Children & Spirituality Symposium

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Centre for **Theology & Ministry**

Held each year at the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Melbourne, the Children & Spirituality Symposium seeks to explore some of the practical consequences from the latest research taking place around ministry with children and their families. Following the success of the 2009 and 2010 events, the 2011 Symposium featured significant contributions from a range of fantastic Australian thinkers.

In particular, gratitude is expressed to Dr. Glenn Cupit, Dr. Brendan Hyde, