

research on children's spirituality has become a popular topic. Ratcliff (2008a:6) traced four⁵⁸ phases of research in children's spirituality, noting some overlap in its emphasis. Since the turn of the millennium, a fifth phase, called the Child Theology period emerged. Each new area is inaugurated by a major publication on the subject of children's religiosity. Groundbreaking authors were Barnes in 1892, Hartshorne and May in 1928, Elkind in 1961 and Coles in 1990 (Ratcliff, 2008b:22). The phases identified are as follows:

1. Early Holism (1892-1928)
2. De-emphasis on Experience (1928-1961)
3. Cognitive Religious Development (1961-1990)
4. Children's Spirituality (1990-present)
5. Child Theology period (2000-present)

During the first phase (Early Holism) faith and religion was seen as inseparable parts with no distinction between religious and secular research topics (Ratcliff, 2008a:6). Hall, psychologist and founder of the "Pedagogical Seminary" published research journals and in 1892 included the first scientific journal on children's religion. It was called "The theological life of the California Child" written by Barnes in which he described children's religious thoughts and experiences and church related beliefs. Other research-based articles entitled "The Younger Grades in Sunday school", "Children's Interest in the Bible", and "Some Fundamental Principles of Sunday School and Bible Teaching" followed. In general, research was limited and educators and scholars wrote, "opinion pieces rather than the results of systematic observation" (Ratcliff 2008b:24). Between 1910 and 1920, perhaps due to the growing tension between science and religion, religious research shifted to religious journals.

During the second phase (De-emphasis on Experience), interest in children's religious development dwindled, research declined and children's spiritual and religious characteristics became compartmentalised. It was possibly due to the interest in behavioural and rational psychology and the economic constraints of the 1930's Great Depression. In 1928, Hartshorne and May researched children's tendency to deceive. Their qualitative research, "Studies in Deceit" concluded that regardless of religious background, all children including those who regularly attend Sunday school, deceive. This had devastating effects on the study of religious

⁵⁸ Grobbelaar (2008:182) referred to five general phases identified by Ratcliff, using an online article called: *A long and short history of children's spiritual development*. The paper was presented in 2005 at the North American Professors of Christian Education annual conference in Rochester. Grobbelaar accessed the document on the 10th July in 2006, from: <http://childspirituality.org/NAPCE/NAPCE.pdf>, but it is unavailable at present. Due to the importance of the Child Theological movement, the fifth phase will be included.

development of children. The studies “tended to downplay the importance of spiritual experience, as an increasing rationalistic framework became predominant” at the time (Ratcliff 2008b:26).

The third phase (Cognitive Religious Development) brought a renewed interest in religion with Elkind⁵⁹ and Goldman⁶⁰ as major role players. This period corresponds with the Piagian era where cognitive development of children gained prominence. Most research-theorists of this era who investigated children’s spirituality, were not only influenced by, but also actively embraced, the cognitive emphasis with the accompanying developmental stages (Ratcliff, 2008b:26). The development of children’s religious concepts as understood within the Piagian cognitive developmental framework is also evident in Kohlberg’s research on the moral thinking of children and Fowler’s stages of children’s faith development (Ratcliff, 2008a:11-14, 20).

The fourth phase (Children’s Spirituality) was initiated by the publication of Coles’⁶¹ book in 1990 called “The Spiritual Life of the Child”. During this phase, the previous cognitive emphasis on children’s religious and spiritual life was replaced by a spiritual emphasis. Coles brought to light perspectives that had been developed as well as the discontent with stage theory, while offering an, “exploratory, descriptive and case study commentary on the spiritual aspects of individual children” (Ratcliff, 2008b:24). Research during this phase includes multiple cultures and religions, emphasising the universality of spirituality. The relationship between spirituality and religion is re-evaluated and the role of the researcher shifted from being an educator to being a friend and learner. Coles paved the way for other researchers to explore children’s spirituality as an academically respectable field.

Hay and Nye (2006:166) introduced the theory that children’s spirituality has a biological basis for human spirituality and this idea is expanded through the use of neurological study

⁵⁹ Elkind researched children’s religious concepts of denominations. He examined the understanding of religious denomination by Jewish, Catholic and Protestant children. Elkind used Piaget’s semi-clinical interview procedure and concluded that children’s understanding of faith traditions corresponded with Piaget’s stages of cognitive development. The later research of Elkind regarding children’s concepts of prayer attracts little interest (Ratcliff, 2008a:14).

⁶⁰ Goldman’s “Religious Instruction for Children Questioned” indicated that religious instruction was not recommended and could be harmful and counterproductive before the age of ten or eleven. Goldman denied such an interpretation of his work, arguing rather that it is difficult for young children to communicate theology (Ratcliff, 2008b:28).

⁶¹ Cole avoided the stage-orientated analysis, using a narrative approach, listening to children’s views and perceptions. He investigated children’s remarks from religious and non-religious backgrounds, including Christians, Jews, Muslims and non-believers. He found that “... with respect to faith and doubt, belief and unbelief, we are all “on the edge”” (Coles, 1990:301). All children go through a time of questioning regarding their personal faith and beliefs.

and other methods in an attempt to discover how people are “hard-wired” for spirituality (Ratcliff 2008b:31). During this phase, many conferences were held investigating children’s spirituality (see Chapter 1 footnotes 7 and 8).

The fifth phase (Child Theology period), is born out of the Cutting Edge conferences facilitated by Viva Network. Keith White was invited to read a paper entitled “A little child shall lead them” at the Cutting Edge 3 conference in 2001. It presented a theological framework of ministry to children at risk, and through it the need for a child theology was awakened by scholars like Willmer, Tan and Bunge⁶² (Grobbelaar, 2008:186). At present, the Child Theological Movement is an important role player in the understanding of the theology of “with the child in our midst.” The founder of the Child Theology Movement, White (2010:244) presented a working definition of Child Theology. He states that:

Child Theology is an investigation that considers and evaluates central themes of theology – historical, biblical and systematic – in the light of the child standing beside Jesus in the midst of the disciples. The child is like a lens through which some aspects of God and his revelation can be seen more clearly. Or, if you like, the child is like a light that throws existing theology into new relief.

The section revealed that during the last century children’s religion and spirituality was at first researched in association with other social sciences but then became compartmentalised and isolated. Children’s religious development shifted from having a cognitive emphasis to spiritual, placing the child central in the dialogue. The turn of the millennium brought a renewed interest in children’s spirituality, not only from religious but also from non-religious fields.

2.2 GROWING INTEREST FROM THE NON-RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR SETTINGS

Although children’s spirituality is researched as a topic on its own, it also received special emphasis because it is embedded in other issues of child well-being. Initially it was not the centre of concern but the interest had a rippling effect. Today there is a growing body of research⁶³ related to children’s spirituality. It became a multidisciplinary field which includes

⁶² Haddon Willmer is a retired Professor of Theology at Leeds University in England and a Director of the Child Theology Movement, Sunny Tan is the Academic Dean of the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary and Marcia Bunge is the professor in Theology and Humanities at Christ College, Valparaiso University, the director of Childhood Studies, Religion and Ethics Project and Co-Chair of the Childhood Studies and Religion Consultation of the American Academy of Religion.

⁶³ There is an international association for children’s spirituality, focusing on the spiritual dimension of children, which includes the ChildSpirit Institute in Georgia, Atlanta (Hyde, 2008:9). There are also regular North American conferences and international conferences on children’s spirituality, which originated in Britain but are now hosted by a variety of countries worldwide.

psychology, education, philosophy, neuroscience, theology and medicine (Hyde, 2008:45). Children's spirituality therefore has captured the interest of teachers, early childhood specialists, counsellors, children's and youth workers.

Reasons for the special interest, especially from the Western secularised countries, are intertwined, and strangely stimulated a deeper inquiry into the subject matter. The reasons include:

- the fertile ground of the post modern era for spiritual concerns;
- educational and social concerns for moral fibre, for example to build resilience against depression, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide in youth; and
- the emphasis on holistic children's development as seen in The Convention of the Rights of the Child and The African Charter of Rights.

2.2.1 The post-modern era

The post-modern era is an era of spiritual inquiry. It moved away from the modern era with its over-emphasis on the intellectual while neglecting the spiritual. In acquiring knowledge, the modernists emphasised scientific objectivity, whereas post-modern thought has a subjective view of truth and reality. There is no over-arching truth explaining human existence, while absolute truth is challenged. Truth is not to be imposed from the outside as it is influenced by one's perspective and life experiences (Beckwith, 2004:22). Modernists disfavoured the idea that the spirit and material world coexist, but post-modernists are more open to the idea of the spiritual realm, even though most are more aware of the tangible world (Ratcliff & May, 2004:9).

2.2.2 The role of education

In England and Wales, interest in children's spirituality was stirred by unexpected events and in unexpected places. It was not initiated by the church in a religious setting, but by school education, in a secular setting. The 1988 Education Reform Act⁶⁴ stressed the need for a more balanced and broad based curriculum promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical dimension of pupils in school and in society (Nye, 2009:70; Hyde, 2008:16). The promotion of the spiritual development of children became a legislative requirement though the educators wrestled with its meaning and application.

⁶⁴ This reform was based on the reinforcement of the 1944 Education Act in education documents. The National Curriculum Council publication of "Spiritual and Moral Development" in 1993 also stressed the inclusion of the spiritual aspect as essential in the curriculum. The handbook of the Office for Standards in Education (1994) also indicates that all areas of the curriculum ought to contribute to the spiritual development of students. For example, scholars working to achieve such a goal are Watson 2003; Kibble 2003; Broadbent 2004 (Hyde, 2008:16).

In the United States of America, the need for holistic development of children's education led to the inclusion of non-cognitive elements. It brought the spiritual development into sharper focus. Hart, the founder of The ChildSpirit Institute, proposed a spiritual programme underpinned by ten principles for the use of parents and caregivers. It includes the child finding a voice, mastering the self, seeing a future, and listening with the heart. These elements are essentially non-religious but provide touchstones for those who engage with children (Hyde, 2008:16).

The Post-Apartheid South African government⁶⁵ was challenged to offer a more holistic approach for personal and educational development. The main reason for the change in the education system was to engage learners from all societal structures that would include a Western and African orientation. Roux (2006:156-158) therefore argues for a non-religious spirituality in South African education. De Klerk-Luttig⁶⁶ (2008:505) feared that the issue of spirituality is rarely explicit in South African educational debates and that such an omission can result in "an incomplete, one-sided, technicist view of education." An obstacle in the spiritual-inclusion-process is that education is closely connected to societal problems such as poverty (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008:509). Based on the diverse multi-religious spiritual nature of South Africa, she asks, "Is there room for teachers' spirituality in South African schools?" (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008:510) She poses a further troubling, though thought-provoking question: "Isn't the concern with spirituality irrelevant in a situation where poverty is rife and teachers are struggling to survive?" She concedes that the answers to these questions are complex (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008:514).

2.2.3 Socially related issues

The abuse and murder of Victoria Adjo Climbié (2 November 1991 – 25 February 2000) by her guardians in London, England, led to public outrage and an inquiry resulting in the formation of the Every Child Matters initiative in 2003; the introduction of the Children Act 2004; and the creation of the Contact Point project. Every Child Matters brought about a sea of change to policy-making in relation to children's programmes and services (Every Child Matters, 2005:7-9). Watson (2006:252) remarked that the British government encourages a holistic approach aiming to improve the well-being of children. Assuming that the spirit is part of the physical well-being, it implies that those who are concerned about children's well-being will invariably also touch on the spiritual aspect.

⁶⁵ See Article 28 (3) Constitutional Court of South Africa: Children's rights [Online]. Available: <http://www.constitutionalcourt.org.za/text/rights/know/children.html>. [2010, 25 June].

⁶⁶ Jeanette de Klerk-Luttig, retired Senior Lecturer of the Department of Education Policy Studies at the University of Stellenbosch is currently a researcher for the Office of Moral Leadership at *Communitas* associated with the Theological Faculty of Stellenbosch.

As in the British case above, the voice of the American public also appealed to the spiritual fibre of the nation. One example is the Columbine massacre in which two teenage students randomly opened fire upon their classmates, before ending their own lives. Concern for the moral direction of young people led to the recognition that life lacked a sense of meaning and purpose and that a spiritual dimension of life needs to be rekindled and nurtured (Hyde, 2008:16).

In Australia and New Zealand questions arose regarding the coping mechanisms of youth. It has been argued that a sense of connectedness with family and community can act as a protective factor and a means to build resilience (Hyde, 2008:45, 173). Hyde regards the searching for meaning and connectedness as notions of spirituality itself. He also refers to environmental concerns, such as the toxic childhood syndrome. This refers to the contaminated environment of children, for example, in the food they eat, their sleeping habits and the influence of the media. Children need to draw on their own inner strength and inner resources to survive the toxic childhood syndrome environment. The notion of the inner life is closely associated with spirituality (Hyde, 2008:16).

It is clearly seen that the interest in the spirituality of children captured the attention of the world. The underlying factors are diverse and researchers represent multi-disciplinary fields. In the post-modern world, views concerning children's spirituality have changed to embrace a variety of elements. In the past there was almost no reference to children's spirituality, but during the last fifteen years numerous books, research projects, conferences and journals addressed the subject (Nye, 2009b:70).

3. THE DEFINITIONAL CHALLENGE

3.1 DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

In the light of the discussion above, the cross-disciplinary nature of the study of children's spirituality becomes clear. One inherent challenge to such a study is the absence of consensus about the definition of spirituality. Thompson and Williams (2008:viii) compare this disharmony to waves that clash and form currents as they contest for the mainstream. In these turbulent waters, Christian children's spirituality has to find a place.

The following section will reveal that spirituality is a general term and that it consists of two streams, religious and non-religious spirituality. These two streams are also applicable to children's spirituality. The aim of the section is to find a workable definition of children's spirituality to be used by the CCW.

3.1.1 Spirituality is a general term

In its narrowest sense, the term “spirituality” refers to the spirit as opposed to matter; the sacred or religious; holy, divine and inspired things. However, it is also applied to a wide spectrum that includes both spiritual and secular fields. Myers (1997:43) for example, refers to training sessions for beauticians as the “spirituality of hair colouring”.

The difficulty in defining the term *spiritual* lies in its varied and nuanced meanings (Boyatzis & Newman, 2004:167). The challenge that it poses is magnified by glancing at website topics. One asked the question: “*Spirituality – What on earth is it?*”⁶⁷, while another reads: “*Spirituality without the G-O-D word.*”⁶⁸

The lack of consensus in definition makes it very difficult to engage in meaningful conversation. Ratcliff and May (2004:9) relayed their experience discussing children’s spirituality at a conference in 2003. The definition of spirituality was left open-ended with the result that sometimes “we were talking about very different things”. Therefore, the primary challenge is to set boundaries and parameters around the term “spirituality” (Yust, et al., 2006:8; Ratcliff & May, 2004:15). These boundaries are discussed under 3.2.3.

3.1.2 Two streams of spirituality

The academic world divided spirituality into two main streams, non-religious and religious spirituality, which subdivides into smaller streams (Anthony, 2006:6). Schneiders differentiates between the two streams as one having an anthropological approach, providing a “definition from below”, while the other has a theological approach supplying a “definition from above” (in Thompson and Williams, 2008:ix; in Allan, 2008b:6).

3.1.2.1 Non-religious spirituality

Non-religious spirituality consists of various streams of natural or secular spirituality. It includes the existential (meaning making), humanistic (enriching life holistically rather than being a religious experience), developmental (e.g. Erickson’s psychosocial model and Piaget’s stages of cognitive development), psychological (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) and social science spirituality. Non-religious spirituality is seen as a kind of “interiority”

⁶⁷ Mason, M., 2000, *Spirituality – What on earth is it?* British Humanist Association is online available: www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1264. [2010, 9 August].

⁶⁸ The website contained an application form for the 3rd North American conference on the spirituality of Children and Youth. The youth track for children 6 -12 was aimed to discover their own spirituality, their inner life. The program included Yoga, field trips, tapping the power on mindfulness, art and creativity, music and movement. The website is online available: https://uwgagenda.westga.edu/psych_chat_conf_broch_07.pdf. [2010, 10 September].

(Anthony, 2006:16), with two common themes of *self-transcendence* and *relationship* with self, others, world and perhaps the transcendent (Allan, 2008b:7). Many researchers use the more general form of non-religious or secular spirituality as it presents a common denominator applicable to numerous research situations. Researchers who focus specifically on the Christian aspect will use religious spirituality as their point of departure.

3.1.2.2 Religious spirituality

Religious spirituality is internally focused and sacred. It branches into Contemporary spirituality, New Age spirituality and World religions. Here Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam and other faiths find a home and subdivide into finer branches (Anthony, 2006:16). Concerning Christian spirituality, Anthony (2006:6) cautions that the church has never agreed on a definition for the term spirituality, but it is possible though to come to some agreement regarding the general nature of spirituality and its application to children. The diagram below gives a pictorial representation of the different streams in spirituality as presented by Anthony (2006:16).

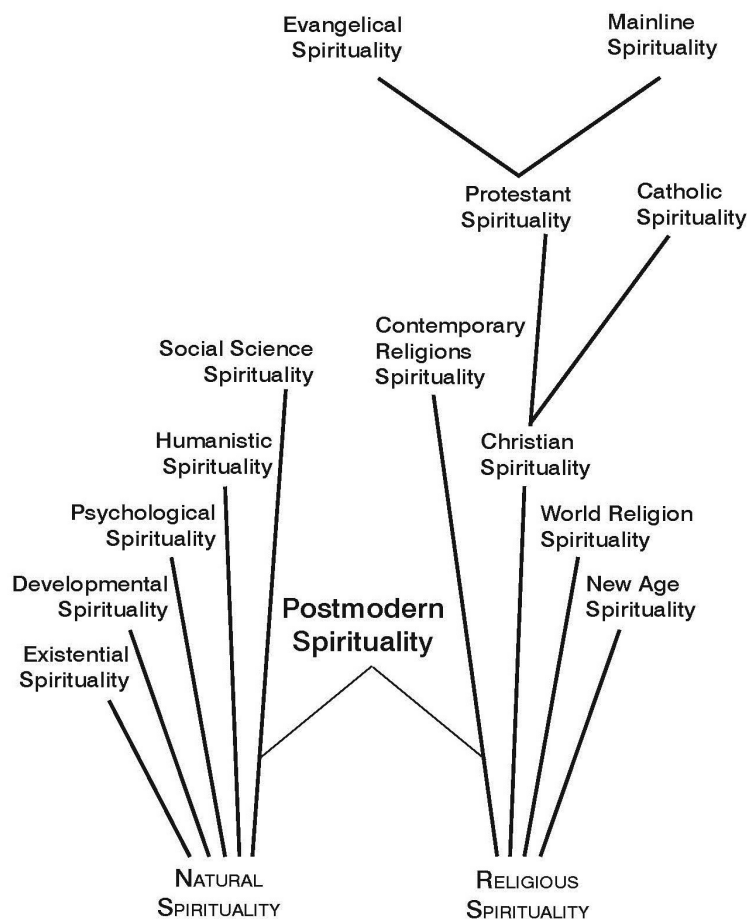


Figure 4: Theological Perspectives on Spirituality (Anthony 2006:16).

3.2 CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY

3.2.1 Defining children's spirituality

Although children's experiences of spirituality differ from that of adults, the same broad categories of non-religious and religious spirituality, with definitional complexities and challenges, remains.

3.2.1.1 Non-religious definitions: An educational perspective on children's spirituality

Secular settings, like the educational sector, necessitate non-religious and all-inclusive definitions of children's spirituality. Myers⁶⁹, a prominent American educator who advocates intentional spiritual development in preschool children, points out that in the Western world spirituality was mainly connected to the Christian Church. At present, in the post-modern world, there is no longer a single, unified understanding of the divine, nor of an all-powerful God. God is redefined as having more to do with relatedness than with absoluteness (Myers, 1997:44). She therefore, defines spirituality as a socially constructed, "inexhaustible web of meaning interrelatedly connecting self, other, world, and cosmos" (Myers, 1997:109).

Educationalist Hay, supports the definition of McCreery that spirituality is "an awareness that there is something Other, something greater than the course of the everyday events" (Hay & Nye, 2006:60). The definition presents a broad perspective of spirituality, is distanced from God and is universally applicable.

Education in South Africa, with its diverse social and cultural contexts, includes both Western and African orientations. A common denominator, acceptable by its entire people, is found in the concept of *ubuntu* to give meaning to the term "spirituality". It indicates the awareness that there is unity of beings. The saying *Ubuntu ngumntu ngabantu* conveys, "A person is a person through other persons." It rejects popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual world. All life is religious; all life is sacred. The spirituality of *ubuntu* reflects the spirit of community members caring for each other and providing for each other's needs (Roux 2006:158).

In South Africa, Roux (2006:156) examined children's spirituality from an educational perspective and proposed that one can define:

non-religious spirituality as referring to the spirituality of art, of historical, traditional and indigenous contexts, of the environment, language, literature,

⁶⁹ Barbara Kimes Myers is Associate Professor of Child Development at DePaul University in Chicago.

music and of science - all the elements that connect with the whole-person wellness.

3.2.1.2 Religious definitions

Anthony (2006:17) notes that some scholars have attempted to bridge the divide between secular and sacred spirituality. For example, Bradford (1995:74) viewed spirituality as tripartite with human (the need for love and security), developmental (importance of faith tradition) and practical (devotional) aspects of spirituality. Anthony places post-modern spirituality within this divide as it covers both secular and religious elements of spirituality. Post-modern spirituality has an audience wider than just the Christian in mind, but some of the core elements are applicable to Christian spirituality.

Relatively few scholars articulated definitions on children's spirituality (Roehlkepartain, 2004:121), but belonging within the divide between secular and religious spirituality, is an important exception. Nye⁷⁰ is a leading scholar of children's spirituality who made valuable contributions to the discussion. Based on extensive interviews with children, she coined the term *relational consciousness* in describing spirituality which is reflected in two patterns: "an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by that child" and "conversations expressed in a context of how the child related to things, other people, him/herself, and God" (Hay & Nye, 2006:109). This relational consciousness is built upon three fundamental categories that outline some parameters of children's spiritual experiences (Hay & Nye, 2006:65-78):

- Awareness sensing, which includes an emphasis upon here and now experiences such as feeling one with nature;
- Mystery sensing, that highlights experiences of wonder and awe and the use of imagination; and
- Value sensing, which includes experiences of delight and despair, a sense of the ultimate goodness of life, and meaning-making.

Hay and Nye's presupposition that children have an innate⁷¹ spiritual potential (2006:60) is based on the theory of the British biologist Alister Hardy. He theorised that religious and spiritual experience has evolved through natural selection because it has survival value and

⁷⁰ In 1998, Nye wrote her doctoral dissertation on "Psychological perspectives on children's spirituality." She used a qualitative research and followed a "grounded theory" approach to analyse the conversations with children (Hay & Nye, 2004:108).

⁷¹ Innate spirituality is not uniform in children. Nye emphasises the individuality of children's spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006:93, 97) which she also refers to as the "signature" phenomenon because no two children are quite the same. Children can have "negative spirituality" due to violence, prejudice, and other evils, resulting from their quest for meaning and pleasure.

the various religions are expressions of such a common spiritual theme (Hay & Nye, 2006:22, 115).

Le Blanc (2010:25) observes that the assumption of intrinsic spirituality is based on the fact that religion and spirituality have been found throughout history and the world, but also on a growing body of research which points to potential biological and physiological underpinnings. This is evident in the inter-faith definition formulated by Yust, Johnson, Sasso, Roehlkepartain (2006:8).

Spirituality is the intrinsic human capacity of self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred-something greater than the self. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped, and expressed through a wide range of narratives, beliefs and practices; and is shaped by many influences in family, community, society, culture and nature.

The definition is formulated for research on perspectives from the world's religious traditions in nurturing child and adolescent spirituality. It had to be wide enough to allow all faiths to agree on its basic assumptions to engage in discussion.

3.2.2 Defining Christian children's spirituality

3.2.2.1 Obstacles in defining Christian children's spirituality

There are many problems and obstacles in reaching a specifically Christian definition on children's spirituality. Nye (2009:70) points out that the Christian perspective on children's spirituality is new territory and cautions that it needs to be critically explored. The first problem in defining and understanding children's spirituality becomes apparent by the discussion of the experts Hay and Nye (1996:144-154), on "How do you start without a starting point?" Scholars acknowledge contradictions in language, meaning and assumptions, but to *start* in the wrong place would be particularly embarrassing (Hay & Nye, 2004:97).

Secondly, spirituality is not something that may be confined to words (Nye, 2009a:1). Possibly frustration may arise because "a definition can capture only part of the whole picture and when the definition attempts to take the whole picture, you need to stand so far back that there is not much to focus on" (Nye, 2009a:2). Because it is so hard to pinpoint and define spirituality, Nye (2009a:11, 19) identified *key themes* and specific *elements* associated with children's spirituality that can serve as *pointers* and set parameters around children's spirituality. The key themes indicate that children's spirituality is more natural than having to

be taught and that children are the most fertile ground for spirituality.⁷² From another perspective Nye (2009a:8) suggests that:

Sometimes it may be liberating to work out what spirituality entails by coming from it sideways - for example using smiles or a drawing. You might like to try this. Spirituality is like ... a lover, breathing, water, a puzzle, a journey?

Thirdly, Hyde (2008:23) believes that a fixed definition is too limited and instead of defining children's spirituality, it should rather be described. Hyde describes children's spirituality by using three broad perspectives: firstly, it is an essential human trait; secondly, the spiritual movement towards ultimate unity implies notions of connectedness or relationality; thirdly, it may or may not be expressed through a formal system of values and beliefs of an institutional religion. Hyde⁷³ referred to the *notions* of connectedness, the inner life, meaning-making and inner strength as indicative of children's spirituality (Hyde, 2008:16). Stonehouse (2008:133, 174, 181) also, observes *notions* in children's spirituality: they think deeply about God, are open to God with a "genuine knowing" and grasp the reality of the transcendence with more ease than adults do. Hyde (2008:44), eventually offers a definition on children's spirituality as an "ontological reality that involves a path towards the realization of the true Self, in which ultimately, Self is unified with everything that is Other than Self".

Fourthly, the many facets of children's spirituality lead to a consideration of having a multiplicity of definitions so that a variety of perspectives on the topic can be reflected. (Ratcliff and May 2004:10). Nye (2009a:7) stresses the importance of an inclusive definition because when areas are overlooked, it could lead to a lopsided understanding and practices. Definitions of children's spirituality should be approached from different perspectives. These perspectives should include the theological perspective, rendering a simple definition of children's spirituality such as "God's way of being with children and children's ways of being with God" (Nye, 2009a:5). A definition from the evidenced-based perspective, pinpoints children's capacity for "relational consciousness" and a definition from an analogy perspective could be "children's spirituality is like being a child" (Nye, 2009a:6).

