 5 to 11-year-olds.

Godly Play and schools

1. That primary schools with a distinctive Church of England and Roman Catholic religious ethos widely adopt Godly Play as an integral part of the their RE curriculum, ideally in partnership with their local parish.
2. That Primary Schools in the RC sector look to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to supplement the offering of their Godly Play room, especially in regard to sacramental preparation.

The Church of England

1. That the formation, training and support of child and adult catechists be taken much more seriously by the Church of England and a national framework of Christian Education adopted.
2. That a national framework of selection, training, deployment and support for youth, children and families ministers be developed and that they be authorised and licensed as lay ministers in the same way that Readers and Church Army Officers currently are.
3. That the Church of England Education Department works more closely with Godly Play UK in the development and dissemination of Godly Play.
4. That greater emphasis be given to the practice and priority of child catechesis in the training and formation of clergy.
5. That a proportion of Church Commissioners' money, currently assigned to the Strategic Development Fund be re-deployed to properly implement and resource these four objectives.