Fifthly, Yust, et al. (2006:8-10) consider boundary-setting on children's spirituality an important aspect in understanding what it entails. Their observations are from an interfaith perspective and therefore scholars may differ about the assumptions. Yust, et al. conclude that children's spirituality:

⁷² Nye (2009a:8) discussed that the understanding of childhood involves understanding related elements. It includes a holistic understanding of childhood, emphasis on emotional life, natural capacity of wonder, inadequacy of words, etc. These ideas underpin the correct understanding of children's spirituality.

⁷³ He is working with preschool children in Catholic schools.

1. is an intrinsic part of humanness;
2. is related to but not defined by religion and faith;
3. involves growth and change;
4. must be actively nurtured;
5. is embedded in relationships and community;
6. is expressed in ethical behaviour; and
7. necessitates interdisciplinary study.

Some elements may need to be redefined or added in order to shape a Christian perspective on children's spirituality and to pinpoint Christian beliefs. The idea that children's spirituality should recognise the child as a whole and that it should be seen in children's life contexts could be included.

In reflecting on the above discussion, the question can be asked: How wide a definition can be accepted for it to be Christian? In addition, how wide a description can still render a Christian definition? A variety of Christian scholars continue to wrestle with these foundational questions.

3.2.2.2 Christian definitions of children's spirituality

Anthony (2006:4-6) found a starting point in establishing a definition by stating what spirituality is not. He identified the following misconceptions:

- spirituality requires joining the church where people are very involved;
- attend long retreats;
- live like a monk;
- read a lot - particularly the latest top ten religious best-sellers;
- have a mountain top experience on a camp that is fun, but does not last long;
- is only for the elite of faith, but is a passing fad that will not last long; and
- is acquired by reading books on prayer, meditation and fasting.

In 2003, at the first American conference on child spirituality from a Christian perspective, scholars grappled to pinpoint the meaning of children's spirituality. Ideas varied from *being self-directed and exuberant*, to a *mystical "otherness"* and simply put "that child has plenty of spirit" (Ratcliff & May, 2004:15). Allan (2008b:6), Professor in Christian Ministries and Director of the Children and Family Ministry Program at John Brown University in Arkansas, lamented the lack of definitions from an explicit Christian community. She refers to

Morgenthaler's definition of children's spirituality within the Christian framework as a rare occurrence. In 1999, Morgenthaler (in Allen, 2008:10) defined children's spirituality as:

The child's development of an awareness of the relationship which has been initiated by God in and through baptism, the role of the child's community in fostering that relationship, and the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship.

In 2005 Allen and Ratcliff⁷⁴ were charged with constructing a working definition on children's spirituality for the 2006 Children's Spirituality Conference: Christian Perspectives. After considering major definitional concepts as discussed in this chapter, they formulated a definition by adapting Morgenthaler's description of children's spirituality and Sheldrake's⁷⁵ description of Christian spirituality. Allen (2008b:11) presents the following definition that was accepted by the organising committee as the working definition for the Children's Spirituality Conference in 2006:

The child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship.

The definition became the accepted working definition for all future Children's Spirituality Conferences, although conformity is not required and it is subject to further modification.⁷⁶ It is clear that there is not a widely accepted definition of children's spirituality (Allen, 2008b:11). Most Christian definitions include elements with a Trinitarian focus, relationality, and the context of the believing community. Due to the newness of the subject, concepts and definitions are still emerging and the definitional challenge remains (Allen, 2008b:11).

The Children's Spirituality Conference's working definition of children's spirituality presents a clear assessment of the core values for a Christian definition and although it cannot stand apart from definitional boundaries mirrored in the discussion, it will be used as the accepted definition by the CCW.

⁷⁴ Ratcliff, Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College and previously Professor of Psychology at Vanguard University, studied children's spirituality and religious development for more than 25 years and wrote several books on the topic.

⁷⁵ Sheldrake is the Professor of Theology and Religion at the University of Durham in England and the editor of *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*.

⁷⁶ The definition is posted on the conference website and has remained unchanged between 2006 and 2011 ([Online] available: <http://childspirituality.org/definition.html>).

4. SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Researching children's spirituality is a little like trying to capture the wind in a box (May, Poterski, Stonehouse & Cannell, 2005:84). Ratcliff (2008b:22) refers to Wangerin's comparison of spiritual development to be like a dance. No one can say when the dance with God begins. The dance, the relationship with God, is a natural experience for children, regardless of culture and language. It is a universal experience and thus we have all danced one round with God. Wangerin's view of spiritual development as a dance may be more poetry than research but Ratcliff comments, "the true value may be as strong as that found in formal study of children" (Ratcliff, 2008b:22).

If spiritual development is like the wind, like a dance with God, the question is: "What theoretical premise can be used to understand the spiritual development of children?" Research for years followed the social sciences' developmental stage theories and the work of human development guided perceptions on spiritual development of children.

4.1 A HISTORICAL REFLECTION ON CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE THEORIES

An historical development of children's spirituality and the interest that followed, was discussed earlier (see section 2). It revealed that in history, the pendulum concerning children's spirituality, swung between an under-emphasis on the experiential aspect (1928-1961) to an over-emphasis on the cognitive aspect (1961-1990). From the early 20th century, behavioural science has dominated and largely defined children's spirituality. In order to understand the full extent of this problematic situation, it is necessary to see how it developed.

During the period of 1960–1990, behaviourism had a powerful influence on psychological thinking and education, but the cognitive development captivated researchers' attention. Earlier theorists of human development, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg's stage-developmental thinking profoundly influenced David Elkind, Ronald Goldberg and James Fowler who in turn provided significant insights into religious and spiritual development of children (Ratcliff, 2008b:26). The term spiritual development is not used by all researchers, for example Fowler prefers the term 'faith development'. However they all influence the debate on children's spirituality.

4.1.1 Structural theories of human development

4.1.1.1 Erikson: Identity development of children

Child psychoanalyst Erikson proposed the concept of identity development, as a process that takes place in stages, where each stage must be completed before progressing to the next. He theorised that a person's development is strongly influenced by the social context and significant relationships. Erikson (1963:247-269) identified eight stages of psychosocial development. The four that cover the childhood years are:

Stage of identity	Age range	Development task. Children will:
1. Trust vs. Mistrust	0 - 1 year	develop trust
2. Autonomy vs. Shame & doubt	1 - 3 years	master new skills, build confidence
3. Initiative vs. Guilt	3 - 6 years	initiate activities
4. Industry vs. Inferiority	6 - 12 years	learn new skills

Figure 5: Erikson's first four stages of children's identity development (Erikson 1963:247-258).

Erikson believed that each life stage involved a conflict or crisis. Parents or caregivers are directly related to the positive or negative mastery of life stages. For example, consistent caring in stage one will develop trust, but a lack of freedom to master tasks in stage two will hamper self-confidence or a child receiving constant criticism during stage three, could lead to feelings of guilt (Stonehouse, 2008:48-62; Venter n.d.:7). Shelly (1982:23), among others, transferred Erikson's parent-child-relationships to that of God-child-relationships⁷⁷.

4.1.1.2 Piaget: Cognitive development of children

Swiss psychologist and educationalist, Piaget studied cognitive development of children for fifty years. He believed the mind does not store information passively but is rather like an artist creating its own interpretation of what is seen. When information is received, (by seeing, hearing or experiencing), it is organised to create meaning and to make sense of it. Piaget used three words to describe the process of "mental organisation": assimilation, accommodation and equilibration (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:5-6). Stonehouse (2008:71) explains *assimilation* as taking new information and storing it into an existing mental category or structure. *Accommodation* is required to adjust a pre-existing category or to establish a new category to deal with the new information. *Disequilibration* (or imbalance)

⁷⁷ Shelly (1982:23) outlines children's spiritual development as related to Erickson's eight stages of man. In prenatal period, children are influenced by their parent's own spiritual wellbeing. In stage 1 the ability to trust is essential for a growing faith in God. In stage 2 a healthy self-concept is the foundation to develop faith in God. In stage 3 unrealistic demands on children may lead them to reject God or become legalistic in religious practices. In stage 4 children's consciences develop and they can comprehend sin and forgiveness more fully.

occurs when a person’s understanding or categorising of information is not accurate. It will cause a sense of inadequacy or discomfort and evoke a desire to restore *equilibrium* (or balance), which is achieved when a person accommodates his or her thinking and adjusts the categories to reflect reality more accurately than was originally perceived. The process of learning is a continual process of moving from disequilibrium to one of equilibrium (Venter, n.d.:47). The mental organisation is a basic task that takes place during each of the stages identified by Piaget (Stonehouse, 2008:73-81). The first four stages he identified are summarised below:

Stage of intelligence	Age range	Children’s cognitive concept-formulating capabilities
1. Sensori-motor or practical intelligence	0 - 2 years	highly egocentric, do not understand object permanence
2. Pre-operational or intuitive intelligence	2 - 6 years	egocentric, use intuitive logic, sensori-motor knowing, irreversible thinking
3. Concrete operational Or concrete intelligence	7 - 12 years	logical and reversible thinking, can grasp time concepts
4. Formal operational Or abstract intelligence	13 - 21 years	capable of abstract; propositional and hypothetical-deductive thought

Figure 6: Piaget’s first four stages of children’s cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:3-13, Stonehouse, 2008:73-81).

Shelly (1982:22) presents an example of how scholars view Piaget’s stages of cognitive development in relation to spiritual development⁷⁸.

4.1.1.3 Kohlberg: Moral development of children

Building on the work initiated by Piaget, Kohlberg, a Jewish American psychologist, researched moral development (Allred, 2009:11). As a cognitive-developmental, he believes a strong and important cognitive component is woven through social and behavioural development (Stonehouse, 2000:62). He identified three levels of two stages each of moral reasoning and two stages within each level. Kohlberg’s theory places a strong emphasis on justice and reasons that moral action is a result of formal reasoning. His theory is summarised in the figure 7 below:

⁷⁸ In Stage 1 the understanding of God is vague and prayer is a comforting bond between parent and child. In Stage 2 children have an anthropomorphic view of God, but the meaning of prayer is vague and ritualistic. In Stage 3 God is seen through actions (love, help and caring), prayer becomes verbal requests, Bible understanding is concrete, there is a desire to please and sin is an act of misbehaviour rather than rebellion against God. In Stage 4 God is seen as a personal friend with private conversations with God in prayer (Shelly, 1982:22).

Stage of moral development	Motivation for moral decisions
1. Preconventional level	Self-interest = not to be caught Justice is what adults command Oblivious to intentions Self-centred view of value of people (I am important)
2 Conventional level	External standards: role models and rules Justice is defined by society Make allowance for intentions People's value lies in relationships
3. Post-conventional level	Internal principles Justice is an equal consideration for all Consider intentions and justice People are valued as persons and life is sacred

Figure 7: Kohlberg's moral development of children (Stonehouse 2000:64).

Kohlberg's research in the late 1960's and early 1970's popularised developmentalism in Christian education. Instead of theology being the only resource for Christian education, Kohlberg's view of the nature and formation of human conscience became a paradigm for the understanding of faith development. Many have fallen "into a widely yawning trap as they searched for spiritual gold among the artefacts of a highly cognitive model" (Ward, 1995:13).

4.2 COGNITIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN

Elkind, Goldman and Fowler used Piaget's stage-theory as their theoretical premise to research children's religious development. They emphasised cognitive development as integrally connected to religious development in children (Ratcliff, 2008b:26).

4.2.1 Elkind: Children's understanding of faith traditions

Using Piaget's semi-clinical interview approach, Elkind concluded that children comprehend religion and other concepts in the same way. During elementary years, (5 – 7) children reflect a general faith and in middle childhood (7 – 9) their religious group becomes important, while during their early teens (10 – 12) internal rather than external belief is prominent. In accordance with Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, Elkind concludes that children could not understand abstract religious concepts (Ratcliff, 2008:28).

4.2.2 Goldman: Religious instruction for children questioned

Goldman's research yielded a three-stage developmental rubric, also using Piagian terminology: Intuitive religious thinking was marked by fragmentation, oversimplification and magical thought (2 - 6 years); concrete logic, in line with Piaget's thinking, placed

development of religious thinking at the ages of eight to twelve; and only during the next stage (14 years and up) would abstract religious thinking develop. Between each stage is a transition stage of two years.

Goldman wrote *Readiness for Religion* and *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* in which he claims that children almost never directly experience the divine. He refers to children being in “pre-religious” and “sub-religious” stages. Christian educationalists assumed that children under the age of twelve are not capable of “knowing” because their cognitive and rational skills are not yet developed. He therefore recommends that the Bible not be taught until age twelve but he contested that he did not argue against formal religious instruction but rather upholds the difficulty in verbal communication for small children especially related to theology (Ratcliff, 2008a:29).

4.2.3 Fowler: Faith in phases

Fowler⁷⁹, influenced by Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg, presented the most enduring theory related to religious and spiritual development (Ratcliff, 2008b:29). He notes corresponding elements between stage-theories and faith development (Stonehouse, 2010:150). Fowler adds to the developmental framework the contents of faith to form his six stages of faith. He includes three aspects of faith: centres of value, images of power and master stories. Though Fowler had a personal Christian orientation, his interest was in faith development in any spiritual framework (Beckwith, 2004:43).

Stage of faith	Age range	Characteristics
0. Undifferentiated or primal faith	0-2 years	Other trust relationship is transferred to God, “pre-images” of God are formed
1. Intuitive-Projective	2 -6 years	Fluid and magical but not logical thinking
2. Mythic-Literal	6-11 years	Story, symbols, ritual are important God’s justice - sense right and wrong
3. Synthetic-Conventional	11 – 15 years	Think abstract, in relationship with others

Figure 8: Fowler’s first four stages of faith (Fowler 1981:119-174).

⁷⁹ Fowler was previously the Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University and also Director of both the Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics until he retired in 2005. Like Fowler, Oser and Gmünder also produced the cognitive-psychological religious stage theories in Europe. Their stage theory research focused on religious judgement. Their work is similar to that of Fowler in that age trends are significant and to some extent are stages parallel. They are different in that Fowler incorporates psychological elements where Oser and Gmünder concentrate on religious judgement in the context of the relationship between oneself and an Absolute (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King & Wagener, 2006:8).

Fowler (1981:119-174) identified one pre-stage and six stages of faith development. Only the first four stages are relevant to the current research outlined above.

Fowler suggests that human faith development is shaped in hierarchical stages where the omission of one stage prevents progress to the next (Dallow, 2002:86). Unlike Erikson, Fowler believes that a person can be stuck in one stage (Beckwith, 2004:43). He theorised that faith development often, though not always, corresponds with age, is not confined to religion and reason is essential in faith forming. Spirals are the key to his theory, in which he sees the person moving through stages, in contrast with the linear thinking of previous theories (Ratcliff, 2008b:30).

According to Fowler, during the Undifferentiated Faith period, children's ability to form relationships with God and others directly relates to the infant care they received. These influences could be positive or negative, but never neutral (Beckwith, 2004:45). The pre-images of God lay the foundations on which later faith will be built (Fowler, 1981:103, 121).

During the Intuitive-Projective Faith stage, children are strongly influenced by history, rituals, images, stories and symbols (Downs, 2000:77). Elements of anger, images of tyranny that inspire fear, legalism and visions of hell should be avoided as they will have lifelong negative implications on faith (Beckwith, 2004:50). Fowler (1981:123) states that these stories influence the development of the image of God in children, which is formed irrespective of religious or non-religious backgrounds.

During the Mythic-Literal Faith stage, children have a limited comprehension of life-meaning in stories and are unable to distinguish between spiritual and literal concepts (Downs, 2000:78). God's strong sense of justice, ("God will be good to me if I am good") is deduced from family and friends' points of view (Fowler, 1981:139). Moral development takes root now (Beckwith, 2004:55) but it is only from the next stage that the image of God is understood in terms of companionship, guidance, love and support (Fowler, 1981:156).

4.3 STAGE THEORIES QUESTIONED

Recently stage theories as basis for spiritual formation of children have been questioned (Ratcliff, 2008b:33). Coles' research on *The Spiritual Life of Children* stimulated inquiry regarding childhood spirituality, when he purposely avoided stage-oriented analysis and used instead a phenomenological framework to investigate children from religious and non-religious backgrounds. He concluded that irrespective of backgrounds "with respect to faith

and doubt, belief and unbelief, we are all ‘on the edge’” (Coles, 1990:301). This study served as a pivotal point in the field and drew attention to the notion of spirituality as a universal human attribute through his demonstration of children’s deep and profound capacity for awareness in theological and spiritual matters.

More and more scholars sensed that something was missing in the developmental literature, and that “something” came to be termed “the spirit of the child” (Hye & Nye, 2006:57). Developmental scholars too identify “something missing” and that is within the domain of spiritual development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006:2). Estep, Professor of Christian Education at Lincoln Christian Seminary and Breckenridge, Associate Professor of Christian Education at the Oral Roberts University School of Theology and Missions, noted the struggle that religious education is going through. They reason that the struggle is due to its basis on developmentalism rooted in psychodynamic theories (Freud, Jung and Erikson) and structural-developmentalism (Piaget, Kohlberg and Fowler) (Estep & Breckenridge, 2004:324). Ratcliff (2008b:31) values the guidance that stage theories provided for religious instruction. Although Ratcliff (2008b:37) admits that it is inept for the educational task, he wonders whether a second look at stages, using neurological studies, cross-cultural studies, and even theological perspectives has merit.

What does the “something missing” of the stage-theories constitute? Alternatively, what problems do the stage theories present?

4.4 PROBLEMS STAGE THEORIES PRESENT

4.4.1 The research problem: theoretical assumptions

Hay and Nye (2004:97) identified the researcher’s conundrum and dilemma as knowing the right place to start. The fundamental problem of stage theories on the religious and spiritual development of children is that it not only assumes Piaget’s cognitive-development stage theory as starting point but also carries the underlying theoretical assumptions to its conclusions. Ratcliff (2008b:31) argues that stage theorists started with Piagian assumptions and used Piagian methods of research, resulting in theories too closely linked to the Piaget’s stage-theory. He observes that the stages were often creatively re-named to reflect the religious concepts.

4.4.2 The problematic cognitive-spiritual relationship of stage theories

The Piagian based stage theories, especially presented by Fowler, offered an intellectual framework to understand children’s’ spirituality. Hay and Nye (2006:57) recognise the

narrowness of the cognitive emphasis, which almost dissolves “religion into reason” and childhood spirituality into a “form of immaturity or inadequacy”. They also refer to the work of Bissonnier who observed profound spiritual awareness in mentally deficient people, which questions the centrality of cognitive development in the spiritual domain. Boyatzis (2008:54) contends that stage theories pigeonhole children’s spirituality into its constraint.

The developmentally sensitive approach was adequate for learning information but spirituality cannot be subjected to the same restrictions. It over-identifies spirituality with intellectual ability and spirituality might have less to do “with age, intellect and mental life and much more with being and feeling” (Nye, 2009a:84).

The recent emphasis on childhood spirituality gave expression to new ideas, for example Nye’s (2009a:48) recommendation that children’s meetings should be both child-friendly as well as child-spiritually-friendly. It is clear that recent researchers found the stage-theory-framework like old wineskins that cannot contain the new wine which focus on the spirituality of children.

4.4.3 A limited anthropology of children

An essential problem with Piagian theorising is the emphasis on the *becoming* aspect of childhood. Ratcliff (2008b:31) asserts that every child has two immediate functions: *to be* and *to become*. The ‘to be’ aspect is the value of children as they are, not just for what they will become in future. Stage theories describe what *is* but do not guide what *can* or *should be*. In support of his argument, Ratcliff refers to Jesus saying that adults are to become like children and that God cares about the whole child, not just the intellect. He maintains “that religion that is only cognitive is not only sub-scriptural, it is also subhuman.”

Hood (2004:234) also challenges Piaget’s starting point of children’s incapacity. Although they cannot see the world as adults and are limited in cognitive development, it need not follow that it has a limiting effect on their perception of God. A more accurate approach to children’s anthropology could assume what children are capable of, that they can look beyond what is real, and that is a crucial element of faith.

In regard to the nature of children’s spirituality, Nye (2009a:16) asserts that we should be critical of ideals and practices that support views that a child is “an empty vessel” waiting to be filled up with religious knowledge.

4.4.4 The problem of “One-size-fits-all”

4.4.4.1 Culture and Context

A crucial point of stage theories is that it provides a framework to map children’s religious and spiritual development but it does not sufficiently take into account other factors like the context in which children develop. For example child soldiers, children in prostitution and children of child-headed households are influenced by their circumstances, forcing them to assume more mature roles early in life. These contextual aspects will also affect their spiritual development.

In the research done by May et al. (2005:85) they asked students to reflect on their childhood faith journeys. Those from non-western cultures, where another world faith and ideology predominates, could not identify at all with Fowler’s stages of faith. This underlines the importance that developmental theories are not “one-size-fits-all” and that other factors such as culture and context need to be taken into consideration.

Hay and Nye (2006:57) comment that contemporary Western culture has a tendency to close down spiritual awareness in older children. She describes this rejection of Christianity by children as a “culturally constructed suppression⁸⁰ or even repression of spirituality”.

4.4.4.2 Universalism versus Individualism

The overemphasis of the universal stages in developmental theories has negative implications when discussing children’s religious and spiritual concepts (Hood, 2004:234). Firstly, it impedes understanding the gradualness, complexity and uniqueness of individual religious development (Boyatzis, 2008:52). Boyatzis (2008:53) notes the variability within individuals at any given age or stage. Children may experience sudden gains and spurts of growth as well as regression during times of trauma or despair. Secondly, the over-emphasis on the cognitive aspect in the early stages seen in Fowler’s theory, leads to a ‘de-religioned’ interpretation of ‘faith’ to reinforce a general ‘individualised’ position (Bradford, 1995:61). Bradford’s further concern is that the “goal of finding – or being found by – God should not merely be thought of as a lifelong pilgrimage or the culmination of passing through a series of stages of development.”

⁸⁰ The Post-Enlightenment European culture avoided spirituality as acceptable in mainstream psychology. Cognitive psychology became a means to self-understanding, and developmental theories followed the same root. Nye (2006:57) referred to large-scale studies by Tamminen, noting high levels of religious and spiritual experiences among Finnish children, while British researcher, Francis, observed a collapse of such experiences among British children of about the same age. Nye notes that children around the age of 12 in the Western culture received scientific instruction and therefore supports Tamminen’s hypothesis that “the ‘blotting out’ of spirituality is culturally mediated.”

4.4.5 The educational problem

Cognitive developmental theory has convinced Christian educators that children learn best with other children of their own age doing developmentally appropriate activities, which may be true of school education but not in spiritual growth. The fundamental difficulty is that spiritual development is not essentially cognitive development as other factors are at work, which are not all primarily age-related. Cognitive developmental principles applied to spirituality may not produce mature members of the Christian community.

Many South African practitioners had to deal with the frustration using curricula that take into account the structural-cognitive theories without regarding the social, cultural and individual needs of their particular context of ministry. It resulted not only in perturbed CCWs but also in programmes not meeting the needs of the children. In some ways, the application of curricula produced in first world countries, presented in second and third world countries were a bit like a sundial in the moonlight – a wonderful invention, used out of context.

In summary, as Hornberger, Jones and Miller (2006:460) adequately put it:

Although stage theories are important to our understanding of child and adult development, they do present pitfalls: issues of oversimplification, standardization, and difficulty accommodating cultural diversity and individual uniqueness or nonconformity regarding the stated time line or worse, seeing such nonconformity as aberrant. Stage theories provide an understanding of child and adolescent development; they generally do not, however, adequately address the role of spirituality in child and adolescent development.

Roehlkepartain et al. (2006:7) bring balance to the discussion by observing that:

Although stage theories have been criticised for their strong cognitive basis and for suggesting that children are limited to less mature faith, they have been invaluable in allowing the study of the transcendent domains of religion, spirituality and faith to gain more serious consideration.

4.5 RETHINKING CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

From what started as “uneasiness about the adequacy” of cognitive stage theories applied to childhood spirituality, grew a shift in perspectives to include the spirit of the child and the transforming Spirit of God (Ratcliff, 2008b:31).

The problems identified above indicate the inadequacies that need to be addressed in children's spiritual development. These will become the new points of departure in understanding children's spiritual development. Current approaches have much to offer by

way of correcting what is insufficient in the stage-structural accounts of religious and spiritual development. The strengths of stage structural approaches can then be combined with the strengths of current approaches (Scarlett, 2006:31).

4.5.1 Contextual factors of spiritual development

While the developmental stage theory was the focal point of children's spiritual development, little attention was given to the context. Estep and Breckenridge (2004:324) note the importance of contextual factors, (learning out of the class room factors) and its implications for children's spiritual formation. Breckenridge (2004:327) therefore values Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach as a model to provide basic parameters in understanding children's spiritual development. Copsy (2006:3) working with "Children in URban situations" (CURBS), who are mostly poor children, also emphasises "development-in-context" while Hood's (2004:233) empirical investigation affirms such views.

4.5.1.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecology – context for spiritual formation

Bronfenbrenner conceptualises development as a series of "nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" which reveals the interconnections of children's interactions with their life settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3).⁸¹ It affects children and consequently also their spiritual development. Breckenridge (2004:325) gives the example that a child's perception of a biological father's⁸² care will have an effect on the perceptions of God's care. Bronfenbrenner states that all systems within the larger-system perspective play a role in the development of individuals and this concept gives a more inclusive understanding of spiritual formation (Breckenridge, 2004:325). In the five levels of environmental systems, the closest one to children is the most influential, which is usually a family relation or the primary caregiver. Bronfenbrenner maintains that development never takes place in a vacuum but takes place within context where all systems influence each other.

⁸¹ Bronfenbrenner's ecological system approach is discussed in chapter two.

⁸² Hay and Nye (2006:54) recognised that the psychoanalytic research shows that children's "images of God contain a strongly projective component, usually drawn from the parents." The Finnish psychologist Kalevi Tamminen also found the evidence ambiguous and argued that "if Freud is correct that God is a projected parent figure and if children normally prefer the opposite sex parent, it follows that boys should be more concerned with a mother deity, girls with a father God" (Hay & Nye 2006:54). The theological focus on the subject touches on how God is viewed. God has characteristics pertaining to both mother and father and within the paternalistic society, especially in the context of poverty where fathers are often absent, there is a need to emphasise both Mother- and Father-God aspects. Alternately, the term parent-God could be used, but even that could have negative associations for children of broken families. There is need to investigate children's perceptions of God using participation action research.

Breckenridge (2004:330-333) presents the following propositions of an ecological model for children's spiritual formation based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system.

- Spiritual formation, at least in part, is the result from the interplay of environmental influences. All environmental systems are sources for spiritual formation, not just the home and church.
- The context of spiritual formation is not only religious settings, but also the whole life course that includes children's significant emotional relationships where they interact and adapt as spiritual beings.
- Spiritual formation is holistic change, it cannot be compartmentalised and should rather be seen as adaptation opposed to linear change.
- Development-in-context rather than development-out-of-context broadens the traditional Christian education of isolated classroom teaching settings to spiritual formation within multiple systems of interactions with children.
- In the midst of the increasing complexities of life, spiritual formation is seen as the ability to adapt to life and to develop an identity of which spirituality is a part.
- Spiritual maturity means to be maximally spiritually adapted, consistent with one's developmental status in the overall life cycle. The source of spiritual formation is children's relationships with God (connectedness) and the empowerment from the Holy Spirit (individuation).

4.5.1.2 An empirical investigation of systems approaches in spiritual formation

Hood (2006:235) empirically investigated the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach to children's spiritual development. In a qualitative research, he explored ideas about God held by six preschool children in context of their families and faith community. The result is supportive of Bronfenbrenner's theory that contexts influence individuals. Examples of the results are:

Micro-systems:

Regarding family influences: Hood (2006:236) found that parents' views echo in the belief of children. For example, the son of parents, who spoke strongly about gender equality, said that God was both a boy and a girl. The daughter of loving parents said, "God never, never, never, never gets mad." When people do things that displease God, he is sad but never mad.

Regarding the faith community: In an attempt to work with parents, teachers deliberately avoided violent Bible stories, God's judgement and crucifixion but instead told children how special they are to God. When children were asked to describe God, only one drew a picture

of the crucifixion; others used the words of songs in their description. The children's perception of God was influenced by other contexts in their lives.

Children's answers also reflected that parents and their faith community influenced their view of God. It was not clear what stemmed specifically from parent or church. That parents and their faith community influenced each other, support Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Meso-systems:

Regarding the broader community: In conversation about creation, two boys talked about God making dinosaurs before he made people. A girl remarked about God's power, "God's power is greater than fairies."

Children's concept of God was also influenced by different settings like school and other contexts such as books, television and movies that they watched (Hood, 2006:239). The influence of multiple layers of context was evident in the response of the children.

Regarding children as active participants with individual interest and personalities: A girl was asked if she knew what God looked like, to which she answered "no". She continued by saying that she saw pictures that other people drew of Jesus, but she was not sure if that is what he really looks like. Then she said "But my heart knows what they both look like cuz they live together in my heart" (Hood, 2006:243).

It can be concluded that spiritual formation occurs within all of life's contexts and not in isolated lessons or directed experiences. The content of religious education is important, as part of the many contexts of children's lives but the content will not be the initial starting point. Breckenridge (2004:333) responding to the classic question as to whether to begin with child or content, now offers another possible alternative, to begin with the child-in-context. Breckenridge (2004:333) suggests that Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development could be used as a "framework for the selection of curriculum and methodology" formation as it embraces the totality of human existence.

Although Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the importance of context, his theory does not specify how children develop and learn within their life settings. Vygotsky on the other hand considers how children's learning is shaped by their learning contexts. It also presents an alternative to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory.

4.5.1.3 Vygotsky – contextual learning

The works of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, repressed by Stalin, became popular in the late twentieth century with Western educators. The Vygotskian approach to cognitive development provides an alternative learning theory for spiritual development. It highlights the connection between cognitive development and the socio-cultural theory that focuses on how culture (values, beliefs, and customs) is transmitted (Greener, 2006:40).

Vygotsky's theory includes two frameworks, that of development-in-context and the zone of proximal development within which scaffolding takes place (Neal, 2000:124). The basic components are that people are mentally dependent on their social-cultural context, which is transferred (or mediated) to them through mental tools, for example art, language, symbols, writing and concepts (Estep, 2004:334). Development not only occurs in context (culture) but also in turn transforms the context. Children's learning therefore cannot be explained apart from their social context because people are in relationship and the developing human person cannot be understood apart from those relationships that help shape their development (Neal, 2000:125).

In Vygotsky's non-linear theory, development takes place within zones. In the zone of actual development children mastered learning. The zone of potential development indicates what they could be capable of, and while in the zone of proximal development, assistance is required to move from actual to potential development. The concept of scaffolding indicates the gradual withdrawal of adult control from one zone where the task is mastered. Support is then given to children to master a task in another zone. An essential feature of scaffolding is that the focus is on the learner (Neal, 2000:133). The learning process assists cognitive development and requires intentional instruction (Estep, 2004:334).

Vygostky's approach provides the Christian educator with:

- A teacher-learner role where deliberate instruction of the teacher or more-mature-others is essential for spiritual formation. Faith is mediated between the community and individuals with education as a component of and not simply a response to the developmental process. Greener (2006:40) notes the importance of social interaction in the learning process.
- A holistic approach to children's spiritual formation that recognises the multitude contextual factors, including social and individual aspects. The Christian faith is mediated to the child through relationships, symbols (ritual and liturgy), and intentional instruction.

- A new developmental perspective to view childhood spiritual formation. It adds that spirituality is a part of childhood and children are individuals-in-community. It secures significance for children as growing and participating members of the faith community where spiritual formation is a process that is cultivated in, by, and through the community of faith. It is here where spiritual vocabulary is learned, which is essential for spiritual formation (Estep, 2004:336-340).

Myers (1997) makes use of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development in combination with ritual theory to explain how participation in ritual will contribute to spiritual formation. The dynamics from moving from the known to the unknown by using the faith symbols of the community, such as sacraments of the church, become the mediator of faith convictions. She identifies four factors that contribute to spiritual formation in children as seen below.⁸³

Core conditions	Vygotsky’s Theory	Ritual process Theory
Hospitable space	Zone of Proximal development	Invocation of sacred space
Recognition of experience	Connection to what the child can not yet do on his own	Liminality
Adult presence	Mentor, coach, teacher, etc as more knowledgeable other	Ritual leader
Expectation of transcendence	Expectation of transcendence	Expectation of transcendence

Figure 9: Myers’ core conditions and Vygotsky’s theory (Myers, 1997:79).

Allen used Vygotsky’s theory to show the need for intergenerational interaction between children and adults to promote children’s spiritual development. Three aspects in Allen’s reasoning, based on Vygotsky’s theory are as follows: Firstly, in enabling children “to learn concepts, they must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in authentic, complex learning environments” (Allen 2005:88). Secondly, Allen (2002:89; 2005:325) applies Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development in academic learning to children’s spiritual development. She reasons that children grow better spiritually when they interact with more competent peers or adults who can assist them in moving from the zone of proximal development to the zone of potential development. Thirdly, learning takes place at its best

⁸³ For a full explanation of her work, consult Myers book *Young children and spirituality* and an abridged version by Crozier 2008:344-347.

when people “actively participate in that particular identified social community, learning alongside those who are further ahead in the journey” (Allen 2005:326).

Allen used a qualitative research, with semi-structured interviews and the 12-item Likert scale Religious Experience questionnaire to investigate her theory. She compared two different Christian church groups, each consisting of twenty 9 -11 year old children to assess the affect of intergenerational interaction on their spiritual development. The first group of children regularly participated in intergenerational settings in their church while the second group had almost no opportunity for intergenerational interaction in their congregation.

Allen classified her research results in four categories: knowledge about God, feelings about God, prayer and reciprocal rationality. In general Allan (2002:311) found that:

The IG⁸⁴ children referred to prayer more often and exhibited relationality in more of their discussions of prayer than did the children from non-IG settings. In defining the concept of knowing God, a larger number of IG children gave relational descriptions of that concept than did non-IG children. Also, more IG children shared examples of reciprocal relationality than did non-IG children.

In general, though both groups of children gave profound and eloquent testimony to their relationships with God, the IG children in this sample seemed to be more aware of their relationship with God, and more of them spoke more often and more reciprocally of that relationship.

Allen acknowledges her research has limits and is not generally applicable to all situations. There is continued research exploring the impact of intergenerational Christian experience on both children and adults (Allen 2002:Abstract). Further research is needed to identify such impact on children’s spiritual development in poor areas. Often in these contexts including church settings, children are not always treated with the human dignity and Christian love that they deserve. What impact will such treatment have on their spiritual lives?⁸⁵

4.5.2 Westerhoff – a Christian premise needed for Christian education

John Westerhoff, director of the Institute of Pastoral Studies at St Luke’s Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia and previous professor of religion and education at Duke University Divinity School for twenty years, made a significant contribution to the development of catechesis and

⁸⁴ Allen abbreviates the word intergenerational as IG.

⁸⁵ Poorer children are often subjected to negative treatment, for example, when they are sent away from church because they are not dressed appropriately. Granted, in the case referred to here, the child was sent home because he had only underpants on. On the other hand, how did the CCW’s positive interaction and soft and gentle response to his plight affect the child spiritually? This comment assumes that spiritual development does not only take place during church services but also in intergenerational interaction before and after meetings.

the catechetical theory, also known as Christian education. Westerhoff (1976:23) reasons that in Christian education, “the schooling instructional paradigm, modelled after modern psychology and pedagogy, leads us to focus on religion rather than faith.” He held that behavioural science gave a false optimism in that educationalists believed if stage thinking could be identified, it would create a technique to answer educational needs (Westerhoff, 1976:20).

Westerhoff (1976:26) also reasons, “not only do we face the crisis of a bankrupt paradigm, we face a corresponding crisis in our theological foundation.” The focal problem is not the paradigm itself but rather that which undergirds the model, which is the lack of theological underpinnings⁸⁶ that ought to reflect the theological conviction of Christian children’s ministry and education (Westerhoff, 1976:24). The need for unity in theology and education is “a necessity, not a luxury” (Westerhoff, 1976:27) and therefore an alternate paradigm is needed. In his book *Will Our Children Have Faith*, Westerhoff uses the lens of liberation theology⁸⁷ for an alternate approach, which he considers to “provide the most helpful theological system for Christian education today” (Westerhoff, 1976:31). He views catechesis as a combination of liberation theology, socialisation and liturgy.

A Biblical anthropology of children, where children are valued for *being* children, *becoming* adults and being an integral part of the faith community, is expressed by Westerhoff’s (1976:89) faith analogy of a tree. Through this analogy, he demonstrates how faith grows like the rings of a tree. The four principles of the analogy in application to the development of faith are that:

- a tree with one ring, (a child/experienced faith) is as much a complete and whole tree as a tree with four rings (adult/owned faith);
- a tree grows if it is in a healthy environment and children need to be in healthy relationships with other Christians;
- a tree grows not by eliminating rings but by adding rings to the previous ones and children’s faith grows in different styles. The styles of faith are *Experienced Faith*, *Affiliative Faith*, *Searching Faith*, and *Owned Faith*⁸⁸ (Westerhoff, 1976:92-99).

⁸⁶ Grobbelaar (2008:170) joins the assessment of concerned scholars such as Beukes (1995), Nel (1998) and Strommen and Hardel (2000) concerning a need for a “clear and compelling theology” in youth ministry.

⁸⁷ This reflects Westerhoff’s thinking of 1976. However, in the revised and expanded edition of his book *Will our children have faith?* printed in 2000, he states that liberation theology plays a less dominant role in his present theological position. His current thinking is more broad and eclectic, including for example feminist theology (Westerhoff 2000:45).

⁸⁸ In *Experienced Faith*, “feeling being part of” the faith community is experienced through interaction and not through theological words. The language and experience are interrelated and learned through

Religious education is seen through the “community of faith-enculturation paradigm” which emphasises both context and content (Westerhoff, 1976:50). The most fruitful context of Christian education is within the faith community. The content should include “every aspect of individual and corporate lives within an intentional, covenanting, pilgrim, radical, counter-cultural, tradition-bearing faith community” (Westerhoff, 1976:49). Westerhoff embraces a co-existential model for faith formation where magical thinking and rational thinking co-exist in the minds of children. Westerhoff (1976:74) reasons that:

Two modes of consciousness are possible for human beings. One is intellectual and focuses on the universal and the abstract, and is characterized by verbal, linear, conceptual, and analytical activities. The other is intuitional and focuses on the syncretic and the experimental, and is characterized by nonverbal, creative, nonlinear, relational activities. The development and integration of both modes of consciousness are essential to the spiritual life.

Westerhoff (1976:16) observes that the “hidden curriculum of socialization” is more influential than the formal program and that intergenerational worship and activities were essential in faith formation. It is essential “to move away from developmentalism towards the creation of a relational model, of doing *with* instead of *to* and *for* children” (Westerhoff, 2008:355). Root (2007:23) who emphasises Christ’s incarnational pattern of “companionship-oriented” instead of “goal-oriented” relationships also stresses this idea. Relationship is not a “tool of influence” (Root, 2007:63) but is accompaniment (Root, 2007:79) and participation in the presence of God (Root, 2007:81). He identified the danger of relational ministry which “promise[s] relationships and only provide[s] connections” (Root, 2007:193).

Holistic thinking is central in Christian education and has been underlined by different researchers. Westerhoff’s holistic thinking relates to all areas of children’s lives. He includes the emotion, intuition and body as well as the mind.⁸⁹ Concerning method, he incorporates liturgy, the arts and service as well as instruction, and concerning faith, expedience and faith

interaction. Affective experience and to be Christian *with* the child is emphasised. In *Affiliative Faith*, children need to “belong to” and “participate in” the faith community in which they seek acceptance to deepen their religious feelings. There is a sense of belonging to and participating in an identity-conscious community of faith. *Searching Faith* is a faith of action, of doubt, a time of experimentation and a need to be committed to a cause. *Owned Faith* is what has been called “conversion”, finding a personal identity in God’s intention for a person.

⁸⁹ Research is drawing more serious attention to a site in the brain which is hypothesised to stimulate spiritual experiences. While the left hemisphere functions analytically and controls speech, the right operates analogically and controls creative expression. The third, the limbic system controls emotions, memories, judgements and attachment to people. Neuroscientists make a connection between the limbic system and religious experience. Supporters of this view are Newberg, d’Aquili and Rause in *Why God won’t go away*. (May et al., 2005:224) See also Newberg, A B and Newberg, S K 2006. *A neuropsychological perspective on spiritual development*. In E.C. Roehlkepartain, P.E. King, L. Wagner & P.L. Benson (eds.). *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. London: Sage Publications.183-196.

development, as well as the journey of life. Concerning the community, he opposes individualism and emphasises inter-generational community life.

4.5.3 A universal approach to child and adolescent spiritual development

The Search Institute's Centre for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence⁹⁰ identifies a set of conceptual statements that affirm different cultures, traditions, disciplines and worldviews presented in the Progress Report of March 2008. A hundred and eighteen Scientific, Theological and Practice advisors are involved in the continued process of developing a framework for the spiritual development of children and adolescents. Items are sorted into categories of science, theology/philosophy and practice. The framework is undergirded by underlying assumptions essential to spiritual development. These serve as touchstones to redefine theory and definition. Roehlkepartain (2008:1-2) explains that this includes the following:

- spiritual development cannot be separated from other aspects of one's being;
- acknowledgement that definitions will never be comprehensive and complete;
- aim to be relevant (not uniform) across gender, age, socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic differences;
- spiritual development is an inward and outward journey;
- it is a dynamic, non-linear process; acknowledging the conceptual values;
- highlights broad domains of spiritual development including individual, cultural and traditional manifestations; and
- distinguishing between spiritual and religious development. Note that it contributes to health and well-being.

An explanation of the emerging framework for child and adolescent spiritual development is presented below. The framework embraces the idea that spiritual development is a constant, ongoing, dynamic and sometimes difficult interplay between three developmental processes (Roehlkepartain, 2008:2).

⁹⁰ For further information on the Search Institute's Centre for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence can be located at the website: www.spiritualdevelopment.org in relation to studying children's spirituality in diverse cultures and religions. Another link to follow is spiritualdevelopment@search-institute.org

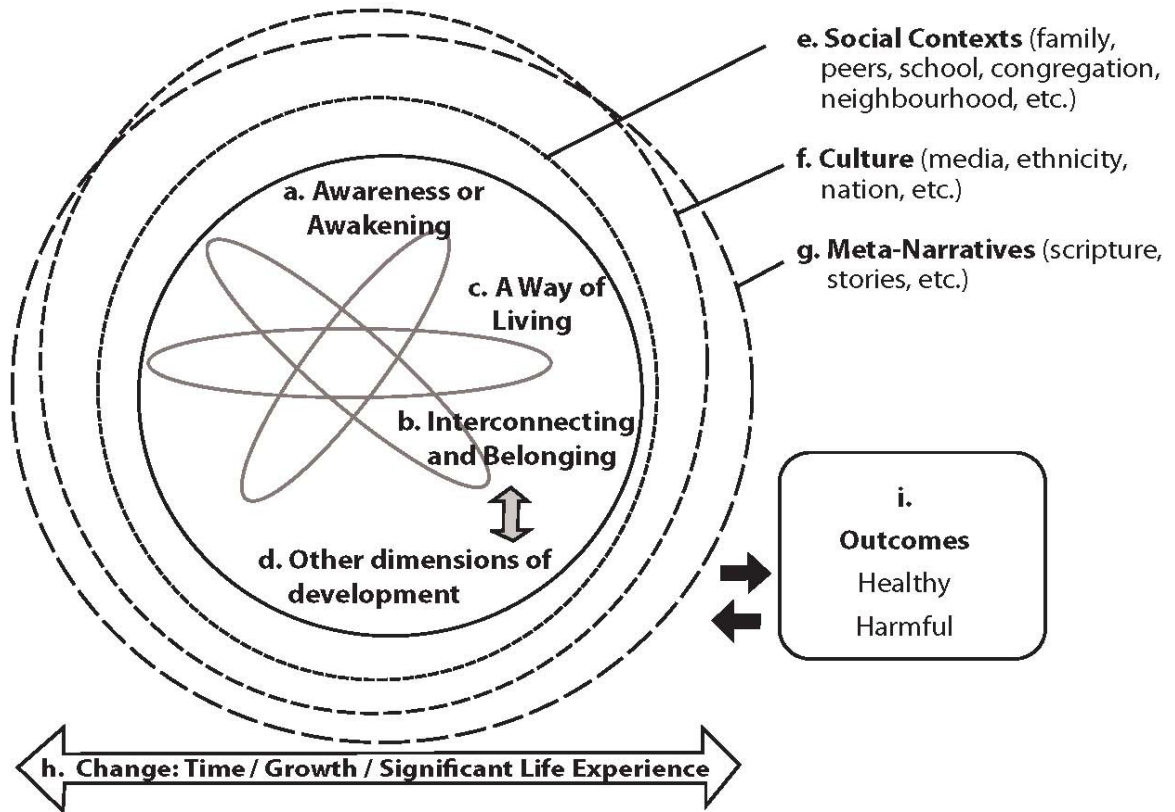


Figure 10: An emerging framework for child and adolescent spiritual development (Roehlkepartain 2008:2).

a. awareness or awakening – becoming conscious of one’s self, other, universe, or divinity to cultivate identity, meaning and purpose

b. interconnecting and belonging – seeking, accepting or experiencing significance in relationships

c. a way of living – authentically expressing oneself (identity, passions, values and creativity) through meaningful relationships, activities and practices in order to bond with family, community, humanity, world and the transcendent

The above three dimensions are embedded in and interact with:

d. other dimensions of development of being human such as physical, social, emotional, etc.

e. social contexts – personal, family and community beliefs, values and practices

f. culture (language, customs, norms, etc.) and socio-political realities

g. meta-narratives, traditions and interpretive frameworks

h. change: time, growth significant life experiences

These processes may result in:

i. cognitive, affective, physical and social outcomes that are either healthy or harmful.

During the previous Progress Report of May 2007, fifteen dimensions of spiritual development were discussed.⁹¹ It acknowledged that research on the effect that hardships, trials, struggles and rigorous spiritual discipline have on children's spiritual development is neglected and omitted. Further research is needed on such aspects as may be important in the spiritual journey of children living in difficult situations. In addition, it is a significant area that could reveal the interplay between spirituality and poverty as well as the accompanied positive or negative effects of poverty on children's spiritual development.

Stuart and Bostrom (2003:4) co-authored the spiritually based book *Children at Promise* about at-risk children in which they note the interplay between adversity and relationship. Without a caring adult, adversity could overwhelm children and without adversity, a caring relationship can spoil children. Both adversity and a trusting relationship in balance are needed to help children to succeed because children are "relationally rooted" (Stuart & Bostrom, 2003:18, 71). They therefore view hardships correctly handled as positive.

Garbarino, who was mentored by Bronfenbrenner, researched the subject of raising children in a socially toxic environment. In working with poverty-stricken children, he observes that "Risk accumulates; opportunity ameliorates" (Garbarino, 1995:151). He compares accumulative risk factors to juggling tennis balls. To juggle one, two or even three balls would be possible, but with four or more, a person will start to drop them. This illustration can be applied to the coping with risk factors. When intellectual development suffers, children cannot master the challenges they face. In the light of the contextual and holistic perspective on spiritual nature of children, such suffering will also affect their spiritual development. Coles (1990:274) also indicates that children reported having spiritual experiences and turn to God in the face of adversity, for example, at times of sickness or death.

4.6 THEORETICAL MARKERS FOR THE PROCESS OF CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When the loose ends of the discussion above are tied together, they present theoretical markers or points of departure to understand the process of children's spiritual formation. The four markers essential to understanding children's spiritual formation are identified as:

- Context – Children need to be understood within the multiplicity of their life contexts and CCWs need to recognise the influence of environmental, social, individual and other contexts on children's spiritual formation.

⁹¹ These dimensions can be accessed on the website indicated in footnote 20.

- Contextual learning – learning best takes place within contextual learning settings. Here the role of the CCW comes to its rightful place in the scaffolding process. Vygotsky’s theory of learning presents an alternative to the Piagian cognitive developmental stage theory as a premise to children’s spiritual development. The role of intergenerational relationships in spiritual formation of children is also emphasised.
- Christian premise – A Christian premise is essential in understanding children’s spiritual formation. Westerhoff underlines the need for unity in theology and education. These “theological underpinnings” (Westerhoff [1976] 2000:20), for example, are expressed in the Biblical anthropology of children, emphasising both aspects of being and becoming. It also emphasises that relationships are central to the spiritual formation of children. The “hidden curriculum of socialisation” should not therefore be overshadowed by the use of the curriculum in the classroom.
- Care for the whole child – A holistic approach to children’s spiritual formation has been underlined and is illustrated by the universal approach to children’s spirituality. Breckenridge, Hood, Allen, Westerhoff and the Search Institute above conclude that spiritual learning cannot be separated from the other aspects of children’s lives. Holistic learning also includes the complete brain function. All hemispheres of the brain need to be exercised, the left function for speech, the right for creative expression and the limbic system for the control of emotions, memories, judgements, attachment to people and possibly religious experience.

The theoretical markers point to a life process of children’s spiritual development as opposed to developmental stages previously presented. Other recent researchers, such as Grobbelaar (2008), Simpson and Hendriks (1999) and Burger (1997) support the idea of children’s spiritual development being a process. Grobbelaar (2008:466) observes similarities between Simpson’s and Hendriks’ (1999:250, 251 and Simpson 1998:107-155) faith development theory and Burger’s (1997:342-346) six processes of children’s faith formation. Simpson and Hendriks identified five interdependent and interacting faith-forming factors:

1. Moving from schooling to active remembrance of tradition (the active remembrance of faith tradition through the telling of stories)
2. Moving from alienation to engagement (involvement of the total humanness of the learner)
3. Moving from rugged individualism to formation in a relating community (integration of the person with the faith community)
4. Moving from ignorance to transformation for social reconstruction (commitment to social transformation)

5. Moving from rational formality to mystery and art (the utilisation of art, mystery and play)

Burger's (1997:342-346) six processes concerning children's spiritual faith formation are:

1. The role of the leader in youth work
2. Better knowledge of the process of faith intergeneration and growth
3. The role of a broader faith community
4. The role of the affective/ intuitive in the learning process
5. Social responsibility as an important part of faith formation within a faith community
6. New ways to understand the Scriptures

Both views place emphasis on the faith community as central role-players in children's faith formation. Grobbelaar (2008:466) argues that faith formation is not an individualistic but a collective process and that all adults, not just a selected small group, should interact with children within their whole life sphere and not only within church settings. He finds support for this argument in Westerhoff's (1976:15) "hidden curriculum" and Harris's (1988:244) "implicit curriculum" which refer "...to patterns of organization or authority; the attitudes of persons toward one another; the way power is shared; the freedom to speak (who does speak, and perhaps more subtly, who gets heard); and the kinds of physical setting in which teaching happens (what goes on in what goes on)."

Hendriks and Grobbelaar (2009:351 and Grobbelaar 2008⁹²), in search of a new way to understand children's ministry in and through the congregation, propose eight theoretical markers for the process of children's spiritual formation. The theoretical markers are:

- children's ministry should be contextual;
- theological, based on who God is and His identity and should be reflected in children's ministry;
- holistic, including the whole being of the child;
- integrated in the total life of the faith community, partaking in all the services of the church;
- family based as opposed to having a corporate style of being church;
- inclusive in its view of spiritual development, moving away from emphasising only cognitive development;
- based on the Trinity and missionality of God and should undergird Christian children's ministry reflecting an inclusive koinonia; and

⁹² A detailed description of the basic theoretical markers can be obtained in Grobbelaar's doctoral dissertation entitled; "n Ondersoek na die bediening van laerskool kinders in en deur die gemeente as intergenerasionele ruimte" 2008 University of Stellenbosch.

- doing ministry to, with, by and for children as a four pronged approach instead of only doing ministry to children.

Grobbelaar (2008:468-472 and Hendriks & Grobbelaar, 2009:353-357) not only views children's spiritual formation as a process but also identifies five ministry processes. Children are described as being on a spiritual "pilgrim's journey" and the ministry processes which will be used in accompanying them on their life journey include:

- Growth (physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual);
- Nurturing ("Koestering") expressed in all aspects of the child's life;
- Socialising (through relationships);
- Formation ("Vorming") where in-depth relationships play an important role in the learning process; and
- Healing – brokenness as seen in traumatised children.

The understanding that children's spiritual development is a process requires that the CCWs should apply it in the multiple settings of children's ministry. Spiritual formation is therefore seen as a process where children are acknowledged as complete human beings living in multiple life contexts. Children's ministry cannot be restricted to any spiritual formation model. The word "process" explains the need for a wider understanding of children's ministry where learning through the curriculum is only one part of the ministry.

Nye (2009a:41-56) also discerns children's spirituality as being a process and formulated six criteria to ensure that the process of spiritual formation take place within children's meetings. She uses the word "SPIRIT" as an acrostic to present the six criteria of the process, which is:

S-pace

P-rocess

I-magination

R-elationship

I-ntimacy

T-rust

Space includes physical (the sense that God is here), emotional (to be safe as well as to be myself), and auditory (silence and to be heard) space.

Process, is not product focused, but supports the idea of a journey, placing value on what children can do rather than what they are called to be. A meeting that is not just child-friendly but child-spiritual-friendly (Nye, 2009a:48).

Imagination implies opportunities for children to go deeper to strengthen their beliefs (Nye, 2009a:49)

Relationship that includes sharing and respect promoting a non-individualistic style of spiritual life.

Intimacy is a coming closer, a feeling safe and not being judged.

Trust implies taking a long term view of results and is embedded in attitudes and actions of non-verbal language of spirituality.

Nye's description of the "SPIRIT" model for children's spiritual formation is an expression of her research with Hay identifying children's spirituality as relational consciousness and awareness, mystery and value-sensing and outlining some parameters of children's spiritual experiences (Hay & Nye, 2006:65-78). A variety of spiritual formation models⁹³ to assist the CCW in ministry is presented by Anthony (2006) and May et al. (2005).

5. CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODELS

5.1 DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODELS

Grobbelaar (2008:144) reasons that the preferred spiritual formation model for the curriculum provides insights regarding the CCW's views on spiritual formation. Models tend to generalise and can oversimplify some aspects which could result in a one-sided emphasis in ministry. However, none of the spiritual formation models exists in its purest form in practice.

May et al. (2005:271-310 and May et al., 2004:403-408)⁹⁴ give a detailed description of different spiritual formation models. The categories are arranged according to the aim and purpose, which includes an educational perspective, worship-focused ministry, models to equip parents and outreach models. Richards used settings: the home, church and Christian school as categories. He identified intergenerational, information and intervention models that he subdivided into artificial situations (schooling models) and real situations (socialisation) (Richards, 1983:285). May et al. (2005:11-25) identified five metaphor models that include the:

- School model which focuses on knowing the content but over-stresses the cognitive, with insufficient concern for the affective and character dimensions.

⁹³ Anthony (2006) and May et al. (2005) use the term "ministry models" or what is described as "spiritual formation models" in the current research. In order to prevent confusion in this research, the term "spiritual formation model" will be used when reference is made to the curriculum. Ministry models refer to children's ministry in its totality, of which spiritual formation models are a part.

⁹⁴ Both document "thumb-nail summaries" of children's ministry models that exist in the United States of America. Websites and email addresses are included for further investigation.

- Gold Star/Win, a prize model emphasising rewards and competition, has excellent short term results but children who struggle in schools often feel overlooked, stupid or that they don't measure up in God's eyes. Extrinsic motivation devalues the quality of learning, while with intrinsic motivation children learn because they want to and because it has significance and meaning.
- Carnival model with many activities, games and crafts which are entertaining and draw large numbers, but some children may feel lost in the crowd and struggle to experience God in holiness, awe and wonder.
- Pilgrims' journey model includes long-term learning experiences and processes to influence children as fellow pilgrims, while teachers are guides. It is a holistic model and experience and knowing God are equally significant. However, it is hard to assess and does not attract many people.
- Dance with God model is a relational model. People in the child's life are agents for the child's growing awareness of the presence of God. Strength is the concept that faith grows and is a process but it may overlook the sin element in children's lives.

Different models, driven by distinct metaphors and methodologies provide differing experiences. May et al. (2005:25) assert that no metaphor is wrong; but "the challenge is rather to objectively identify one's own metaphors of spiritual growth of children." They formulated questions to guide ministry: Which metaphors best conform to God's redemptive story? Do they transcend cultures, current educational theory or fads? In what ways do they resonate with scripture? What is the view of children and teacher? In what ways do they shape the process of learning? What values are communicated through the metaphor? How is scripture treated and presented to learners? Whether this assessment proves to be true depends on CCWs ministry purposes and basic assumptions about children's ministry. Holistic ministry approaches are essential in poverty contexts which eliminate the School model and Gold Star model, while the Pilgrims' journey and Dance with God Model allow for a more holistic application.

5.2 A PARADIGM TO DISCERN SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODELS

Anthony (2006:1) suggests that the best way to understand children's spiritual formation is to critically evaluate the major spiritual formation models. He uses a paradigm in which the models of spiritual formation can be understood. It is an integrated model of two typologies; Kolb's learning cycle and Holmes typology of Christian spirituality. Researchers like May et al. (2005:261) also found that Kolb's learning cycle is valuable in explaining learning, while

Berryman (1991:162) valued Holmes typology as it divides people into thinking-feeling, and closure-openness types.

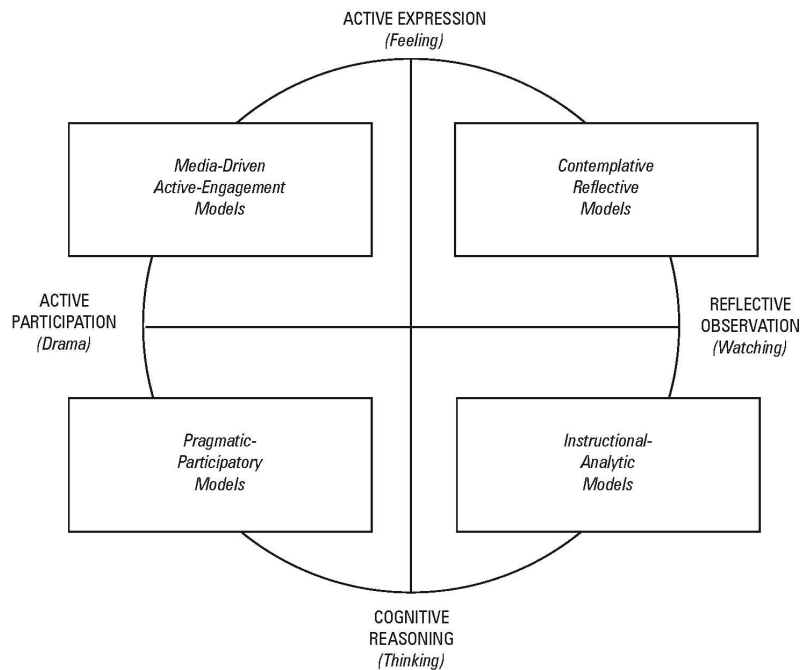


Figure 11: Models of children’s spiritual formation (Anthony 2006:36).

Kolb’s learning cycle consists of two intersecting axes which form four learning components: to *experience* (active expression), *reflect* (reflective observation), *think* (cognitive reasoning), and to *do* (active participation). These four actions indicate ways children experience and process new information. Kolb places concrete *experience* and abstract *thinking* on opposite ends of a vertical axis while *reflect* and *do* are opposing ends of a horizontal axis. Kolb’s learning cycle indicates learning preferences of children. May et al. (2005: 261) describe that favourable learning situations, consisting of the four quadrants, will form a “kite” that will fly.

The Holmes typology represent spirituality on two intersecting axes. On the one end of the vertical axis Holmes combined thinking with an *active* approach and feeling with *passivity* on the other end. The horizontal axis refers to knowing God with *emptying* oneself of images at the one end and *visualised images* at the opposing end. “When the four tendencies are balanced, one’s spirituality is considered to be whole and creative” (Berryman, 1991:162).

Anthony uses this paradigm to provide insight into how children develop spiritually and learn cognitively. He suggests an integration of these two elements is needed in the complex

process of spiritual formation. Both experience and knowledge are needed in spiritual formation (Anthony, 2006:33). Anthony (2006:35) reasons that:

The four quadrants revealed by overlapping these two axes form a basis for helping us understand how children come to faith in Christ and grow in their relationship to him. In the midst of so many mind-numbing individual differences, the diagram Models of Children's Spiritual Formation allows us to view spiritual formation from a larger perspective so we can understand what's taking place inside the heart and mind of the believer.

The paradigm contains four sections within which the major models of spiritual formation belong. The four models are the Instructional-Analytic Model, the Contemplative Reflective Model, the Pragmatic-Participatory Model and the Media Driven Active-Engagement Model (Anthony, 2006:1).

- The Instructional-Analytic Model is rooted in a cognitive basis of development. It emphasises receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour, Scripture memory, biblical instruction, a gradual award system and a systematic structural form of training (Carlson & Crupper, 2006:104). Although there is a high regard for scripture (Graves, 2006:153; Ellis et al., 2006:160), May (2006:210) points to the weakness that some researchers are rethinking "some of the implications of the stage theory of development as presented by scholars such as Piaget and Fowler." This evaluation, that children's experience and relationship with God is not dependent on logical concepts, is discussed at length under section 4 above. This model also strongly emphasises a "top down" approach between the CCWs and the children. The deeper question is whether such a strong teaching approach will be able to sufficiently address the needs of children in the context of poverty?
- Contemplative-Reflective Model⁹⁵ is a relational model that views spiritual formation more than teaching biblical information (Anthony, 2006:37). It is characterised by quiet reflection, story telling and prayer.⁹⁶ Cultivating a quiet, worshipful spirit is an important aspect of spiritual formation in this model. It aims to help "children encounter God in ways that fuel their innate sense of awe and wonder, to help them

⁹⁵ The Contemplative-Reflective Model originated with a devout Catholic medical doctor, Maria Montessori born in 1870. Sofia Cavalletti formalized the Montessori approach to religious education. In time she developed *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, a Montessori-based, contemplative approach that helps young children meet and fall in love with the good shepherd (May, 2006:55). Jerome Berryman adapted the work of Montessori-Cavalletti. Berryman became the founder of the Centre for the Theology of Childhood and the author of the popular book *Godly Play: A way of religious education* (Anthony, 2006:38).

⁹⁶ Prayer could take the form of introspective, contemplative or centring prayer. Centring prayer is an ancient form of prayer that joined meditation on a word of Scripture, with prayer. Its aim is to centre one's life in God's presence. This is done by recognising thoughts present and gently releasing them into the hands of God. It seems mysterious as the prayer is not verbal, focusing more on sitting in the presence of God (Calhoun, 2005:208).

consider things of God with continued attention” (May, 2006:45). This model separates language from spiritual experience and emphasises *connatural knowing* opposed to *speculative knowing*.⁹⁷ The character of this model works best in small groups in church settings. It is not intended as a strategy for evangelism or to reach out to the masses of non-church children (Carlson & Crupper, 2006:87; May, 2006:82). May has found that it showed good results in working with children at-risk (May, 2006:81). An aspect of concern revolves around the root issue of the origin of knowledge. Carlson and Crupper (2006:82) criticised the model for the lack of rote learning and argue “...the starting place is the revelation about God in his Word, his nature, his character, his activity.”

- The Pragmatic-Participatory Model emphasizes coaching or modelling spiritual formation. The underlying assumption of this model is that children from a young age imitate, and Christ-likeness is seen clearer in the learning pattern of behaviour or by setting an example. Learning is informal as well as demonstrational and places a strong emphasis on the sociocultural influences on spiritual formation. “First and foremost, more than the words that Jesus spoke, He modelled His character to the disciples and those He encountered... The disciples learned important lessons about the type of person Jesus was and how they should treat others by watching him and interacting with him” (Graves, 2006:192). This model is strongly rooted in Bible-based education, seeks age appropriate instruction; incorporates emotional development and peer relationships.
- The Media Driven Active-Engagement Model is discovery-based and emphasises cooperative learning (Ellis, Baumgart & Carper, 2006:225). This philosophy is based on the assumption that ministry must take into account the unique distinctions of those to whom they minister, which is in this case a media dominated culture (Ellis et al., 2006:227). Media as the familiar cultural environment is used as a springboard to children’s spiritual development. Proponents of this model follow Barna’s three-tiered system of influence. It maintains that parents and media are the most influential on children, followed by the school and friends and lastly by the church (Ellis et al.,

⁹⁷ Connatural knowing is an *encounter* with what is to be known. In a way it is the desire to know because of interest, longing, even love of the object. Initially infants learn language and sounds in this manner. Speculative knowing is detached, rational, theoretical, propositional – the more traditional ‘schooling’ approach). A study showed that children disengage from the learning process if speculative knowing is used extensively in teaching them things of faith. The study suggests purposefully altering traditional religious education by introducing connatural knowing to young children so that they may *encounter* God rather than initially being taught about Him. Consistent early experiences *with* God may allow the desire to know *about* God to grow. This proposed sequence of knowing seems to parallel a child’s knowing about her parents: connatural knowing comes first, with the desire for speculative knowing gradually coming later. Thus, a relationship with God, certainly the chief goal of children’s ministry, might be established with positive emotional grounding (May, 2006:59)

2006:242). Allred (2009:111) argues that media can provide a “cultural connection to faith.” May (2006:260) points out positively that technology and media can be effective tools for reaching children.

On reflection, the different approaches regarding spiritual formation models can provide helpful lenses in children’s ministry. Ellis et al. (2006:96) are justified in saying that no perfect model of children’s ministry exists, but “our gracious God is at work in lives and in ministries in spite of flawed approaches and human shortcomings.” Graves (2006:158) believes that spiritual formation “models working in tandem with one another can help to bring about powerful transformation among children.”

There is however a danger of falling into the trap by starting from a Western perspective, using Western methods and models, making Western conclusions and observations. Most of the models and methods above are Western in origin, evaluation and outlook. Models are also isolated from other aspects of life. The applicability of the Media Driven Active-Engagement Model to a South African poverty-stricken area could be questioned. The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is ineffectual due to the lack of good role models in these children’s lives.

Irrespective of the chosen model for children’s ministry, the choice of the model rests on desired aims and purposes of the CCW for ministry. Discerning ministry purposes is not an easy task and May et al. found the Frankena model a helpful aid in the task.

5.3 THE FRANKENA MODEL

The decision as to which spiritual formation model should be used depends on the chosen curricula and the ministry purposes. The curriculum is a practical guide in children’s ministry, while the Frankena Model is an intellectual guide in choosing the appropriate curriculum. The Frankena Model is a tool for discerning ministry purposes and guides ministry planning to stay focused on central issues (May et al., 2005:285-288).

Genuine spiritual formation is meaningful only when it results in a Christ-like existence and a Christian life style. Spiritual formation is not just a means to an end (Anthony 2006:7). The Frankena Model is based on a Christian philosophy that incorporates principles and values of Scripture where “knowing God” and not just knowing about God or the Bible, is central. The philosophy of the Frankena Model consists of five interrelated sets of questions that can form a philosophy for children’s ministry in any setting. May et al. (2005:285-286) states that the five questions are:

1. What is the ultimate purpose of the ministry?
2. What is the nature of the ministry contexts? (Belief about God, children, salvation, economic, demographic, social and cultural aspects).
3. What values need to be developed within children?
4. In what ways do learning and character development take place?
5. What ministry experiences need to be created to achieve these purposes?

May et al., (2005:287) state that “If these questions were visualized as shapes that “talk” to each other, they might look like” the figure below.

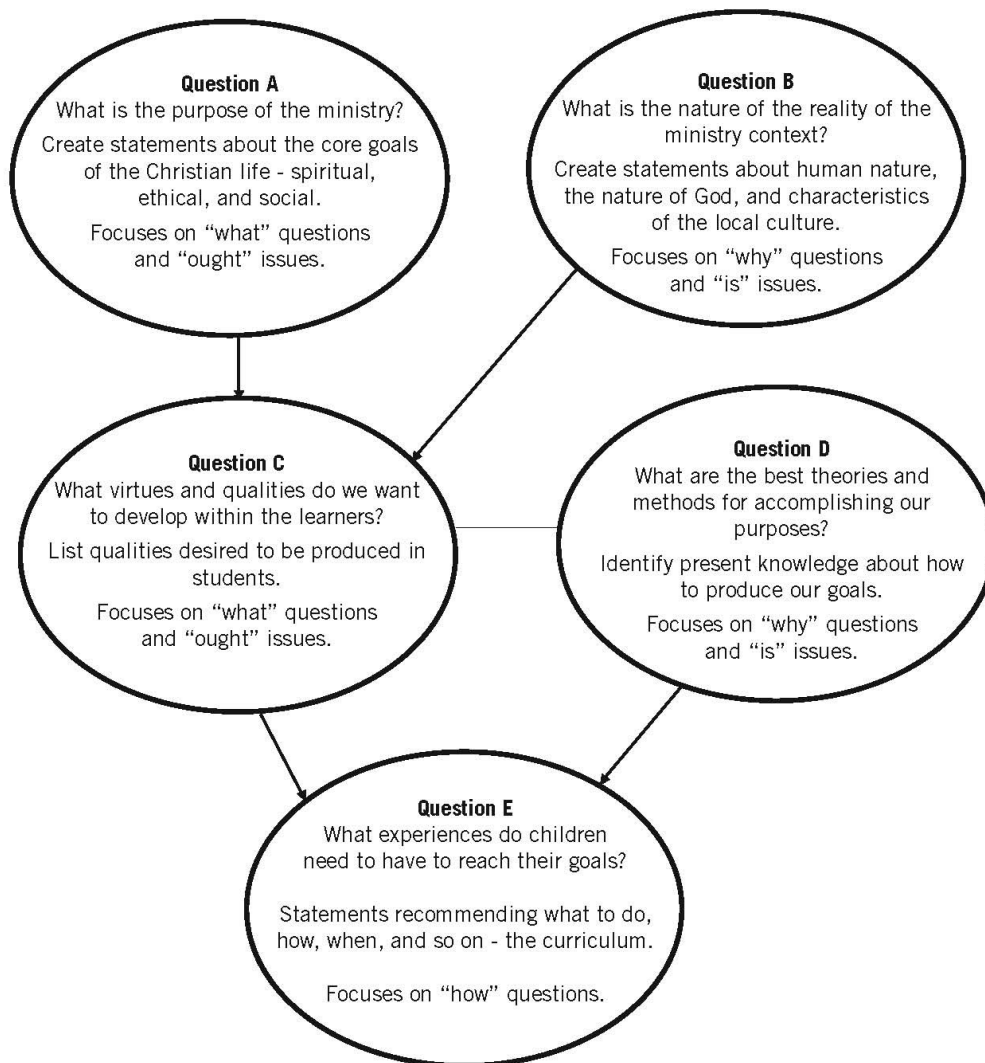


Figure 12: William Frankena’s Model (May et al., 2005:287).

The questions above can guide the CCW to use spiritual formation models best suited and beneficial to children in a specific situation. There is a need for children’s spiritual formation

models from a South African perspective, especially highlighting children suffering from poverty. West (2006:339) contends, “All interpretations of the Bible are contextual... Our contexts, therefore, always shape our reading practice.” He argues that, “We can only move beyond ‘speaking for’ and ‘listening to’ if we are willing to enter into a ‘speaking with’” (West, 1999:52). It is necessary to read the Bible with the poor and marginalised children (West, 1999:14) because “when oppressed people live in silence” they use the words of oppressors (West, 1999:40). These aspects need to be taken into consideration when children’s spiritual formation models are developed in the context of poverty.

6. CONCLUSION

The chapter revealed that the current interest in children’s spirituality led to the formation of religious and non-religious definitions. Children’s spirituality defined by a wide-range of descriptions is like a diamond with many sides. One side could not portray the diamond’s beauty; all sides need to be seen in unison. The beauty of children’s spirituality includes relational consciousness with awareness, mystery and value sensing, connectedness, the Ubuntu spirit and concerns the whole-person’s wellness. What distinguishes Christian children’s spirituality from non-religious spirituality is that children’s spirituality places children in a conscious relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The non-religious elements are recognised and are channelled into the understanding of a personal relationship with God.

An analysis of the Piagian based developmental stage theories proved to be inadequate as a premise for children’s spiritual development. It presented inadequate theoretical assumptions, a limited anthropology of children, and a problematic cognitive-spiritual relationship with the accompanying educational problems. Against the backdrop of the cognitive development stage theories and after rethinking children’s spiritual development, new theoretical markers in understanding children’s spiritual development were found. It revealed that context, contextual learning, and care for children holistically built on a Christian theological premise. These essential elements are needed in the process of children’s spiritual formation.

Different children’s spiritual formation models have been placed on the table for consideration. In fulfilling the role of the CCW as a spiritual nurturer, these models are acknowledged as an aspect in the spiritual formation process of children. The choice of a curriculum will be guided by ministry purposes where the Frankena model is a helpful tool and by considering children-in-context.

The research will now move away from the descriptive-empirical and the interpretive tasks to the normative task. The next chapter will present theological reflections on poverty and children's spirituality.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON POVERTY AND SPIRITUALITY OF CHILDREN

1. INTRODUCTION

The descriptive-empirical and interpretive tasks were used in both chapter 2 and 3. Chapter 2 focused on child poverty; how it is defined, measured and how poverty-stricken children are affected by and experience their different life contexts. Chapter 3 explored children's spirituality, revealing the special interest that it receives, resulting in a variety of definitions. Having identified a Christian definition of children's spirituality, the research investigated children's spiritual development. Problems were identified, indicating that the cognitive developmental stage theories are inadequate as a premise for understanding children's spirituality. Alternate theoretical markers indicate that children's spirituality should rather be seen as a process which includes context, contextual learning and care that is holistically built on a Christian premise. In addition, the Frankena model was found to be a helpful tool in discern faith formation models.

Research will now turn to the normative task, which asks the question, "What ought to be going on?" (Osmer 2008:4). The research will consider why a theological reflection on poverty is needed. It is followed by two theological interpretations on poverty, the God's story and the kingdom of God theory. These reflections highlight deep concerns that influence effective ministry in the spiritual nurturing of poverty-stricken children. These concerns include holistic, God, ministry and humans factors.

The following section is a theological reflection specifically on children in poverty which includes theological reflections on children's spirituality. Jensen (2005), assistant professor of Reformed Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas, presents a theology of childhood. Couture (2000), Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York and consultant to the United Methodist Council of Bishops' initiative on children and poverty, presents a practical theology of children and poverty. The theology of Jensen and Couture focus on vulnerable and poverty-stricken children, thus their work will be discussed and in an evaluation other aspects of concern will be considered. It will lead to a more focused study on the role of the

Christian children's worker (CCW) centring on relational, christological and contemplative perspectives.

2. WHY ARE THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS NEEDED?

2.1 THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IS IN THE REALM OF THE UNSEEN

Both God and children in poverty pose the same problem: they tend to be hidden in a world that focuses on secular success (Couture, 2000:52). When CCWs enter the devastating world of poverty, they are faced with an emotionally draining situation and an intellectually overwhelming task (Couture, 2000:14). The visibility of material poverty speaks so loud that it captures all attention, accentuating only one aspect of a much more problematic situation. Theological reflections on children in poverty and their spirituality will provide a healthy balance to the one-sided emphasis. It will also present a clearer picture and a comprehensive understanding to make sense of the complexity and challenges that poverty poses in the spiritual nurturing of children.

2.2 THE SILENT GUIDE: THE WORLDVIEW OF THE CHILDREN'S WORKER

A reason for a one-sided view of poverty is found in a dualistic view of the two worlds we live in, the material and the spiritual (Myers, 2008:20). Hiebert (2009) is the previously Chairman of the Department of Mission and Evangelism and Professor of Mission and Anthropology at Trinity Evangelical School in Deerfield, Illinois. Hiebert (2009:411) explains the western two-tiered view of reality as the spiritual and material worlds separated by an empty space, which he identifies as "the excluded middle," the "modern blind spot" and also calls it "the flaw of the excluded middle." The CCW in South Africa should be aware of dangers resulting from unconscious influences on ministry that flows from the separation of these two entities. A worldview⁹⁸ is like glasses people wear, it colours all reasoning and actions in ministry. Basic questions like "Who are you?" "What do you (CCW) believe?" and "Who do you say they (children in poverty) are?" will have a far-reaching impact on the question, "What do you think should be done and how are you (CCW) to do it?" Both the traditional and biblical worldview⁹⁹ perceive the material and spiritual world as interrelated in

⁹⁸ Hiebert (2009:411) uses the word "worldview" interchangeably with the "view of reality."

⁹⁹ Deist (1984:187) defines a worldview as "The way in which a person or group interprets the world, making sense of events of history, and conceives of man's nature and destiny." Brewster (2005:56) describes a worldview as a mental map that is used to help children making sense of a confusing and unpredictable world. He identified three forms of worldviews: Secularism is a modern worldview that denies the existence of God, the spiritual aspect of life and absolute morals. Animism sees God in everything and Theism that believes in a personal and relational God. Theism sees God as the creator of the physical and spiritual, the seen and unseen worlds (Brewster 2005:57). The problem is that though Christian workers are Theists, they are influenced by the secular world around them and may

a seamless whole. Brewster (2005:56) regards a biblical worldview as the key to holistic child development. The importance of moving away from dualistic thinking to holistic thinking as found in both traditional and biblical worldviews is emphasised by Hiebert (2009:412), who reasons:

A holistic theology of God in history integrates worldviews in which God is understood to be involved not only in cosmic history, but also in human history and natural history. Only such an integrated theology of history will help us avoid dangers of operating with alternative worldviews of spiritistic animism or secularism.

Beckwith (2004:34) contends that the post-modern area is a spiritual area and that the spiritual has become an inseparable part of life. She believes that people are more open to God, though uncertainty regarding which God to follow, leads to a pick and mix approach in spirituality. It implies that the danger of the excluded middle is diminishing. Recently organisations such as UNICEF, CFI and IDASA do advocate a more holistic approach, which may include spiritual elements in addressing poverty. In practice, however the world of children in poverty continues to be compartmentalised (UNICEF, 2007b:5).

In Chapter 2, problematic issues concerning childhood poverty were placed on the table. What does it mean to be poor? How does poverty affect children? The following section will discover different theological reflections on poverty. It will firstly discuss poverty in general as well as the accompanied issues raised in the evaluation that need further consideration. Section 4 will centre specifically on the theological reflections of children in poverty.

3. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF POVERTY

Myers, Hughes and Brewster present theological reflections on poverty. Myers, Professor of transformational development at Fuller Theological Seminary and former Vice-President of ministry at World Vision International, is a lifelong activist in Christian relief and development work around the world. Hughes is the theological advisor of Tearfund which is a leading relief and development charity, working in partnership with Christian agencies and churches worldwide to alleviate poverty. Brewster, the Director for International Holistic Child Development (HCD) Ministries Compassion International and previous Africa Area Director, monitored child and family development and relief projects in more than 50 countries. Myers, Hughes and Brewster are practitioners as well as academics concerned with the plight of the poor, representing large organisations from a Christian perspective and

not have a Biblical worldview. Both Biblical and traditional world sees God present in all spheres of life.

therefore will be used to present the theological interpretations on poverty. Myers' interpretation is here referred to as "God's story," while Hughes' and Brewster's interpretation will be called "The Kingdom of God".

3.1 GOD'S STORY

3.1.1 The premise of God's story

Myers embraces the work of Jayakaran, Christian, Chambers, and Friedman to conceptualise poverty. Jayakaran and Christian are both associate directors of World Vision, Jayakaran for West India and Christian for North India. Chambers is the Research Associate for the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England and Friedman, Professor of urban planning at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Friedman (1992:30) describes poverty as a systematic process of disempowerment that excludes the poor from the economic, political, social and religious mainstream of society. Chambers (1983:109, 111) uses the household as a point of departure, describing the poor as living in a cluster of disadvantage¹⁰⁰. Christian (1999:6) built on Chambers and Friedman by describing poverty as a system of disempowerment which is the result of broken relationships. Jayakaran (in Myers, 2008:80) emphasises the lack of freedom to grow. All these aspects of poverty form the basis of Myers' interpretation of poverty, but he also emphasises poverty as fundamentally relational and that its cause is fundamentally spiritual (Myers, 2008:13).

Myers, from reformed thinking, argues for holistic transformation in dealing with poverty which will result in positive change affecting all areas of life. It includes the spiritual, physical, mental, economic, and societal aspects. He reasons that "doing transformational development is a form of doing theology" and that it will either support or work against what God is doing (Myers, 2008:20).

From a narrative approach, Myers describes the transformational development process as a shared story and that this story can give direction to the complex situation that poverty presents (Myers, 2008:12). The story starts from the theological premise that the Biblical story is God's story and it contains all other stories. Myers (2008:23) suggests that:

In a nutshell, it is the story of creation and redemption through the God of Israel and Father (sic) of the risen Christ working through the Holy Spirit. God's story tells us how things started, lost their way, can be redirected, and how the human story comes out in the end.

¹⁰⁰ Chambers (1983:109, 111) describes five clusters of disadvantage: poverty, physical weakness, vulnerability, isolation and powerlessness and maintains that these clusters of disadvantage interlock.

3.1.2 The narrative of God’s story

God created the earth and made people in his image. According to Myers, God is by nature relational and people as image bearers should reflect loving and self-giving relationships. Their calling (which Myers calls vocation) is to be fruitful and productive stewards of God’s creation (Myers, 2008:26).

Satan’s deception resulted in the fall and sin, which marred the story as well as all the dimensions of human relationships and their identity. Sin is therefore seen as broken relationships because it is in direct opposition to the character of a relational God and broken relationships are precisely the nature of poverty. Myers (2008:86) states that:

This is the point of departure: Poverty is a result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom¹⁰¹ in all its meanings.

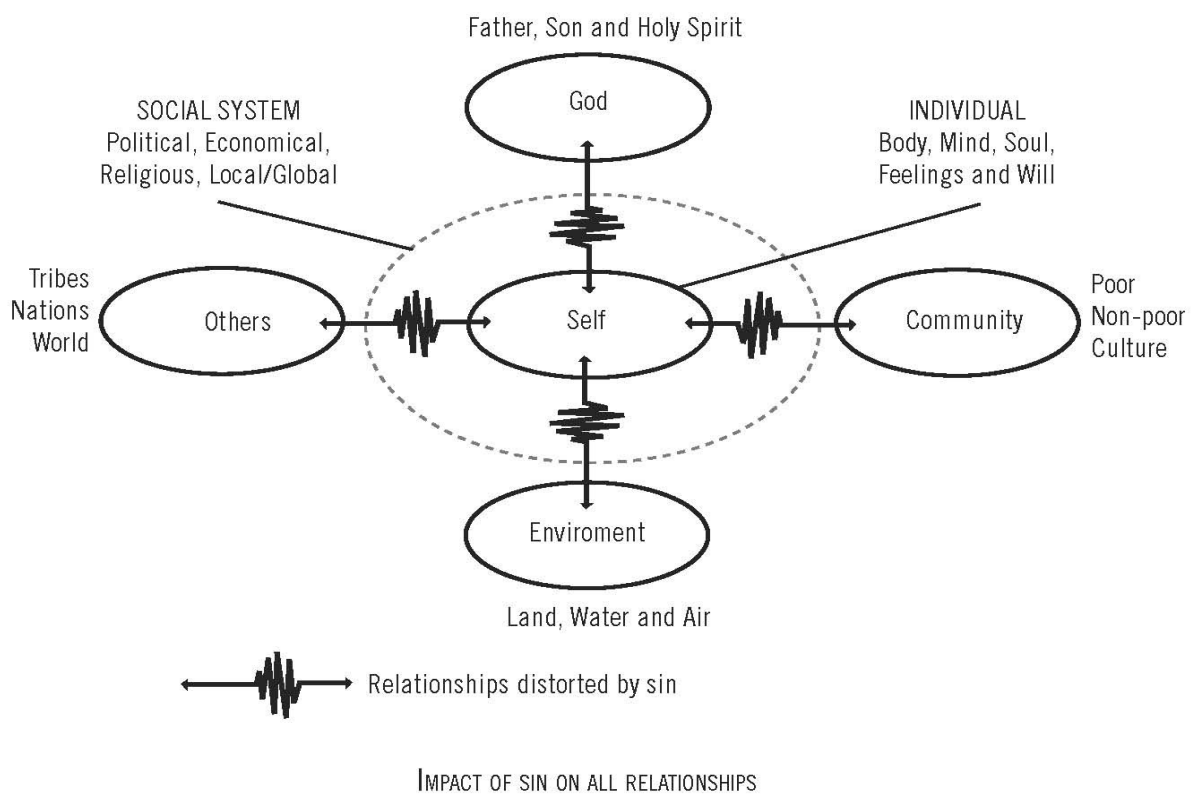


Figure 13: Impact of sin on all relationships (Myers, 2008:27).

¹⁰¹ Myers (2008:51) explains shalom as a relational concept. It is to live in peace with God, others and nature. It implies just, harmonious and enjoyable relationships. The vision of shalom is abundance and the fullness of life is expressed in purpose. Myers (2008:254) observes that consistent with the Hebraic worldview relationships are the highest good, while alienation is the lowest.

Poverty consequently “works against well-being, against life and life abundant” and sin is a web of lies¹⁰² that traps people in poverty (Myers, 2008:87).

Broken and unjust relationships have a devastating effect resulting in a marred identity, diminished vocation and poverty of being. Myers (2008:87) explains that:

At the centre of this relational understanding of poverty is the idea of the poor not knowing who they are or the reason for which they were created. When people believe they are less than human ... their understanding of who they are is marred. Similarly, when the poor do not believe that they have anything to contribute ... their understanding of their vocation is distorted as well. With marred identities and distorted vocations, the poor cannot play their proper relational role in the world, either within themselves or with those around them.

Not only the poor, but also the non-poor suffer from broken relationships and marred identities. This is seen in the god complex¹⁰³ of those working with the poor. The identity and vocation of the worker needs to be corrected in order to be in a right relationship with the poor.

Jesus, the liberator in the story, started his ministry among the poor in Galilee, the central location of transformation (Myers, 2008:34). When he died alone on a cross, he cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:33). Myers (2008:36) argues that God’s abandonment:

must shape our view of poverty. Poverty is about relationships that don’t work, that isolates, that abandon or devalue. Transformation must be about restoring relationships, just and right relationships with God, with self, with community, with the “other,” and with environment.

Myers also underscores that each person in poverty has his or her own story. God’s story is entwined with the story of the poor. Incarnation did not stop by Jesus being present on earth but his presence is already in the story of the poor. This implies that God is already at work in the lives of the poor even before the CCW enters their lives. Poverty-stricken children have their own story, but it is encircled by the CCW’s story. Both their stories are encircled by the story of human history, which is ultimately in the circle of God’s story. God is therefore present in all areas of life (Myers, 2008:22).

¹⁰² A web of lies is the absence of the web of truth, which is believed by both the poor and the non-poor. The lies are the result of god-complexes, inadequate worldviews and deception by principalities and powers. (Myers 2008:77-79)

¹⁰³ God complexes are clusters of power (social, economic, bureaucratic, political and religious) within the domain of poverty relationships that absolutise themselves to keep the poor powerless. These god complexes hold the poor captive (Christian 2008:5).

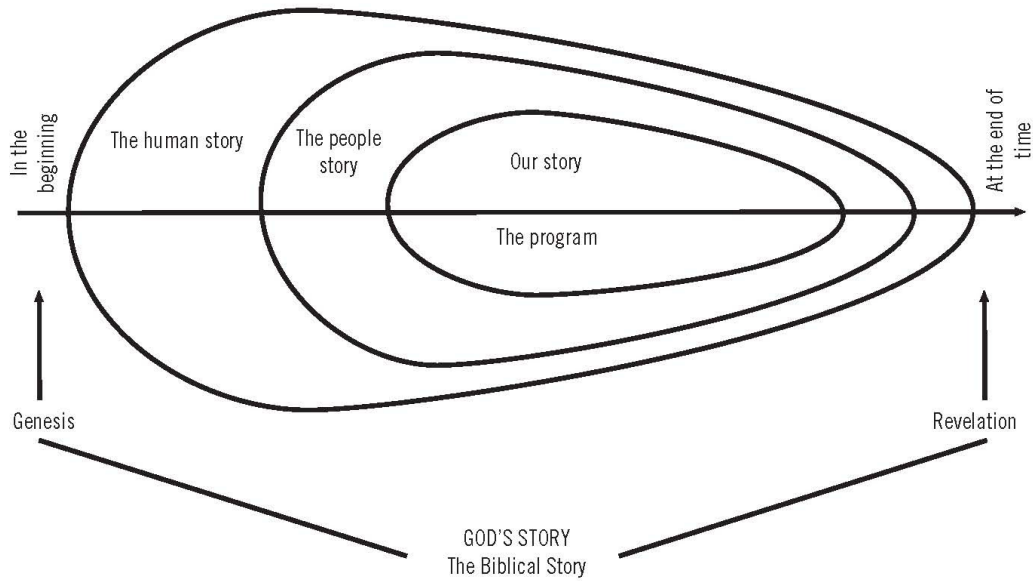


Figure 14: The constellation of stories (Myers, 2008:22).

3.1.3 The story with a happy ending: restored relationships

In using a theological lens on poverty with a transformational goal, the focus is not on people themselves or on supplying their material needs. True change lies in a restored relationship with God that leads to the rediscovery of true identity and vocation. Once this change occurs, sustainable transformation has started to take effect (Myers, 2008:115). This indicates that a transformed person will also transform their environment. Myers (2008:117) concludes that:

With a rediscovered identity and a character to match, transformational development works to empower people to live out these values in search of their new vision. This means teaching people to read, to understand and interpret their context, to figure out what and who is contributing to their current situation, and then to decide what they want to do about it.

A restored identity and vocation is an important step towards breaking free from the poverty trap and its web of lies. Ideally, a restored relationship with God should affect or stimulate the restoration of other relationships.

3.2 THE KINGDOM OF GOD THEORY

3.2.1 Presented by Hughes in association with Tear Fund

Hughes, the Theological Advisor for Tear Fund, by way of a narrative approach uses the theological lens of the kingdom of God to explain poverty. He reasons that God created the world and the word “*cosmos*” indicates creation of not only people but also everything in the world. Sin marred all of God’s creation but it can be restored. The kingdom of God begins

whenever God's values are established in a particular situation, not only in salvation (Hughes, 1998:25). The fight against poverty is therefore an integral part of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth.

Hughes (1998:69) describes Jesus as the King of the Kingdom who established the church, and the King's people are God's agents of human transformation. They are to fight the King's war to restore the kingdom. The battle of the King is in the world of religion, politics, economy, poverty and all other areas of life (Hughes, 1998:127). All aspects of people and elements of the world need to be won and redeemed for the King. The wealth of the earth with its resources belongs to the King and is to be used for God's glory and to bless the poor (Hughes, 1998:90).

There is no vacuum between the spiritual and material world. Spiritual redemption implies that people created in God's image were marred by the fall, but need to restore God's image again. Spiritual redemption of the cosmos implies that there should be justice in the economic and political spheres. God's plan is for the whole creation, pursuing peace, seeking sustainable use of natural resources, which reflects God's concern and restores the image of God. God is sovereign and rules universally over all people.

3.2.2 Presented by Brewster in association with Compassion International

Brewster (2005:53) from Compassion International uses a theological lens similar to that of Hughes. He envisages poverty holistically as a six-spiked wheel, consisting of the spiritual, physical, economic, social, political, mental and emotional aspects of life.

Brewster integrates the three concepts of creation, covenants and God's redemptive intent for all of creation (Brewster, 2005:69). All of creation is good but is fallen. Redemption and reconciliation entail the restoration of *all* creation to its original state. It applies to individuals, whole cultures, societies and the whole world ("cosmos"). In the Old Testament God used the covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham as instruments to accomplish redemption. The New Testament is the instrument pointing to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. (Brewster, 2005:69). Based on John 3:17: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him," God's love for people and the whole of creation, though fallen, is expressed (Brewster, 2005:72).

Among its different roots, Brewster (2005:56) identified the core problem of poverty as spiritual, due to the permeating effect of sin at the fall. Christians therefore need to employ a

holistic approach that includes the spiritual dimension, and so address the problem of the whole person in poverty. In agreement with Hughes, Brewster envisages the church as God's chosen vessel to fulfil such a role (Brewster, 2005:74). Brewster (2005:73) concludes that:

Holistic development, including holistic child development, is a way we Christians participate both in God's work of salvation (through spiritual ministries) and in His redemptive work (through acts of physical kindness). Salvation (meeting spiritual needs) and redemption (addressing physical and societal needs) then are two key components of holistic ministry.

3.3 EVALUATION AND EMERGING FACTORS

The strength of the theological reflections on poverty presented by Myers, Hughes and Brewster is that they are not in opposition, but that they complement and reinforce important factors regarding poverty. These factors include acknowledging God as creator and humankind as created in His image to reflect His character. While Myers focuses on relationships, Hughes and Brewster view people as God's representatives in the world. Their theological reflections overcome the excluded middle, as identified by Hiebert, by presenting a holistic approach to poverty. Although not all aspects related to their theological reflections are fully explained, they touched on important underlying factors that need further consideration. These factors are the holistic factor, the God factor, the relationship between social action and evangelism and the human factor.

They strongly emphasise a holistic approach to answer the complexity of poverty with right relationships as a core element. The church as an agent of change receives more attention by Hughes and Brewster, but all stress that God is already at work within the context of poverty. It can be seen in two ways, through God's involvement in history as well as the fact that each human being is created in the image of God.

3.3.1 The holistic factor

The "God's story" of Myers is supported by Friedman's *systematic process of disempowerment* and Christian's emphasis on poverty as broken relationships. In addition, Brewster's and Hughes' recognition of poverty as an inadequate ruling of God's Kingdom and the complexity of poverty indicates the need for a holistic theological response. Such a response will be able to address the multidimensional nature of poverty reflected in the definitions offered by UNICEF (2004b:18), CHIP (2004:1) and Streak (2000:7). They appeal to factors such as human rights in building a holistic approach for addressing poverty (see Chapter 2 section 3). Hughes', Myers', and Brewster's theological reflection on poverty

found the root cause of poverty to be spiritual because sin permeated all relationships or systems and that restoration includes all elements of life. Hughes (1998:2) asserts that Scripture is the final authority and it requires the complete restoration of all creation.

Myers' concept of God's story that encircles history, the CCW as well as the children's story, accentuates the life contexts of poverty. It would be interesting if Myers and Bronfenbrenner could engage in conversation, discussing how contexts affect children in poverty. They both present holistic frameworks of poverty, though they are starting from two different perspectives. Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach indicates that people are influenced by all life contexts. Myers' (2008:22) constellation of stories indicates that people's stories are influencing each other and that all their stories are influenced by God's story.

Considering Myers' theological perspective on poverty and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach, the researcher would like to present a hypothetical situation of Myers looking at the systems approach. It can be imagined Myers drawing another circle around Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach. This time it will indicate the realm of the spiritual with Myers asking Bronfenbrenner the question: "Why did you stop one circle short?" After the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems, there is another realm that influences poverty. It is the realm of principalities and powers, which includes elements like "poverty as fear." Fear as the opposite of faith is a spiritual problem. Only someone more powerful than any source of fear can dispel it and that person is the Son of God (Myers, 2009:609).

3.3.2 The God factor

The theological perspective regarding spirituality as the wider context of poverty, relates to the recent inclusive perception of childhood spirituality. Myers (2008:217) urges Christian workers to recognise the "fingerprints of God" in the lives of the poor and to accompany them in their search for meaning in life. Both the kingdom theory and God's story place importance on humans being created in the image of God and their engagement in spiritual relationships. Before the CCW entered the world of the poor, God was already present with them and was at work in their lives. Theologians find themselves on common ground with scholars like Hay and Nye (2006:166) who theorise about the biological basis of human spirituality (see Chapter 3 section 3). They describe children's innate spirituality as each child having a unique, individual "signature" phenomenon (Hay & Nye, 2006:97). Both proponents with religious and nonreligious perceptions advocate holistic development of children, which includes an emphasis on spirituality, be it in education or other fields. If the perceptions of

Myers and Hay and Nye were placed in juxtaposition, it would relate that children in poverty already have a spiritual awareness within themselves and that God is already present within their life context. The CCW could make a valuable contribution to this context by addressing poverty and spiritual nurturing of children in need.

3.3.3 The ministry factor

The holistic implications presented by the theological reflections of Myers, Hughes and Brewster draw attention to the relationship between evangelism and social action. In chapter 1, reference was made to the fact that the CCW becomes overwhelmed by the challenges of poverty and seems to lose the spiritual character of ministry. In the light of the kingdom of God theory, the question could be asked: “Where does spiritual nurture begin and where does it end?” Could nurture that is material, educational or medical be seen as spiritual acts? Concerning Hiebert’s excluded middle, such questions could indicate a danger of falling prey to the modern blind spot by separating the spiritual and material world. From a practical perspective, the question: “If the CCW has limited resources, which of the demands should take preference?” Would evangelism without social action be effective especially in the spiritual nurturing of children in poverty? The reverse of the question would be “Should spiritual nurturing of poverty-stricken children take pre-eminence over caring for their immediate needs?” There are no easy answers to these questions, but it points to further consideration on the relationship between evangelism and social action.

Adeyemo, former General Secretary of the Africa Association of Evangelicals, (in Brewster, 2005:77) refers to eight different angles regarding the relationship between social action and evangelism. They are:

- 1 Social action is a distraction from evangelism - it meets only “felt needs.”
- 2 Social action is a betrayal of evangelism - which focuses on saving souls.
- 3 Social action is a means to evangelism - it creates new opportunities to reach people.
- 4 Social action is a manifestation of evangelism - it demonstrates God’s love tangibly.
- 5 Social action is a consequence of evangelism - it empowers Christians to live abundant lives.
- 6 Social action is an unequal partner in evangelism - but they are both expressions of the gospel.
- 7 Social action and evangelism are equal partners - they complement each other in Christian ministry.
- 8 Social action is part of evangelism - which is seen in Jesus’ concern for every aspect of human life.

Brewster (2005:77) holds the position that it is God's intention to use the Church to transform society in holistic ways. He follows the Lausanne Covenant of 1974¹⁰⁴ saying that like "the two blades of a pair of scissors, two wings of a bird", social action and evangelism need each other to function fully.

Based on the Kingdom of God theory, Hughes contributes to evangelistic thinking in that care for the poor is seen as a fundamental aspect of evangelism. Myers' (2008:4) support for this view is seen in his exposition of Isaiah 58:13. He concludes that loving God and our neighbour are "two sides of the same gospel coin. They are inseparable, seamlessly related ... At the end of the day, how we treat the poor is a measure of whom we truly worship."

Adeyemo (1982:4) explains that at the end of the 19th century, liberal theologians developed the "social gospel" in which some of them confused the kingdom of God with Christian civilisation and social democracy. They wrongly assumed that the kingdom of God could be built on earth through social action. Evangelicals reacted against this distortion of the gospel, which led to antagonism between evangelism and social action, and therefore social action was treated with suspicion. Evangelicals have now recovered from this over-reaction. The Lausanne Covenant reinforces the premise that social action is an expression of the Christian faith, and that no one should ignore social oppression. Social action should be both an aim and consequence of evangelism. Some people may be uncomfortable with paragraph 6 of The Lausanne Covenant that affirms, "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" nonetheless, it also endorses the social responsibility of the church.

3.3.4 The human factor

A strong point of Myers', Hughes' and Brewster's theological reflections on poverty is that they locate human dignity in people as being created in the image of God. Many theologians follow this reasoning. The richness of the concept "image of God" is reflected by the diverse interpretations and deductions rendered by different scholars. When theological arguments are based on interpretations of the Biblical texts without clarifying the interpretation, it becomes confusing to readers. The concept "image of God" is an important aspect within the current chapter and needs further explanation.

The intention of the following section is not to present a broad, in-depth analytical or exegetical discussion supported by philosophical interpretation on the meaning of the image

¹⁰⁴ The Lausanne Covenant is the statement of faith of the Lausanne Congress. The Lausanne Congress started in 1974 in Switzerland and by 1980 almost every major evangelical mission agency endorsed the Covenant as their statement of faith.

of God as presented through history. It rather desires to observe noteworthy connections made between the image of God and the consequential theological interpretations related to children in poverty. It attempts to prevent confusion within the current research by briefly discussing the interpretations of scholars relevant to the current chapter.

For centuries, diverse interpretations are presented in determining the meaning of “being made in the image of God.” Towner (2008:309) distinguishes nine approaches based primarily on Genesis 1, 5 and 9, which he classifies into two broad categories: the substantial and relational. Van Huysteen, (2006:126-144) however, identifies four categories which are:

- 1 The *Substantial* interpretation understands God’s image as a reflection of a characteristic of God in people such as a physical, emotional or spiritual attribute. It could be physical appearance, rationality, morality and freedom.
- 2 The *Relational* interpretation in general refers to the need to live in relationship with God and others. Differing opinions about the exact nature of the relationship exists.
- 3 The *Eschatological* interpretation centres the image of God on the ideal relationship with God that can only exist in the future.
- 4 The *Functional* interpretation relates the image of God with the calling to be His representative on earth. The action is often related to rule justly on God’s behalf.

In the current research, no scholars were identified who follow the eschatological interpretation in relation to children. Therefore, it will not be discussed in the following section.

3.3.4.1 The Substantial interpretation

Although Copsey’s reasoning starts from a relational perspective, she concludes that being made in the image of God points to having God’s attribute of spirituality. Copsey (2005:90) reasons that the “let us...” of Genesis 1:26 refers to God who is in essence relational, and therefore those made in His image will be relational too. However, she equates the meaning that to be made in the image of God, not with “being in relationship”, but with spirituality, indicates that all children have an innate spirituality (Copsey, 2005:6). Copsey (2005:24) believes:

God made us spiritual beings like himself which means that all have a spiritual dimension. “Our lives are shot through with God.” Each child is made in the image of God. In other words, each child has an innate spirituality. So we recognize that being created in the image of God means that we have a spiritual dimension, spirituality within us.

Copsey (2006:8) interprets the image of God to be inborn spirituality. She associates it with Hay and Nye’s (2006:22) perception of a “biologically natural” innate spirituality, common to

all humankind, especially identified in children. (see Chapter 3 section 3).

Guthrie, (1994:195) opposes this view, by stating that it stems from ancient Greek dualistic thinking with the division between the spiritual and physical aspects of human nature. The reasoning is that the soul is divine, having the same essence as God, with the body only as the house of the soul. He argues that however basic humanity is, it has to do with the whole being. The “spiritual *and* physical, body *and* soul in their inseparable interrelatedness” form a unified whole (Guthrie 1994:195). In addition to Guthrie’s observation, limiting the image of God to spirituality comes dangerously close to being in the blind spot of the excluded middle described by Hiebert (2009:411).

Although not in direct reference with the image of God, *rationality or brain function* as the locus of spirituality and religious experiences received attention by neuro-psychologists such as d’Aquili and Newberg (see Chapter 3 section 4.6 and footnote 32). They speculate about a ‘holistic operator’ that underpins the sense of unity in religious experience, and a “causal operator” that underpins the sense of divine action in the world. In response, some scholars view spirituality independent from religious experience while others might argue that to involve the brain in spirituality results in spiritual experiences that are “nothing but a spin-off of brain activity.” From a theological point of view, Watts, Nye and Savage (2002:7) reason, “the brain is part of God’s creation, and there is no reason why it should be bypassed.”

In opposition to interpreting the image of God as having the attribute of *rationality*, Jensen (2005:31) argues that though qualities distinguish humans from the rest of creation and rationality facilitates contemplation on God, it cannot be equated with the image of God. What about human beings whose rationality or moral facility do not fit the norm, such as infants, mentally ill, and people with Alzheimer’s disease? Jensen asks: “Are they less human? Then some are more fully human than others.” The same reasoning can be applied to some children living in poverty, for example, those who have alcohol syndrome or poor brain development, which is very prevalent, especially among the poor of the Western Cape.

3.3.4.2 The Relational interpretation

Jensen (2005:14-15), admits that “[T]he biblical text is conspicuously silent in defining the *imago Dei*.” However, he views the image of God as the *male and female relationship*. Such a relationship is not restricted to biological sex differences but implies *vulnerability and openness* within the relationship and also to other relationships. The image of God is not uniform in people but is whispered in the differences of human persons. The differences are

detected in vulnerability. Children are in the most vulnerable relationships of all and therefore grace needs to be extended to them. Upon such reasoning, he presents a Theology of Childhood as “Graced Vulnerability.”

Towner (2008:317) also interprets the image of God in relational terms. Human beings relate to their creator, to each other and to creation. Guthrie (1994:197-199) views the image of God as fully displayed in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the second Adam (Rom. 5:15-21; 1 Cor.15:45-49), the “image of the invisible God” (Col.1:15), “the likeness of God” (2 Cor. 4:4) “in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6).¹⁰⁵ The image of God is displayed in how Jesus lived, His “relatedness, community, or fellowship with others outside ourselves.” Being made in the image of God therefore underlines a deeply relational need within people.

3.3.4.3 The Functional interpretation

Hughes (1998:87), from a cultural-historical background of the text, believes that the image of God is displayed when human beings serve as God’s deputies on earth. People are God’s *representatives* who should rule justly according to God’s guidelines as seen in scripture. Towner (2008:315) found an exegetical difficulty with “dominion” in Genesis 1:2b and the parallel “to subdue” the earth. He argues that God is a power-sharing, not a power-hoarding God. Jensen (2005:13) agrees that abuse of human power is a weakness in this proposition. However, Hughes rightly argues that ruling on God’s behalf reflects God’s character and therefore it can never be power-hoarding. It should be power-sharing to protect and defend children in poverty.

Van Huyssteen (2006:121) defines the unique position given to humans to rule as “Dominion is expressed in stewardship, nurture, and responsibility toward the things God loves.” It also illustrates the importance of human beings who “are walking representations of God, and as such are of exquisite value and importance.”

Despite the diversity of interpretations, all scholars agree that God highly values all human beings who should be treated with dignity. This is an especially important point in ministry to children in poverty (Towner, 2008:308). Couture (2000:49-50) expresses the value of children by seeing the “image of God mirrored in their faces.” Couture, without interpreting the meaning of the image of God, uses it to highlight the dignity of children in poverty. Seeing the face of God in the face of the children maintains their dignity and value, irrespective of the devastation around them.

¹⁰⁵ References from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

The discussion above clearly shows the complexity of poverty and the accompanied theological reflections. In spite of the difficulties, it is discerned that the CCW is not alone in facing the challenges of poverty. God is already present in the situation and because children are created in His image, they are highly valuable to Him and should be treated as such. Children do not only live within the context of poverty, but also in the context of God's love and care. CCWs too should find their identity in God and resist falling into the trap of the god complex. Instead, they should fulfil their vocation as God's representatives working with Him to let His kingdom come.

The theological reflections of the previous section were on poverty and its implication on children. In the following section, theological reflections on childhood and childhood poverty will be discussed. Jensen presents a theology specifically related to childhood and Couture to children in poverty. Each of these theologies reveals aspects of concern for further investigation.

4. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDHOOD POVERTY

4.1 JENSEN'S THEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

Central to Jensen's (2005:14-16) Theology of Childhood is the interpretation that the image of God refers to the difference between male and female, including the vulnerability and openness that the relationship brings. He firstly identifies God's vulnerability in the covenant-relationship with Israel, which grieves God when broken, and secondly in Jesus' birth and death on the cross. To be vulnerable, is to be open to possible harm and injury and at the same time to recognise dependence on and connection with others. God's vulnerability-in-relationship is also evident in the "*perichoresis* of the trinity as the mutual self-giving, inhering, eternal dance between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Jensen, 2005:30).

All people reflect the image of God, but children are the most vulnerable because they are dependent on and exposed to a network of diverse personal relationships (Jensen, 2005:48). For that reason, an advocacy theology is needed to speak with those whose voices are often not heard, and not only to describe "the reign of peace" but also to participate in it (Jensen, 2005:xiii).

Children's vulnerabilities are seen in biblical narratives such as Genesis 21:9-20. Two marginalised people Hagar and her son Ishmael, who were not included in God's promise to Abraham, found themselves destitute and forsaken in the wilderness. It was when the

abandoned *boy*, not his mother, cried out, that God heard and attended to both the child and mother's pain (Jensen, 2005:36-41). In today's context, Jensen highlights children's vulnerability to violence, to poverty marked by inadequate health care, education and basic nutrition for children, to child neglect, child labour and to warfare. These silent cries need to be heard not only by God but also by caring adults.

The silent cries of children are often caused by the sins of adults or perhaps the sins of other children, be it consciously or unconsciously. Children are often intentionally harmed, for example, by using them for child pornography and child abuse in its various forms. Children are forced to deal with the repercussions of other people's sin and the devastating affect it has on their lives. They will have to work through and learn to cope with these hurts during their life time.

The fact that children are at the receiving end of sins committed by others, calls for a reinterpretation of sin, church practice and Christian witness. Sin is often defined from the perspective of those in power and seldom from the "underside." The classic "one-dimensional" understanding of sin as "falling short" is generally applied to children. Any definition of sin must include both actor and the acted upon. Children most often occupy the position as those acted upon (Jensen, 2005:x).

The greatest challenge in articulating a theology of childhood lies in the fact that most theologians have paid attention to the perpetrator and left little room for the victim (Jensen 2005:89). Jensen argues against the limited use of the classic doctrine of sin, which considers children only as adults in the making. In addition, the adult model as a person trapped in sin is directly applied to children. Jensen (2005:92) asks the stimulating question:

whether a complementary understanding of sin can be developed: an understanding that begins with the suffering of children and with a welcome to the children in our midst?

Jensen (2005:94-95) contends, "we sell children short" when we fall prey to the two extremes: either attributing all sin to a depravity or see children as blank slates. Sin needs to be understood in all its facets as well as the facets of its victims. A renewed understanding of sin, with special reference to children, begins with two convictions: Each person is connected in some way to others and each person is at all times both actor and acted upon. "We are never reducible to passive vessels or masters of our own destiny" (Jensen 2005:95).

The argument culminates in Jensen seeing sin through the lens of "vulnerability and openness,

the dimension of *imago Dei*.” Jensen (2005:98) argues that:

If sin is the woundedness of a relational creation - both the wounds we inflict on others and the wounds that we receive - then sin is the aberration of creation. Sin expresses the fundamental disease of human life, which is present mysteriously from the beginning of life, but is neither the fundamental character of life nor its final word.

Therefore, instead of viewing life as starting with depravity and doom, it is rather viewed by Jensen as “graced by vulnerability, relationship, and hope” where children will inevitably face the world that will wound (Jensen, 2005:98). Jensen’s (2005:viii) primary claim is that children’s vulnerability is basic to humanity and that God’s own nature reveals the Saviour who became vulnerable for the world, in order to atone for sin.

4.1.2 Evaluation and some aspects of concern

4.1.2.1 Sin and the suffering child

In evaluation, Jensen made a valuable contribution in presenting a theology where children are optimal in mind. The vulnerabilities in relationship, with children being at the “underside” and open to harm resonates the dehumanising effect of poverty on children as described in chapter 2. Advocates are needed to speak on behalf of children and Jensen himself partly fulfils this role by broadening our understanding of sin by including the aspect of children suffering due to the sinful acts of other people. The necessity to expand the understanding of sin with suffering children in mind has been recognised by different theologians as well as practitioners. The following section will take a closer look at some of the theological interpretations.

The influence of hurts on children’s spiritual lives needs further research. Bunge (2004:46-48) addresses the issue of children seen as sinful creatures. Although she does not disregard biblical evidence that children are sinful (Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 3:9-10; Proverbs 22:15; Genesis 8:21), her concern is the negative and destructive response from an adult based premise. Miller-McLemore (2003:64) from a feminist liberal perspective, shares these concerns. In reference to James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, she observes that he “is not the only Christian, nor will he be the last, to name the doctrine of sin as a reason for parental punishment.” Bunge therefore offers four helpful aspects for the notion that children are sinful in order to avoid destructive views of children. According to Bunge, (2004:46-47) children’s sinfulness implies that:

- 1 they are born into a “state of sin” which is the sinful conditions of the world into which children are born;

- 2 they carry out “actual sin” for which they are to some degree responsible but it should not be confused with physical or emotional needs;
- 3 they are not as sinful as adults and should be treated tenderly; and
- 4 they should be treated as equal with adults in that they are individuals with gifts and talents to be cultivated.

Both Jensen and Bunge voice their concerns from a North American context without considering sin seen in an African poverty context. On the one hand, speaking for children in vulnerability is a breakthrough especially when children are not held in high regard. However, as noted in Chapter 2 poverty never stands alone and carries with it its own struggles that include its struggles with sin. For example, the perpetual cycle of poverty includes elements of violence, the cycle of sexual abuse and other abuse, and neglect. This presents an uneasy situation that children may learn and continue these sins. Miller-McLemore (2003:xxx) rightly refer to children as actors in their own right. There is hardly a child who does not commit any wrong and children will not always be children as they grow up and become adults. Precautions need to be taken so that they do not change from being sinned against to those sinning against other children. A definition of sin needs to emphasise both the sinner and those sinned against. Both adults and children need forgiveness and to be transformed.

Copsey (2005:65-66) makes a connection between the doctrine of sin and the image of God. She reasons that sin can damage the image of God in children and subsequently influence their spirituality. The degree of damage varies from being “marred, tarnished and scratched.” Due to Adam’s disobedience resulting in the fallen nature of humankind, the image of God is *marred* (Rom 5:19). It means that all are sinners and have a bias toward sin. The image of God becomes *tarnished* by the impact and influences of the surrounding world and can be *scratched* by “deliberate and ... inadvertent messages” that are given and received from other people.

Although Copsey made an attempt to distinguish between sin, the world’s influences and harmful messages children receive, the theory is questionable on two accounts. One, it assumes that the image of God refers to spirituality and two, although sin permeates all of God’s creation, there is no scriptural support that the image of God can be marred, tarnished and scratched to the degree that Copsey describes it. It is true though that the intensity of children’s hurts can vary and some hurts will affect their lives more deeply than others. The influence of hurts on children’s spiritual lives needs further research.

Willmer (2007), emeritus Professor of Theology at Leeds University in England and a Director of the Child Theology Movement, presented a more feasible understanding of sin in relation to suffering children. He presents a quadrilateral diagram to reflect the complexity of sin as seen in the figure below.

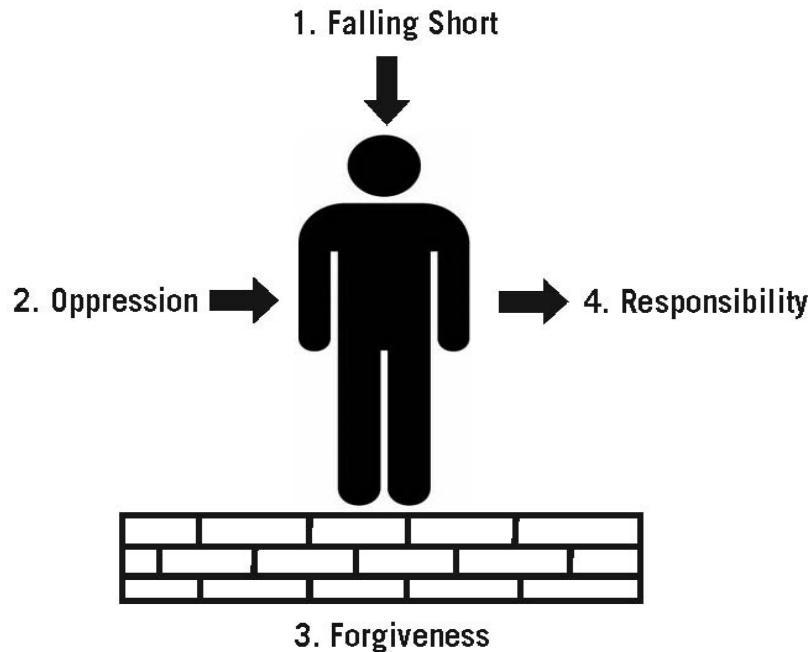


Figure 15: The child as clue for understanding sin (Willmer, 2007:17).

The four sides include two negative pressures, falling short and oppression (see point 1 and 2 below) and two positive pressures, responsibility and forgiveness (see point 3 and 4). Willmer (2007:16-22) explains the components as follows:

1. Falling short of the glory of God

Romans 3:23 firstly states that *all have sinned*. According to Willmer, *falling short of the glory of God* refers to the sin condition that separates people from God. It occurs when people sin as well as when they are sinned against. It includes more than sin as a personal choice. Suffering because of someone else's sin and personal sin is intertwined. In considering sin and suffering children, it is better not to accuse them of wrong doing but rather to recognise that they are falling short of the glory of God.

2. Oppression by enemies

Sin oppresses and victimises children. This results from sins of commission as well as omission by various people, and social structures such as culture and flawed value-systems. For example, sins of commission can be seen in children caught up in prostitution and sins of

omission can be seen in child neglect or ineffective economic systems or organisations.

3. Sin as forgiven

Instead of sin being a captivating power, it can be defeated due to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Sin is seen here as the active enemy that blocks grace and stop the possibility of a renewed life. The light of God reveals His glory in that God forgives sin (see Psalm 130). God opposes sin and establishes righteousness in its place. Sin therefore is fully seen for what it is from within the forgiveness of God.

4. Taking responsibility

When children stand on the sure foundation of God's forgiveness and hope, they can be reckoned as responsible people. The newly found relationship with God brings liberation, enables them to take up new responsibilities and respond to new opportunities in life.

In the quadrilateral diagram, sides 1 and 2 press negatively on children and sides 3 and 4 are uplifting. Children are taking responsibility for their lives which will liberate them and enable them to overcome sin and to live towards the future. They are not alone in this struggle, being in relationship with God also assures them of God's presence and enablement. It presents a scriptural and balanced approach of children as sinners and also as those against whom others have sinned.

4.1.2.2 The anthropology of children

Jensen also touched on the anthropological question of children "as adults in the making". Jensen's definition of childhood is, "To be a child, then, is to begin this course of life – nothing more, nothing less" (Jensen, 2005:43). He reasons that children are made in the image of God, not in the image of their parents or authoritarian figures and cannot be placed within "moulds of suffocating uniformity."

Bunge (2004:44-48) also pleads for a more complex and balanced view on children. She offers six ways of viewing children within the Christian tradition that need to be held in a balanced tension. She believes that it will broaden the view on children and strengthen commitment to them and will break down the problematic view of seeing children as *becoming* instead of already *being* (see Chapter 3 section 4.4.3). The six ways that Bunge refers to are that children are:

- 1 gifts from God and sources of joy;
- 2 sinful creatures and moral agents (see discussion above);

- 3 developing beings who need instruction and guidance;
- 4 fully human and made in the image of God;
- 5 models of faith and sources of revelation; and
- 6 orphans, neighbours and strangers in need of justice and compassion.

There is a need for a renewed understanding of the image of God and sin in relation to children. They are not adults in the making; they are created in the image of God and often are at the receiving end of sin and abuse. Children must not be looked upon as depraved but as “graced by vulnerability, relationship and hope” (Jensen, 2005:98). If the cycle of poverty, violence, abuse and neglect is not broken, it is more than likely to be continued when they become adults (Miller-McLemore 2003:xxx). Willmer’s model (2007:16-22) would be useful in this regard where there is tension between oppression and taking responsibility and between sin and forgiveness. Children are made in the image of God, and not in the image of their parents. They are gifts of joy from God, fully human, in God’s image and are in need of instruction and guidance (Bunge 2004:48).

Whereas Jensen’s focus was on the vulnerability of children, Couture specifically addresses children in poverty. She presents a practical theology of children and poverty which will now be considered.

4.2 COUTURE’S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF CHILDREN AND POVERTY

Couture (2000:14), presented a Practical Theology of Children and Poverty from a pastoral care perspective. She differentiates between two overlapping categories of poverty, material poverty and poverty of tenuous connections. Children are the most vulnerable in all the poverty arenas such as the social, economic, and political (Couture, 2000:11). Children’s lives are shaped by multiple kinds of poverties and therefore Couture prefers the term poverties instead of poverty as it gives better expression to their predicament (Couture, 2000:25). It also accurately describes the multi-dimensional aspects and concerns of poverty as described in chapter 2.

Couture (2000:14) proposes two normative frameworks for understanding child poverty, namely a social ecology and children’s rights. She suggests that by describing the two conditions of poverty in relation to the normative frameworks, this can function as a map in understanding childhood poverty. She identifies the obstacles that children face and the pastoral care issues that arise in different contexts.

The concept of grace, which is seen as “mercy being in right relationship with piety”, forms the biblical ground for pastoral care. Piety, according to Couture (2000:54) is practice in caring with God, for example: praying, fasting and studying the scriptures. Caring for other human beings such as caring for the poor and the sick is an example of mercy. In support of care seen through the juxtaposition of piety and mercy, Couture relies on Old Testament passages about caring for the orphan, widow and resident alien. In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the prime example of the balance between mercy and piety.

Central to the theology of religious care is the need for each other. In this case, the CCW and poverty-stricken children grow together spiritually. In answer to the question: “Why should the church care for poor children?” Couture (2000:14-15) contends, “This work of care is a means of finding God.” She believes that a deep spiritual hunger in adults can be connected with child poverty. The idea that spiritual fullness is dependent upon care for the most vulnerable person is central to the biblical witness. This thinking is consistent with Couture’s faith tradition and with the Wesleyan formula for the means of grace in pastoral care. It indicates that as carers show grace and care for others, they will be transformed and led into a deeper understanding of their neighbour and gain a profound awareness of the presence of God in their lives (Couture, 2000:55). Finding God and “godchildren” through the means of grace go together hand in hand (Couture, 2000:54).

The biblical basis for the value and dignity for children in poverty is found in being created in the image of God. Couture (2000:62) prefers the term “godchildren” instead of children in poverty to prevent marginalisation of impoverished children. Like Jensen, Couture identifies that children are suffering because of the actions of others. Instead of redefining sin, she uses the concept of suffering as a channel to address the problem. She states that their suffering is so much that:

The traditional language of sin, evil and depravity does not allow us adequately to articulate the problem. The concept of “han” from Korean minjung theology offers helpful distinctions that augment our traditional language. Han refers to the suffering that is accumulated in the victims of sin, burdening them with agony.

The concept “Han” has a passive and active structure. The passive indicates that the unconscious self is in despair, helplessness and hopelessness. Their hope is destroyed. The active han expresses bitterness against the oppressive policies and unjust work. It is a reflection of a deeply wounded heart (Couture, 2000:62). The importance of the concept lies in understanding that the attention is focused on the one suffering and not on the perpetrator.

The Christian worker, “motivated from the fount of gratitude”, will aim to see children and so see God in their own lives as a result. The “seeing of children” starts by seeing the “image of God mirrored in their faces” (Couture, 2000:49). An “irrational commitment to the well-being of the child” will result in the exchange of a mirrored image, to a place “where godchildren and God begin to have a human, incarnate face” (Couture, 2000:53).

The pathway to overcome children’s poverty is by building relationships with vulnerable children (Couture, 2000:15). It is encouraging to acknowledge the Wesleyan insistence that “God has not given up on us”, and that “God is already at work in deprived children and depraved adults” (Couture, 2000:53). CCWs can “live from the presence of God” in their lives (Couture, 2000:51).

The transformation of God’s image takes place within both the CCW and poverty-stricken children but is not limited to their lives only. Transformation depending on the intimate connection with God should also intervene at every structural level in society and culture. The normative frame, connected with the social ecology, offer lenses to help focus on global child poverty (Couture, 2000:14).

4.2.1 Evaluation and some aspects of concern

In evaluation, Jensen (2005:50) observed the valuable contribution of the work of Couture in that she avoids the “trap of paternalism: the privileged adult who knows best and thus bestows grace on the impoverished child.” At the same time, she also avoids dualistic thinking of the spiritual and the material and upholds the human dignity of children. She asserts that spiritual development of the children and the CCW’s goes hand in hand. The dynamic is that care is reciprocal, the life of the CCW is enriched and the children are nurtured. They are not alone, both are living in the presence of God who is already at work in the situation. As Jensen rightly comments, “To turn child-ward and God-ward, then, is one and the same turn.”

Human dignity is found in “being made in the image of God.” There is also strength in her expression “seeing the face of God in children” and referring to poverty-stricken children as “godchildren”.

A strength of Couture’s theology is that she recognises the importance of the CCW as a major role player in dealing with poverty. Although her threefold aim is to point out why the church should care for poor children; what the theological tradition has to contribute to their resilience and how theology of care can help build such ministries, she does not include specific reference to the CCW’s as she addresses fundamental concerns of workers (Couture,

2000:20-21). Some practical advice from Couture (2000:61) includes:

Do not rush to save the world. Begin small. Consider commitments carefully. Make only commitments you can keep. Do not underestimate the accumulating value of small, regular commitments. Reflect on your experience; pray about it; learn from it; walk with God in it. Anticipate that you will find new and disturbing forms of sin and evil, but you will also find grace.

4.2.1.1 The motivation of the Christian children's worker

Couture (2000:49) identifies the role that the CCW plays and also recognises the demands that they will face and the importance of proper motivation in a sustainable ministry. Couture believes that workers should be "motivated from the fount of gratitude" (Couture, 2000:49) and "live from the presence of God" in their lives (Couture, 2000:51). The CCW needs to know what is the driving force for ministry. The next section will take a closer look at the motivation of Christian workers.

Stockley (2007:299) asserts that the goal to assess and express motivation is:

to have a broader and deeper rationale for our work that is rooted in the values of our Christian life and faith. Without this, we simply remain grounded in the human philosophies of modern and post-modern society. ... We need to reconnect with the defining principle behind who we are and what we do.

Bartel (2006:336) identifies three motivational sources, which compel people to work with 'children at risk', including children in poverty. Motivation could centre on the CCW, the children and on God's honour.

- Motivations centred on the CCW:

Bartel (2006:336) cautions that some CCWs could have unhealthy secondary or hidden motivations for working with at-risk children. These motivations include that CCWs:

1. see themselves as the saviour of the children;
2. have a need to be needed or appreciated;
3. have an emotional void that only children can fill;
4. believe that by helping others who suffer, it will heal their own sufferings; and
5. need to make restitution for former wrongdoings.

Wright (2006b:341) argues that people in caring professions and especially missionaries are often motivated by their own unmet childhood needs. They consciously or unconsciously attempt to compensate these needs by 'being there' for children in a way that they wish someone had been there for them. Wright (2006b:343) does not condone such a motivation but notes that workers need to be aware of these emotions and recognise their impact on their

lives and ministry. Emotional motivations need not handicap or paralyse ministry. Wright (2006b:343) believes that “If a person is emotionally free (from his past life), then he can be more aware of his world (as a child is) and can respond in a real and spontaneous way (as a child can) – free from constraints imposed by others.”

- Motivations centred on the suffering children:

CCWs sometimes respond out of pity, compassion or a need to rectify injustice on suffering children as in the case of poverty-stricken children. A solely sympathetic needs-based motivation often complicates and creates further problems in ministry. According to Bartel (2006:338) the following problems, which mostly relate to the CCW may occur:

- 1 responses tend to be superficial, addressing only the most obvious needs of children;
- 2 responses tend to be immediate, without thinking through the long-term implications;
- 3 personal involvement may be short-lived;
- 4 workers become discouraged when they are unable to meet the magnitude of needs;
and
- 5 workers may feel that children no longer need or deserve help when they seem to be unappreciative or disrespectful.

Brewster (2005:47), drawing on the work of Olasky, attempted to overcome problems relating to compassion-child focused ministry by identifying seven characteristics of true compassion to yield a holistic approach in ministry. He presents the characteristics of true compassion in an alphabetic sequence: affiliation, bonding, categorisation, discernment, empowerment, freedom and God.

- Motivations centred on God:

Christian organisations recognised that passion, love for children and skills development alone are not sufficient in training CCWs. Riley and Wright (2006:214) rightly maintain that personal transformation of the CCW before God is essential and although training and the worker’s personal relationship with God are intertwined and interdependent, children respond to who workers are before God and not to their skills.

According to Bartel (2006:336), when CCWs centre their motivation for ministry on God’s love, will, honour of His name, a desire to please and therefore be transformed, it will result in sustainable ministry. An unconditional love that springs from a desire to honour God’s holy name and to please and obey God, will keep CCWs continuing their work even when they are discouraged and the children are disobedient. He argues that the motivations that centre on the CCW or children are not negative in themselves, but they are not strong enough to sustain the

person working with children. He suggests that a combination of motivations based upon a desire to honour God is needed to strengthen and to persist in the challenging work of children's ministry. It is especially true in the case of working with children in poverty. Anderson (1997:119), who compiled a profile for street workers, supports Bartel's view as he observed that feelings of pity quickly run dry, while the compassion of Christ causes a person to move from an emotional response to an active response. Couture (2000:47), rightly relates the motivation to care for poor children with the desire to find God.

4.2.1.2 Theological interpretation of the Rights of the Child

Another important aspect raised by Couture (2000:43) is to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in addressing child poverty. The Rights of the Child is built on four pillars: the basic rights survival, development, protection and participation. Berry and Guthrie (2003:13) refer to children's lack of access to services and their right to identity, which includes their spiritual identity.

In 2006 Swart and Yates at the Annual Congress of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa presented a paper on "The rights of children: A new agenda for Practical Theology in South Africa." They argue that religion should contribute towards the establishment and promotion of a human rights culture. They accentuate Marshall and Parvis' call to honouring children by viewing the Human Rights of the Child from a Christian Perspective (Swart & Yates, 2006:326, 329).

Theology needs to address issues of political interest, such as the social context of children. Education, well-being and caring for children should be central concerns of the true Christian culture. Swart and Yates (2006:330) plead for a contextual theology of children and their rights in South Africa. Such a theology should direct the theological community towards playing a complementary role in the world of children. In South Africa the suffering of children has mainly been "a function of social systems." Swart and Yates (2006:330) are disgruntled by the "sense of injustice" that seems "negative in characteristic." Children's suffering should, instead, be answered by "religious indignation" emerging from a sense of love.

A theological anthropology of children can bolster children's rights. People's appreciation of children determines their actions and theology. The Christian church and communities can challenge wrong perceptions held by adults on children. Swart and Yates (2006:331) argue that:

theology, driven by the central theme of love, has the inescapable responsibility to take seriously the contextual realities that affect children directly and to found the ideals of children's rights in principles and values that fundamentally direct people's lives.

In general, the response of the Christian community has been critical and negative about the UNCRC, while it has the capacity to strengthen children's rights and impact spiritual development at the same time. Scott (2007:23), for example, observes that "the mere mention of the children's rights is enough to end a conversation" in some Christian circles. For Christians, rights became a "blunt tool to vindicate individual rights" (Stephenson 2006:56). Christians generally object to the UNCRC because of the emphasis on rights instead of the biblical emphasis on responsibilities and obligations (Brewster 2005:162; Stephenson 2006:57) Brewster (2005:162-166) discusses five concerns raised by Christians concerning the UNCRC. These concerns are that it:

- gives away too many parental rights;
- emphasises rights that children are not mature enough to handle;
- may make loving discipline, including spanking in the home, a form of child abuse;
- discusses "rights" which may not be culturally appropriate (especially in Asia); and
- maintains that secular rights do not centre on biblical rights.

In spite of the negative views aired, Brewster (2005:165) argues that almost all articles of the UNCRC will find scriptural support, while Scott (2007:30) concludes that Christians have every reason to engage with rights as a tool for accomplishing God's purposes in the world. Despite varied opinions among religious groups, Stephenson (2006:60) holds that there is consensus that the UNCRC has put children at the heart of the international agenda. Most importantly, in countries dominated by conflict and poverty, the UNCRC acts as a wake-up call to the church and government. It provides a basis for action and challenges the church firstly, for having an assistance approach and secondly, for viewing the child as "an object of compassion" instead of being "full subjects of their rights" (Stephenson 2006:59).

One weakness of Couture's theology is that the spiritual aspect of poverty is not included in her definition nor is it mentioned that children are also tenuously connected to God. The importance of building relationships is a central thought but it could have been more definitely linked with "finding God." Couture (2000:20-21) laments "the lack of university research on children's studies, religion or spirituality as part of the problem or solution" which indicates that the omission of the spiritual aspect was probably not intentional.

The importance of the role of the CCW has been touched on in the previous section but requires additional attention. The following section will take a closer look at the CCW who is

ministering to the poor.

5. THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S WORKER IN THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY

5.1 THE CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S WORKER AS A PERSON

In the past, the role of the CCW as an important element in children's ministry has been overshadowed by the emphasis on curriculum. Copsey (2005:17), working among poverty-stricken children, observed that when relationships break down, it impairs children's ability to experience and come to faith. Relationships indicate a need for a person more than a program. This is a serious concern in the spiritual nurture of children living in poverty where relationships are tenuously connected.

Geldard and Geldard (2008:17) from a secular psychology counselling perspective, point out that "each counsellor brings into the therapeutic relationship their own unique personality." This concept is true of the CCW coming to children too. The CCW could be described as the hinge on which children's ministry hangs.

When the CCWs "see *themselves* as a significant part of the curriculum" rather than focusing only on the curriculum itself, it will result in a more effective ministry (May et al., 2005:208). May et al. accentuate that a curriculum is "what happens to people, through people, in the learning environment" and that the CCW is a key influence in the spiritual formation of children.

May et al. (2005:197) identified the problem and presented a more balanced model. Instead of the overemphasis on the content, the curriculum is divided into four components, illustrated below as four intersecting circles¹⁰⁶ to constitute children's ministry.

¹⁰⁶ The terms used by May et al. have been renamed to be consistent with the vocabulary used in the present research. Learner has been replaced with children, teacher with CCW, and environment with context. The content refers to the curriculum itself.

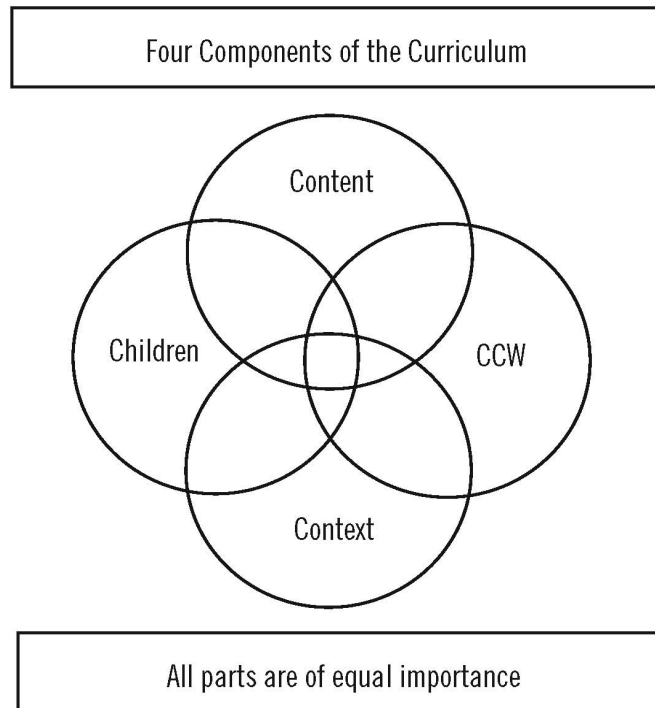


Figure 16: Curriculum (Adapted from May et al., 2005:197).

5.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Root (2007) from a Christological perspective and Yaconelli (2006) from a contemplative perspective emphasised the importance of relationships in ministry. They are both youth workers, not CCWs, but underlying principles of their approaches are not only applicable but also essential in children’s ministry. The term Youth Ministry is retained and not replaced by children’s ministry in order to stay true to their field of ministry.

5.2.1 Root’s Christological perspective

Root (2007:17) asserts that relationships are central in youth ministry. The distinguishing quality of relationships is their “companionship-oriented” aspect that values young people, for who they are, instead of having a “goal-oriented” view of relationships, using them as an instrument of influence. Such relationships reframe ministry to become “participation [together] in God’s presence” (Root, 2007:77).

Root (2007:60) argues that in the past, relational youth ministry has been formed from a “strategy of engagement within a pluralistic culture” in order to counter negative cultural influences on youth by positive modelling and setting a good example. He instead reflects theologically on the incarnation of Christ as foundational to relational youth ministry. He turns to Bonhoeffer’s Christological theology to express what true relational youth ministry

is. Following Bonhoeffer's three key questions, he unpacks theological reflections and the implication for ministry. The three questions are:

- 1 Who is Jesus Christ?
- 2 Where is Jesus Christ?
- 3 What then shall we do?

Root's (2007:89) theological reflection on youth ministry is as follows: The question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" is a question of personal relationship. An encounter is needed before an answer can be given to "who are you?" The "who" relating to the *person of Jesus* reveals a pattern for relationship instead of a "how" question that can be answered by a step-by-step instruction book. God's intention for the real meaning of humanity is expressed in Jesus as God *Incarinate* in His ministry in the world. Root (2007:92) notes that "Incarnation is not about influence but about solidarity in common humanity, so relational ministry should be the same".

Jesus as the *Crucified* relates to the whole world, including those who rejected Him, but at the same time there is the offer of reconciliation (Root, 2007:93-95). Based on Jesus' example, relational youth ministers need to be prepared to enter *into* suffering with, but also to receive suffering *from*, those with whom they work.

Jesus as the *Resurrected* overcame sin and death, and as the living Lord, He empowers others to bring transformation and hope. "Jesus has bent humanity back to God..." (Root, 2007: 97). That Jesus *is* (not that He *was*) stands at the core of relational ministry. It is about persons, not strategies and "about the person of Christ, who meets the persons of the world as the incarnate, crucified and resurrected One" (Root, 2007:101). Those who follow Christ will find their identity and purpose in Him (Root, 2007:103).

The question "Where is Jesus Christ?" in relational ministry is not about accepting "a message (an idea) but about participating together (one to another) in the presence of God." The meeting place is in both the church and the world, as long as those places are places of relationship (Root, 2007:103-115). The anthropological emphasis of youth ministry is not on what the youth worker is to *do* as much as the importance of who they *are*, and the willingness to be vulnerable in relationship (Root, 2007:122-123).

Root (2007:125) seeks to answer the question, "What then shall we do?" (ethics), by following Jesus' example of a ministry based on personal relationships. Root identifies the Christocentric ethic as place-sharing, which means becoming an advocate, a person who

stands so close that their reality becomes personalised (Root, 2007:127). It implies a life of selflessness and being prepared to carry the pain of others. Sacrificial living is motivated by a desire to be faithful to Christ and to young people instead of measuring success or failure. Faithfulness acknowledges “the degrading of their humanity, brought about by broken and abusive families, violent neighbourhoods, failing schools and poverty, that caused them to lash out so forcefully” (Root, 2007:15). It is not the responsibility of place-sharers to fix these structures, but they should responsibly enter into these cultural systems, speaking of their dehumanization and inequality and act to rebuild human dignity (Root, 2007:131).

In summary, Root (2007:141) believes that:

Relational youth ministry then is much more than one of many strategies for influencing adolescents for spiritual growth and religious commitment. Relationships are the concrete place where we meet the transcendent otherness of God in God’s revelation and subsequently become place-sharers for young people.

5.2.2 Yaconelli’s contemplative perspective

Mark Yaconelli¹⁰⁷, the director for the Center for Engaged Compassion at the Claremont School of Theology, emphasises the contemplative perspective of ministry and places relationships central in guiding young people to experience God’s presence (Yaconelli, 2006:26). Contemplative youth ministry is based on the interplay between three kinds of relationships. Firstly, the relationship between youth and adults in which Yaconelli identifies a “structural disconnect” (Yaconelli, 2006:32). The concern of youth workers is usually about answers and safe activities while youth long for companionship instead. *Being* instead of *doing* is what matters more to them (Yaconelli, 2006:67, 68). Secondly, the relationship of youth workers within themselves is one of anxiety, anxiety as how to relate with youth and about which programs to use. Thirdly, there is a need for both the youth and youth worker to be in a deep relationship with God.

Developing new techniques or broadening theology, will not lead to a deeper sense of God’s presence between the youth worker and both God and young people (Yaconelli, 2006:122). The primary emphasis of contemplative youth ministry, being an encounter with God, requires a new way in relating to and engaging with young people. It is found in an attitude of the heart rooted in love that replaces anxiety (Yaconelli, 2006:79).

¹⁰⁷ Mark Yaconelli, is the son of the late Michael Yaconelli (24/07/1942 - 30/10/2003), who was the cofounder and director of the Youth Ministry and Spirituality project. He played a major role in youth work. He was also a writer, theologian, church leader, and satirist.

The path of contemplative prayer will lead to an attitude immersed in love. The word contemplative means “to be in the temple.” As “the prayer of the heart”, it seeks to rest and dwell in the presence of God. It desires to enter into a deep personal relationship with God and to intercede for young people (Yaconelli, 2006:82-83). Contemplative prayer enables youth workers “to see each face through Jesus’ eyes” (Yaconelli, 2006:107) and to develop love and compassion for them.

Contemplative prayer promotes a kind of youth ministry where the presence of God can be recognised and contemplated. It requires youth workers to set the climate and create circumstances that will develop a growing awareness of the presence of God. Spiritual formation takes place by making space for God so that young people can engage with God in the midst of conversation and learning in youth meetings. The traditional word-heavy form of youth ministry placed the youth worker as the sole mediator of God. In this model, a young person’s relationship with the Holy is only through the youth worker as a trustworthy and approachable channel (Yaconelli, 2006:189-196). Spiritual formation means not only helping young people to recognise God’s presence is active in their lives, but helping them name this God as well. For the Youth worker, good teaching also involves being faithful not successful, being a good listener, taking delight in young people and identifying an awareness of God’s presence in their lives (Yaconelli, 2006:203). Young people will feel respected, loved and cared for and that someone delights in their existence (Yaconelli, 2006:121).

In summary, Yaconelli (2006:126) believes that:

Being present to God amidst young people and being present to young people amidst God is the centre practice in contemplative youth ministry.

The reflective engagement approach also called Godly Play, or the contemplative-reflective spiritual formation model of children’s ministry, in some respects corresponds to the contemplative approach (Stonehouse & May 2010:164; Anthony 2006:37; see also Chapter 3 section 5.2). The primary emphasis of contemplative ministry is to have an encounter with God and to be conscious of God’s presence in everyday life (Yaconelli, 2006:79). The reflective engagement approach actively creates a climate enabling children to “discover the awesome reality of God’s transcendence” by engaging with and reflecting on God’s Word (Stonehouse & May 2010:86). The aim of reflective engagement is to help children find meaning and allow the Holy Spirit to apply the divinely inspired story to their own life instead of the CCW doing it (Stonehouse & May 2010:89).

A further aim of the reflective engagement approach is for children to feel God's closeness, to remember and experience God's presence in everyday life (Stonehouse & May 2010:41). In the *Listening to children study* conducted by Stonehouse and May, twenty children answered questions regarding their experience of God in their daily lives. Several children referred to negative situations such as being scared or worried, and frightening, worrisome and stress-filled times, as times when they prayed and experienced a close relationship with God (Stonehouse & May 2010:42).

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated theological reflections on poverty and some aspects of childhood spirituality. It revealed that the CCW plays an essential role in the spiritual nurturing of children. Some conclusions drawn from the investigation above are as follows:

1. A holistic view of poverty is essential (see 3.3.1). In Chapter 2, different concepts regarding poverty were discussed and considered that a theological reflection revealed that all relationships are affected by poverty. Myers, Hughes and Brewster noted a spiritual focus indicating that poverty stems from the first broken relationship which affected all else. To render a holistic view of poverty, Myers' God's story added another circle to Bronfenbrenner's ecological view by including the spiritual. Here principalities and powers were evident. Hiebert cautions against the danger subconsciously at work opposing a holistic view, the dualistic worldview separating the material and spiritual world. It leads to a one-sided and compartmentalised children's ministry (see 2.2 and 3.2.1). Brewster and Adeyemo emphasised that both evangelism and the social gospel are needed in holistic children's ministry. Hughes expressed this idea by the kingdom of God theory. People are God's representatives to care for the whole of creation, not only for the future salvation of people (see 3.3.3).

2. God is already present with the poor. Each person has his or her own story, but it all rests within God's story (see 3.1.2). That God is already at work in the lives of the poor can be recognised in different ways. Firstly, by God being present in the world, secondly, by people created in His image, thirdly, by children having innate spirituality and fourthly, by the CCW's presence and presenting God's Word to the children (see 3.3.2).

3. Children should be treated with dignity and respect because they are made in the image of God. In spite of the diverse interpretations and views as to what the image of God constitutes, the basic consideration and where all scholars agree, is that the value and dignity of all people should be recognised (see 3.3.4). It cautions the CCW against the god complex when working with poverty-stricken children as well as the challenge to both the children and the worker to find their identity in God (see 3.1.2 and 3.1.3).

4. A definition of sin seen in the context of the suffering child will include elements of sin committed by children as well as committed against them. Children are the most vulnerable of all people. They are oppressed by sin but also fall short of God's glory. They need forgiveness and then can fulfil their responsibility in God's kingdom (see 4.1 and 4.1.2.1). Couture's concept of the Han helps to consider the intensity of pain that children endure without the focus of being the perpetrator (see 4.2).

5. The theological anthropology of children upheld children as complete human beings and not little ones who are in the process of growing up to become human beings (see 4.1.2.2). They are created in God's image and are full recipients of God's grace, care and forgiveness together with the responsibility of what it means to be a member of God's family (see 4.1.2.1). Some ways to help the CCW to keep this focus in mind is to see God's face in the children or to see the image of God mirrored in their faces (see 4.2).

6. The CCW's source of motivation is in his or her relationship with God. Working with children can stir up past memories, or can be a manner in which to fulfil the personal needs of the CCW. This may not be a disadvantage in itself, unless it brings unresolved issues of the CCW to the fore.

7. Theological interpretation of the Rights of the Child can help bridge the gap within the political, social and spiritual arena. Practical theology and the church ought to take their rightful place in influencing the political and social context of children (see 4.2.1.2).

8. The role of the CCW is central in ministry to children. The Incarnational Christ indicates the importance of relationships (see 5.2.1). The prominent aim of ministry with young people is to establish relationships with them and to guide them into experiencing God's presence in their daily lives.

In the following chapter the normative task will guide the investigation to conclude with proposals for a practical theological framework focusing on the role of CCW in the spiritual nurturing of children in the context of poverty.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S WORKER IN THE SPIRITUAL NURTURING OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reflected theologically on children in poverty and on aspects affecting children's spirituality. It highlighted dangers such as "playing god" in the lives of the poor and the gap of the excluded middle. Myers, Hughes and Brewster presented theological interpretations on poverty that led to further investigations as to how sin should be interpreted in the light of suffering children. A closer look at the CCW's motivation in working with the children was followed by a consideration on the role of the Christian children's worker (CCW). Relationships were underlined as a core element in working with children.

The research followed the methodology of Osmer's four tasks of practical theological interpretation. Chapters 2 and 3 followed the descriptive and interpretive tasks that asked the questions: What is going on and why is it going on? Chapter 4 applied the normative task, asking what ought to be going on and the current chapter will present the pragmatic task, asking how are we to respond to the situation at hand?

2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The research question: *What is the role of the Christian children's worker in the spiritual nurturing of children in the context of poverty?* The research questions were answered through the following aims:

- a broad understanding of the realities children face when living in the context of poverty;
- a clear command of the intricate aspects of children's spirituality;
- a theological reflection on poverty and spirituality of children which includes the role of the Christian children's worker; and
- a framework of good practices in the spiritual nurturing of children in poverty, which is also meaningful to the Christian children's worker.

In chapter 2 the investigation considered aspects that shape the lives of children living in the context of poverty. Results revealed that childhood poverty is multifaceted and is expressed in varied definitions and practices by organisations (see Chapter 2 sections 3 and 4).

Poverty is a broad term with various intensities and ratios in South Africa. The Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, North West and Western Cape struggle with high levels of child hunger. In spite of high rates of unemployment, the Limpopo province has the lowest proportion of child hunger (9%) (compare Berry and Hendricks 2009 in Chapter 2 section 5). In addition, children experience and interpret poverty and its challenges individually.

Bronfenbrenner's systems approach showed how the interrelated life context, the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems are influencing children and that children in turn influence their own life contexts (see Chapter 2 sections 6 and 7). Children are uniquely different. Some are more resilient than others and can survive and even excel in similar distressing situations. Therefore, children need to be given the opportunity to express their views and experience of poverty (see Chapter 2 section 8).

In chapter 3 the investigation explored children's spirituality which revealed the difficulty in pinpointing the precise meaning of spirituality. An essential element of Christian spirituality, applicable to both adults and children is that it is embedded in relationships, with God and with each other. Equally important is the contextual influence on spiritual nurture, which necessitates a holistic view.

The path in understanding spiritual development of children has taken many different turns in history. The cognitive developmental stage theories as a premise of children's spiritual development resulting in a school educational model for spiritual nurture has been challenged and found wanting. Alternatively, children's spiritual development is best understood as a process nurtured by contextual learning built on a Christian premise as offered by Westerhoff (see Chapter 2 section 4). The various children's spiritual formation models to promote spiritual development are Western in origin and are inadequate to poverty contexts in South Africa. However, the Frankena Model designed to help CCWs to reach proper method, is useful in translating theological understanding of spiritual nurture to practical application in ministry.

In chapter 4 a practical theological reflection on poverty and spirituality of children yielded insights on the subject matter from a Christian perspective. Seen from the normative point of view, relationships and the knowledge that God is already present in all life contexts became

an important part in the discussion. The CCW received central focus as the one in relationship to both children and God. Important aspects of concern emerged in the discussion such as the relationship between social action and evangelism, the image of God, sin seen in relation to suffering children and the anthropology of children (see Chapter 4 sections 3.3 and 4.1.2).

The current chapter moves from foundation theory to a practical theory in an attempt to answer the research question regarding the spiritual nurture of children living in the context of poverty, with the focus on the role of the CCW. In summary, after being challenged by the concrete realities of children living in poverty and analysing aspects of children in poverty, as well as exploring spirituality, followed by the theological reflection on both those aspects, the research needs to conclude with possible proposals to address children's spiritual needs in the context of poverty.

In applying the normative action, the current research will follow various researchers using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach as one lens for understanding children's ministry. Breckenridge, Couture and the current research use Bronfenbrenner's system, but apply it differently. Breckenridge (2004:327) uses Bronfenbrenner's five levels of "environmental systems as a framework to understand spiritual formation of children" exactly as he described it. Couture (2000:93) subdivided Bronfenbrenner's five levels to create seven ecological lenses for a practical theology of children and poverty based on a social ecology for pastoral care. The seven levels include the individual, the family, community institutions, government policy, cultural beliefs, values and expressions, economic structures, and nature. The current research will employ the concept of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach but will include two additional contexts, that of the CCW as a micro-system and the God-context as the Christian spiritual system, which encircle all the other systems.

In chapter 5 conclusions and proposals will be presented that inform a practical theological framework focusing on the role of CCW for the spiritual nurturing of children in the context of poverty. The practical theological framework consists of three sections. Firstly, it considers children's life contexts using a systems approach to the spiritual nurture of children in poverty. Secondly, it places emphasis on the *Christian* nature of children's ministry. Thirdly, it points out conflicting tensions that the CCW could encounter.

3. PERSPECTIVES ON A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 CONTEXT: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

A recurring theme of the research is that children are complete human beings whose development takes place holistically and is influenced by all their life contexts. Bradford (1995:3-34) showed spirituality as a dynamic, tripartite that is intrinsically linked, interdependent, and fundamental to the overall well-being of every child (see Chapter 1 section 6.1). Spiritual nurture cannot take place in a vacuum. It involves the total essence of children communicated within a particular environmental context as portrayed by Bronfenbrenner’s relational understanding of systems. In line with Bronfenbrenner’s thinking, it is accepted that the biological, environmental, relational and spiritual development of children, to some extent, influence each other. In the following section, perspectives on a theological framework will centre on environmental levels that influence the spiritual development of children (see Chapter 2 section 7; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Estep, 2004:327-329). It will incorporate the two additional contexts, firstly, the micro-system of the CCW and secondly, the spiritual as the all encompassing realm, which is called the God-context. These contexts can be illustrated as follows:

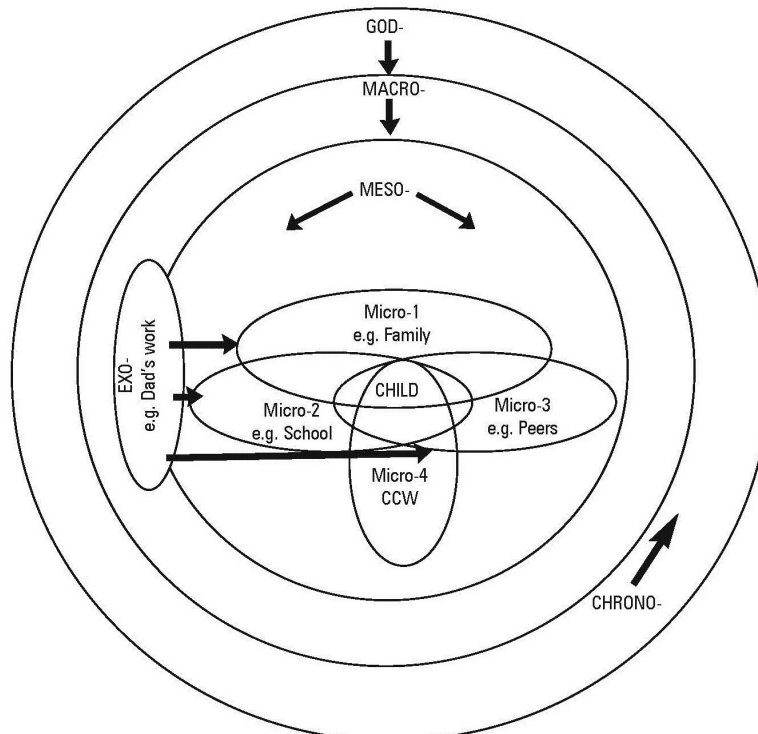


Figure 17: Contexts of children with a CCW.

3.1.1 Children in context

3.1.1.1 The anthropological factor

The research showed that children's lives are affected by multiple contexts. The effects of the micro-contexts are the most keenly felt by children. The anthropological perspectives that people in the micro-contexts have of children will directly influence how children will be treated.

In each context, children are treated in direct relationship to how they are perceived. A theological anthropology for the correct understanding of children is therefore essential for their spiritual nurturing. People are often unconscious of underlying views and motivations of their actions. In the academic field, metaphors are used to describe these unconscious perceptions and though they are not verbalised by people, they are strong factors in determining ministry. Academically speaking, if, for example, passive metaphors such as a sponge, blank slate, empty cup, clay or wet cement were used to describe children it would result in CCWs being the expert, authority, boss, funnel holder and evaluator. Active metaphors, such as sheep, seed or plant, pilgrims or disciples to describe children will render a CCW acting as a shepherd, farmer or gardener, fellow pilgrim, guide, and friend. Instead of children's ministry being informative only, active metaphors lead to form and transform children (see Chapter 1 section 6.3 and May et al., 2005:9).

Children are marginalised due to an over-emphasis on what they will *become* in future while neglecting what they *are* at present. In child development, the Piagian stage theories emphasise what children will become (see Chapter 3 section 4.4.3), but it is not an appropriate application to spirituality which has a now-context as well as a future-context. Westerhoff (1976:89) reasons that a theological anthropology of children values children for *being*, as well as *becoming* adults and they are an integral part of the faith community (see Chapter 3 section 4.5.2) Jensen (2005:43), in defence of vulnerable children, opposes the idea that children are "adults in the making" and views childhood as the beginning of the course of life "nothing more, nothing less." Ratcliff (2008b:31) rightly reasons that children are complete human beings, including both *being* and *becoming* aspects. This is of special interest in the poverty context where children are often valued for their role as a future financial contributor to their households. Children are of least importance in a poverty context and UNICEF observed that the highest poverty rate is among children under five.

3.1.1.2 The resilience factor

Children living in the context of poverty have a measure of resilience and have an influence on their own life contexts. Stuart and Bostrom (2003:4) state that all children need both adversity and a trusting relationship in balance to overcome difficulties and excel in life. The CCW can use the strength of children's resilience to help them interpret their life context from a spiritual perspective. Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright and Masten (2006:358) examine four major ways in which religion and spirituality may stimulate resilience in children. It can be by:

- strengthening attachment in relationships with God, family, peers, mentors;
- providing social support that includes a sense of community belonging, rituals like funerals etc, prayers for sick, visit sick, bring food in troubled times, counselling;
- guiding conduct and moral behaviour that includes integrity, compassion, forgiveness, empathy, altruism, kindness, love; and by
- encouraging personal growth and development, offering opportunities to change, regulate affect and arousal, prayer, meditation, liturgy, reinforce family values, provide meaning and a philosophy of life, reframe trauma, acceptance of God's will, conversion and transformation.

When combined, the three aspects that children are "relationally rooted" (Stuart & Bostrom, 2003:18, 71), have innate spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006:60) and are facing life complexities often stimulate them to turn to God (Coles, 1990:274). The CCW can help children to interpret their life situation and develop skills as a buffer against adversity (Garbarino, 1995:151). Holistic spiritual nurture of children assumes that each contact with children can potentially be a spiritual act. Spiritual nurture is therefore not something that takes place only in children's meetings.

3.1.2 The Christian children's worker

A key feature of micro-systems is the bidirectional nature which includes consistent, interpersonal and face-to-face interactions that occur within the immediate environment, such as the family, school, peers and church (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:22; and Chapter 2 section 6.2). Providing children's ministry occurs on a regular basis with meaningful interactions between the CCW and the children, it is justifiable to argue that the CCW becomes a micro-system in the children's lives. In general, research on the psychological effects of poverty on children

does not take into account the church, religion, or spirituality (Couture, 2000:94; and Chapter 2 section 7.6), but the role of the church is prominent within poorer areas partly due to a lack of alternatives. In addition, the CCW can present an essential and influential context to the lives of poverty-stricken children. When CCWs realise that their continuous contact with children is potentially a micro-system, the CCW will strive to strengthen the system, knowing how it can affect all other systems.

It is essential to distinguish between the CCWs and non-CCWs seeing that the Christian component brings a unique quality to the micro-system. Perspectives on foundational issues, focus of ministry, motivation, and how success is gauged, reveal the distinct character of the CCWs. Foundational to Christian children's ministry, is that it is built on a theological premise (see Chapter 3 section 4.5.2) which identifies the root cause of poverty as inherited sin resulting in broken relationships (see Chapter 4 section 3.1.2). The focus of ministry is not only on development but also on transformed lives (compare definition of child poverty used by CCW in Chapter 2 section 3.2.5 and Christian definition of children's spirituality Chapter 3 section 3.2.2.2). The essence of effective Christian children's ministry translates into children having changed lives and restored relationships with people and God. In some instances, it also includes a healing process because they have been recipients of other people's sin. The task of CCWs has two focal points, to counteract the deprivation of poverty and to develop children's spirituality. The value of CCWs lie not in what they do *to* or *for* children but in being Christian *with* children on their spiritual journey, finding their identity in God (see Chapter 3 section 4.5.2). Consequently, children are not objectified, but are treated as complete people, whose dignity in its entirety is acknowledged. The actions of the CCWs will reveal that they value children as created in the image of God worthy of dignity and respect. In addition, their right to protection and participation is not only acknowledged but is also actively promoted. The CCWs motivation to care for poor children springs from a desire to honour, please and obey God. Central to the motivation is a desire to find and to be transformed by God. An unconditional love for poverty-stricken children is also an expression of gratitude to God, which results from living in the presence of God (see Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.1). Success is gauged by the CCWs faithful participation with God, realising that God is already present with poverty-stricken children (see Chapter 4 section 5.2.1). All these elements will filter through into the micro-context that the CCW creates.

The micro-context of the CCW consists of the CCW, co-workers or helpers in the team, as well as the quality of relationships, atmosphere, content of the curriculum, and the totality of all ministry aspects that are provided for poverty-stricken children. The CCW-context should

have a holistic approach because children need to be addressed as complete human beings influenced by the total effect of poverty. The context therefore should aim to include all the activities relating to the children's meeting, active listening, counselling, handing out of food, and other material needs. Couture (2000:91) emphasises the importance of personal presence, liberating symbols and meaningful conversation as essentials in ministry with children in poverty. The context that the CCW provides therefore should reflect a holistic appreciation of the child as a person – spiritual, physical, emotional, educational, and of a child as a person in relationship with others.

A prominent feature of the CCW micro-system is the relational focus, which is a recurring theme identified in all the previous chapters. Chapter 2 identified poverty-stricken children's relational needs, for example, a poor family and community structures strained children's development (see Chapter 2 section 7.1.1). Chapter 4 identifies poverty to be the result of broken relationships, that the poor are in a system of disempowerment and that children are vulnerable while living with tenuous connections (see Chapter 4 sections 3.1.1 and 4.2). Chapter 3 locates the aspect of being in relationship with God and other people, as a core element of Christian spirituality and Chapter 4 identifies the restoration of a broken relationship as a basic answer to poverty (see Chapter 4 section 3.1.3). Consequently, both poverty and spirituality call for a restoration in relationships. The context that the CCW seeks to create cannot be anything other than being essentially relational.

The role of the CCW as person in the micro-system can be described as the hinge on which children's ministry hangs (see Chapter 4 section 5.1). Christian children's ministry not only starts with the worker but their perceptions, relationships and views greatly influence, and to some extent, determine ministry. Some victories resulting in life-changing children's ministry are won before any contact is made with poverty-stricken children. Preparation for Christian children's ministry takes place in:

- the mind of the worker – what he/she *thinks*

The CCW should identify and eliminate elements that would impede Christian children's ministry. These elements include having a god complex, falling trap to a dualistic worldview, minimising the human dignity of poverty-stricken children and an overemphasis on the *becoming* at the cost of *being* aspect of children. The CCW should also identify and cultivate elements that will promote the purpose and aim of ministry. These elements include seeing children as complete human beings, having an understanding of the realities that poverty-stricken children face, understanding that though starting from different points of departure,

CCWs and children are both on a spiritual journey accompanying each other as equal human beings to find their identity in God.

- the heart of the worker – what he/she *feels*

Different aspects could motivate compassionate ministry but it should include being motivated by their devotion to God. Couture calls for an “irrational commitment” (see Chapter 4 section 4.2) to children, but compassion should be undergirded with a rational understanding of what poverty entails, and how children’s spiritual development may be affected by it.

- the relationship with God – what he/she *believes*

The CCW needs to maintain a personal spiritual relationship with God, as it is the fountain from which Christian ministry springs.

- the inner room of the worker – what he/she *practices*

The inner room is the place where the heart of the CCW turns towards God and towards the children (see Chapter 4 section 4.2.1). It is where *being* receives more importance than *doing*, where the CCW dwells in the presence of God and intercedes for children.

The value in identifying the context of the CCW lies in considering what it can provide in the wider context of spiritual nurture. Being in a warm positive relationship becomes an essential part of the process of spiritual nurture. A focus on meaningful relationships can be an antidote for children in difficult conditions. The CCW can be a shock absorber and buffer against the multidimensional aspects of poverty. In addition, the context of the CCW creates a safe space for poverty-stricken children where they receive caring attention. Providing a hospitable space (see Chapter 3 section 4.5.1.3) as well as a sacred space (see Chapter 3 section 4.6) is foundational to spiritual nurture. Such a context can also contribute to adults being safety nets in the lives of children (Brueggemann, 2008:412).

A further value in identifying the context of the CCW is that it presents a wider scope of ministry and makes it easier to recognise work done. It leads to the realisation that Christian children’s ministry is meaningful and to the significance of a CCW (see Chapter 1 section 2.2). In addition, Stott (1984:62-66) argues against Christian pessimism and compels Christian workers to actively “occupy a sphere of influence for Christ” because history revealed that Christianity can change societies (see Chapter 4 section 5.2.3.2). A long-term view of these aspects can encourage sustainable Christian children’s ministry.

3.1.3 Circle of connecting contexts

Bronfenbrenner argues that the contexts affect each other (see Chapter 2 sections 6.1 and 6.2). The presence of the CCW will therefore have a rippling effect within the other micro- and meso-systems in the community. The CCW's awareness that the meso-system consists of interplay of micro-systems, will result in spiritual nurture sensitive to the contextual influences on children (see Chapter 3 section 4.5.1). In addition, the CCW will have a broader vision to include the other micro-systems. In holistic children's ministry, though the child is the focal point of spiritual nurture, their family, educational and social settings will also be in view. In practice, it can take place by sharing responsibility with mothers, fathers and families as a means of strengthening tenuous connections. Couture (2000:98) reasons to assist parents formally or informally through practices of meditation and prayer and to provide childcare, will reduce stress of multiple expectations and provide strength for parents.

Although the CCW cannot be involved in the exo-systems of children such as the parent's work place, the CCW recognises its influence on children. The effect of parents' low paid jobs will be felt in all the micro-systems of their children. For example, children may not have enough food at home, money to pay their school fees or participate in special school or church activities. Poor children are likely to live in poor communities, go to poor schools and be friends with other children who are also poor. The web of poverty stretches not only over a household but also within all the ecological systems. It is here where the CCW can play a further meaningful role, by being sensitive to needs and addressing issues as they arise.

The CCW needs to identify the tenuous connections and needs within the ecological systems and help children to strengthen connections in their lives. The supportive and helping role could also include the incorporation of NGO's or help organisations such as Operation Child which gives shoe boxes filled with gifts for children in poverty at Christmas time. The foundational concept is that one cares better for children when the others in the environment are also given care.

3.1.4 Macro-context

Well-functioning community institutions can form a protective web around children. This web consists of community institutions with high performance and delivery to its community (Couture, 2000:100). The health of a community is almost directly measurable by the strength of this web. Chapters 2 and 4 revealed that the poor are living in a web of poverty and poor community systems. In response to this problem, governments worldwide, including the

South African government, provide ample pro-children legislation and policies.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, it raises many questions as to the difference it makes in the children's life situation. Do children know their rights and how to act on them? Does it contribute to the betterment of their lives? In the discussion on Human's Rights, Dembitzer (2009:237) argues, "If you are starving, satisfying your basic needs for food is all you care about." It could be said that someone with a hungry stomach has no ears.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on their needs. A theological interpretation on care for children is a command by God based on love (see Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.2). It challenges the church to take up the scriptural position in caring for the poor. The CCW needs to play a role in addressing and educating the church as to their place within God's command to care for the widow and the orphan (see Chapter 4 section 4.1). If this is done, it will ensure that children in poverty will be able to access the love and care needed. To some extent, the context of the CCW can fulfil such a role, but the church as a whole needs to play a role in this context.

The role of shared responsibility is also seen when the CCW and the church take on the task of advocacy. Advocacy can be conducted in a variety of ways such as developing a theology of childhood (see Chapter 4 section 4.1). Newer forms of advocacy by using the Internet, Facebook and Twitter offer opportunities to make one's voice heard. CCWs could speak out against issues harmful to children's development and aspects about which they are passionate. It could include aspects of child abuse, educational needs of poverty-stricken children, or the search for lost children. There are, for example, 1120 000 results on the Internet for the search of Madeleine McCann, the three-year girl who was abducted from her parents' holiday home in Portugal.

3.1.5 Chrono-context

Chrono-systems refer to the changes in the developing child and at the same time changes taking place in the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979:26). Aspects such as economic depression, political violence, or apartheid can influence children's spiritual development. However, how these events are mediated can reduce the impact (see Chapter 2 section 6.2). The CCW in the South African context needs to be sensitive about the after-effects of apartheid and violence that occurs in poorer areas. It may be expressed in bitterness, revenge,

¹⁰⁸ Child Law in South Africa was updated and greatly expanded after the Introduction to Child Law in South Africa (2000). Since South Africa ratified the UNCRC in 1995, new legislation followed, such as prohibiting child pornography. An annual review of the status of South Africa's children focusing on access to education takes place, as well as the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy development.

racism, hated and harmful actions that can negatively influence children's spiritual life. Forgiveness and the value for human dignity, God's love and care for all, need to be emphasised by the CCW.

3.1.6 God-context

The God-context is a reminder of Myers', Hughes' and Brewster's observations that the world is ultimately in God's care. God is actively present and involved in it and people are His representatives (see Chapter 4 section 3). It implies that God is already at work in the lives of children in poverty. This thought stimulates sustainable children's ministry as the CCW can draw from the knowledge that spiritual nurture is a team effort between the worker and the divine.

God-context as the Christian spiritual system, is also a reminder of Hiebert's concept of the excluded middle that renders a dualistic worldview (see Chapter 4 section 2.2). Material and spiritual worlds cannot be separated, especially in the spiritual nurture of children in poverty. In addition, the CCW cannot assume a role of being "god" to children, as all life contexts of all people are within and in submission to God.

It is seen that the spiritual nurturing of children in poverty needs to consider all the life contexts of children. The CCW becomes an additional significant context in the lives of children and everyone has to recognise that God's care encompasses all. The following section will consider spiritual nurture specifically related to being in relationship with children.

3.2 CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

CCWs ministering to poverty-stricken children are often overwhelmed on two accounts. Firstly, by the complexities of poverty and secondly, by the range of various curricula available for the spiritual nurturing of children. It creates frustration and tension within the workers when they are unable to address the needs of the children and to find a curriculum that is meaningful to the children (see Chapter 1 section 1). Furthermore, there has been an over-emphasis on curricula while neglecting the context of children, the role of the CCW and the focus on a Christ-centred ministry. The following section will consider Christ-centred Christian Children's ministry, the process of spiritual nurture and human dignity and children who sin and are sinned against.

3.2.1 Christ-centred Christian children's ministry

In the post-modern era of spiritual inquiry, (see Chapter 2 section 2.2.1) children's spirituality came under the spotlight of academic research. Hay and Nye (2006:65-78, 109) reason that children's innate spirituality is expressed in relational consciousness which is built on the three categories of awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing (see Chapter 3 section 3.2.1.2). Christian Children's spirituality also emphasises the conscious relational aspect but gave it a Christian impetus and direction by placing children's spirituality in relationship with God (see Chapter 3 section 3.2.2). The important aspect of awareness, mystery and value sensing is incorporated in the approach of the Search Institute's Centre for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence (see Chapter 3 section 4.3.5) and the contemplative ministry model such as Godly Play (see Chapter 3 section 5.3). However, the model seems to fail in application to a large number of children without adequate facilities as in the case of children's ministry in poor areas.

Nevertheless, when the scope of Christian children's ministry is widened and spiritual formation models become only an aspect of a more complete ministry, the elements of awareness, mystery and value sensing can find expression in relationships. Instead of using a contemplative model, the contemplative aspect becomes a basic section of departure for being in relationship. In contemplative children's ministry, *being* is more important than *doing*. The primary emphasis is on an encounter with God. Firstly, it places the prayer of the CCW centrally as a desire to dwell in the presence of God and to intercede for children. This helps the CCW "to see each [child's] face through Jesus' eyes" (Yaconelli, 2006:107). Secondly, it helps children to recognise God's presence in their lives (see Chapter 4 section 5.2.2). There is a need for children in poverty to be in a relationship with the CCW who directs them to sense God's awareness and value the mystery of God in their lives. Equally important, the CCW needs to be in relationship with God as the source of motivation for being in a meaningful relationship with the children (see Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.1).

Root (2007:77) reinforces the relational aspect as foundational to ministry from a Christological perspective. Jesus became God incarnate, not to influence people but to be in solidarity with humanity. Instead of using relationships to direct children's lives, relational ministry is therefore "companionship-oriented" and has a Christocentric ethic of place-sharing. Place-sharing requires that the CCW stand so close to the reality of children in poverty that their reality becomes that of the CCW. It also reveals the need to participate together in the presence of God (see Chapter 4 section 5.2.1). Westerhoff, in answering the question *Will our children have faith?*, identified the "hidden curriculum" of socialization and

argues that it is essential “to move away from developmentalism towards the creation of a relational model, of doing *with* instead of *to* and *for* children” (Westerhoff, 2008:355; and compare Chapter 3 section 4.5.2).

3.2.2 Process of spiritual nurture

The cognitive and stage elements of children’s spiritual development received prominence in the past. Although it does not totally disregard the cognitive aspect in spirituality, the focal aspect has moved to “the child in our midst” (White, 2010:244) that views and theologically interprets spirituality from the child’s perspective. Spirituality development and nurturing is best understood, as a process of a “pilgrim’s journey” with adults.

Holistic spiritual nurture includes the different life processes of children. Grobbelaar (2008:468-472, Hendriks & Grobbelaar 2009:353-357) identified five life processes: Growth (physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual); Nurturing (“Koestering”) expressed in loving care for all aspects of the child’s life; Socialising through relationships and community; Formation (“Vorming”) through in-depth relationships; Healing brokenness as seen in traumatised children (see Chapter 3 section 4.6). These aspects show a comprehensive summary of the needs of children in poverty.

3.2.3 Human dignity

Poverty has a devaluing effect and severely impedes the human dignity of children. The burden of poverty influences children’s lives by deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability (see Chapter 2 section 8.3). Even to label them as “poor children” or “children-at-risk” re-enforces deprivation as the basis of their identity. A child expressed the experience of marginalisation, stating that it “makes you feel like a lesser person” (see Chapter 2 section 8.1). It is imperative that poverty-stricken children are treated with dignity and respect because:

- God values all children

God’s character is revealed by God’s actions. When Ishmael, the marginalised child of Hagar, was crying in the wilderness, God paid special attention to him (see Chapter 4 section 4.1). God not only heard, but also made provision for Ishmael and revealed a plan and purpose for his life. God acknowledged the human dignity of Ishmael by respecting his life context, his natural bond with his mother and the mother-child relationship. Therefore, God answered Ishmael’s cry by speaking to Hagar. The narrative not only gives God’s perspective on human dignity of poverty-stricken children. It also offers the CCWs space to contemplate instances where the human dignity of South Africa’s poor children, deserving of respect and dignity, is violated.

- Children are made in the image of God

Irrespective of the theological interpretation of the term “image of God”, all scholars agree that it indicates value and dignity of all people, including poverty-stricken children (see Chapter 4 section 3.3.4). Without a doubt, working with children in poverty accompanied by unsightly surroundings can be a hideous undertaking. As a reminder that poverty-stricken children have inherent value and are to be treated with human dignity, researchers and practitioners coined terms to prevent marginalisation. Couture (2000:62) prefers the term *Godchildren* and reasons that an “irrational commitment to the well-being of the child” will result in the exchange of a mirrored image to a place “where Godchildren and God begin to have a human, incarnate face” (Couture, 2000:53). Couture uses the phrase *seeing the face of God in children* and encourages the CCW to find the face of God in the face of each child (Couture, 2000:51; compare Chapter 4 section 4.2). Jensen views children as the most vulnerable and used the concept *graced vulnerability* to create a compassionate understanding in their complexities of life (see Chapter 4 section 4.2). Unruh (2007:150), working with at-risk children reports, “Without effective intervention, 70 percent of children will likely follow their parent’s path into jail or prison.” She used a West African word “Amachi”, that means, “Who knows what God has brought us through this child” as a concept to remind one to keep the children’s dignity and value optimal in mind (Unruh 2007:150). Humane treatment of children starts in the way that CCWs think about children.

- Children sin but are also suffering at the hand of other’s sins.

A concern for the human dignity of children, who are sinned against, as is often the case in poverty-stricken children, is expressed by the rethinking of the classic definition of sin. Sin, in the context of vulnerable and suffering children, needs to include elements of sin committed by children and against children. Although they fall short of God’s glory, they are also oppressed by the sins of other people. The definition sin requires a more comprehensive theological understanding. Such a definition ought to incorporate all the aspects of sin in order to underscore the human dignity of children (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.2.1). Couture’s concept of the Han helps to consider the intensity of pain that children endure without the focus being on the perpetrator (see Chapter 4 section 4.2).

- Adults could unconsciously dehumanise children

CCWs should be aware of the complex, multidimensional aspects and effects of poverty on children seen through the lens of human dignity. They should be cautious not to have a god complex but instead, should guide children, as well as seeking to establish their own identity in God (see Chapter 4 sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3). Children are also marginalised due to an over-emphasis on what they will *become* in future while neglecting what they *are* at present (see section 3.1.1.1 above). CCWs should create a situation where the children’s ability

flourishes, instead of being restricted and impaired. Children are to be treated as equals whose needs matter, whose potential is developed to face life in poverty-stricken conditions, not with a dependence-syndrome but with a positive self-esteem. CCW's response to dehumanisation ought to resist the persons and the forces that seek to diminish children's worth as human beings. All forms of dehumanisation on all children should be resisted. On the other hand, a child-centred approach that includes child participation will allow children's voices and perspective to be heard and will give them dignity and value (see Chapter 2 section 3.2.5).

Working with children in poverty has a kaleidoscope of challenges and aspects. Therefore, there will most often be conflicting tensions that the CCW needs to consider and to apply wisdom before responding to the challenges.

3.3 CONFLICTING TENSIONS

Holistic Christian children's ministry in the context of poverty will present conflicting tensions to the CCW. This is partly the result of the multifaceted character of poverty, the limited resources of the CCW and the desire to achieve holistic ministry. These tensions may differ according to the different contexts in which they occur. The CCW needs to be aware of the tensions in ministry and face them in the best way possible. In the research the following tensions were identified:

3.3.1 Relation related tensions

Relationships, as part of the process in spiritual nurture of children in poverty, are an important aspect. The intensity of effective relationships requires companionship, as well as discovering with the children God's presence in their lives. Parker (2006:183) advises that the number of children should be limited to twenty and Couture (2000:61) urges CCWs to begin small in order to keep commitments. In person-to-person encounters, where the CCW is the place sharer of children in poverty, Root (2007:199) gives the counsel to be "in a relationship with a few." However, such advice based on the intensity of relationships and the large numbers of children in poverty that the CCW encounters creates conflict and tension. The CCW even with an accompanying team cannot achieve that kind of relationship. This creates the practical theology problem of the gap between theory and practice.

A proposition to solve the dilemma is that the children can be divided into three groups. It can be visualised as a three-tiered triangle with the largest group of children at the bottom and the smallest at the top. The large group of children attending the meeting will benefit from the interaction and other forms of ministry such as handing out of food. This will be the lowest

level of interpersonal interaction and at times can be described as the only connection. It has the disadvantage that although the relationship is genuine and sincere it is limited. The middle section of the triangle represents a core group of children who faithfully attend meetings. This allows the CCW to form deeper friendships with them. The top part of the triangle will represent a few children with whom close relationships can be formed. These relationships in the top part of the triangle, will also inevitably lead to working closely with the children's families as well. Root faced similar relational tensions in ministry and reasons that Christian workers "should have connections to all ... but be in a relationship with a few" (Root 2007:199). Furthermore, he reasons that "though you can be in relationship with a few, all adolescents should be invited into relationships of place-sharing" (Root 2007:200). He suggests facilitating possible place-sharers so that more young people can benefit from effective spiritual nurture. In children's ministry, these close relationships would usually come from counselling or from God working in the lives of both the CCW and the children. The relational triangle in Children's ministry can be visualised as seen below:

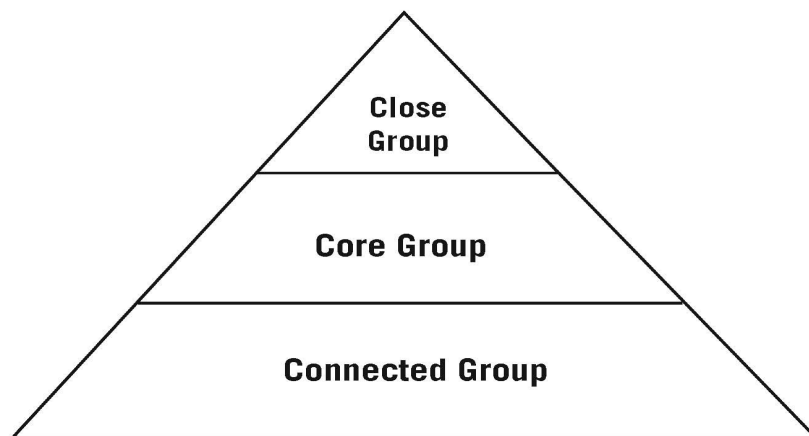


Figure 18: The relational triangle of the CCW

In addition to the problem of large numbers, there is also an age related tension. In chapter 1 (see section 6.2) the age for attending meetings is defined as primary school children. In practice though, poor children often have to care for their pre-primary school siblings, the identified group with the highest severity ratio of poverty. Can preschool children be sent back home knowing that it is the area where most child hunger exists? This is a tension that each CCW will have to face and treat with sensitivity.

A further rational concern of the CCW is the god complex as described by Myers (see Chapter 4 section 3.1.2). Although the CCW does take care not to fall into the trap of

assuming a role of superiority, the children sometimes project a god complex onto the CCW. They may view the CCW as the saviour and answer to their problems, especially when the CCW is from a higher socioeconomic background. The CCW has to protect the children from assuming the role of a beggar and to transfer their trust to and find their identity in God (see Chapter 4 section 5.2.3.4).

3.3.2 Resource related tensions

A holistic view of spiritual nurture of children in poverty is essential or else it will become a one-sided and compartmentalised children's ministry. The practical implication of a holistic view though, adds to the magnitude of the task. Whereas the specialised eye is needed to identify problems in the lives of middle and upper class children, with children in poverty problems are obvious and overwhelming. Holistic ministry includes taking care of all areas of life such as giving children something to eat, being involved in their education and personal and family problems. Resource related tensions include the financial constraint, time element and a shortage of human capacity.

The growing tension between time spent in counselling children and the need to pay attention to the other children at the same time, indicates that all children have needs and that more qualified CCWs are required (see Chapter 1 section 1). It would be beneficial to the whole community if the CCW could train people from the community to work with traumatised children.¹⁰⁹

CCWs, from a practical theological perspective, acknowledge that both evangelism and the social action are two sides of the same gospel coin and both are needed in holistic children's ministry. Moreover, they can view themselves as God's representatives to care for the whole of creation, not only for the future salvation of people (see Chapter 4 section 3.3.3). They may subscribe to the Lausanne Covenant (1974) saying that like "the two blades of a pair of scissors, two wings of a bird", social action and evangelism need each other (see Chapter 4 section 3.3.3). The social responsibility to the children suffers due to a lack of resources. The CCW may therefore affirm Paragraph 6 of the Lausanne Covenant which states that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary." However, in practice the opposite is often true, where well-functioning soup kitchens and feeding schemes exist while the aspect of spiritual nurture is neglected.

¹⁰⁹ Petra College presents a course on "Walking with Wounded children". It is also presented as a correspondence course by the South African College of Theology. The course lends itself to working with children in poverty by non-professionals.

3.3.3 Religion related tensions

Poverty covers all religions. Children's meetings draw all children irrespective of religious background. Children may represent a variety of denominational backgrounds as well as other religions and non-church children. The term "God" may be interpreted according to their own spiritual orientation. Spiritual development therefore needs to be the first priority. However, in working with poverty-stricken children evangelism calls for the accompanied social action. Spiritually nurturing of children from a Christian perspective necessitates a Christian focus in children's meetings. These tensions between denominations and religions are outside the boundaries of the present study. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that these tensions exist in practice (see Chapter 1 section 6.4 and Chapter 3 section 3.1).

4. FURTHER RESEARCH

In the process of the present research, different aspects came to light that need further investigation. The aspects for further research are as follows:

4.1 HERMENEUTICAL CHALLENGES

4.1.1 Contextualised hermeneutic

The research found that context is an important aspect in the spiritual nurture of children. Although children expressed their views regarding poverty, researchers did not hear their voices in relation to interpreting scriptures or other spiritual aspects. There is therefore a need for a contextual interpretation of scripture, incorporating careful listening to the voices of poverty-stricken children (see Chapter 2 section 8).

4.1.2 Western-minded hermeneutic

The majority of children's ministry material is written from a Western middleclass perspective (see Chapter 3 section 4.4.4.2). There is a need for material addressing the needs of poverty-stricken children in South Africa that will stimulate relationship and personal development.

4.2 CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

There is a move away from the cognitive developmental stage theories to relational contemplative children's ministry (see Chapter 3 section 4.3). Research on children's spiritual development, which includes a relational and contemplative approach, in application to the South African poverty context, is needed. At present South Africans contribute little research to address the spiritual development of poverty-stricken children in South Africa.

4.3 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The UN's Charter of the Rights of the Child focuses on all categories of children's rights, such as protection, prevention of dehumanisation and emphasising child participatory rights. Theological interpretations of the CRC based on the scriptural foundation of God's love in commanding the church to care for vulnerable children is needed (see Chapter 2 section 4.2.4; and section 2.1.4 above).

4.4 LACK OF COMPETENT COUNSELLORS

There is a need for research on the training of lay counsellors in addressing the problem of large groups of needy children in poor communities.

4.5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON CHILDREN IN POVERTY

At present most of the research data available on children in poverty is from an American perspective. In South Africa there is a need for empirical research on poverty-stricken children, especially focussing on spirituality. Research with a bottom-up approach that Keith White of the Child Theology Movement refers to as having "the child in our midst" is needed. Questions such as: what is the interplay between resilience and spirituality in the lives of children in poverty, how do children interpret their life's challenges and how do they affect spiritual development, need to be investigated. For example, what are children's experiences when they see their parents and siblings selling furniture for drugs and alcohol? How do children feel about themselves when they know that stealing is wrong, yet stealing has become a way to survive and to still their hunger pains? How do these broken relationships affect their spiritual lives? The voice of Sibanyoni (2009:11) who warns against the false philosophy that poverty breeds deep spirituality needs further investigation. As a child in poverty, he experienced that rebellious behaviour, drugs and alcohol, are the "opiate of the people."

4.6 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a need for further research to establish a clear theological framework to underpin Christian children's ministry among children in poverty in such a way that their human dignity is always taken very seriously.

5. CONCLUSION

The research question under investigation was, “*What is the role of the Christian children’s worker in the spiritual nurturing of children in the context of poverty?*” The research found that the role of the CCW is significantly determined by his or her own perceptions and perspectives. As a key component in ministry, the role of the CCW is to scrutinise the premise from which they build the ministry. In addition, the role will involve ministry to children in their interrelated life contexts so that their lives are totally affected. Ideally, spiritual nurturing includes being involved in all the life contexts of children. The CCW needs to guide children in the process of their spiritual development by balancing the content of the curriculum, the hidden curriculum of socialisation and a relational, companionship-orientated ministry. Conflicting tensions will remain a challenge but the CCW should strive to reach the highest good of children in the face of these challenges.

The research therefore found that, providing the practical theological framework established is followed, the CCW can play a valuable role as a spiritual nurturer of poverty-stricken children. The CCW should be encouraged to preserve the Christian focus of children’s ministry, knowing that they are in participation with God. The confident CCW will subsequently find the spiritual nurturing of children living in poverty extremely meaningful.

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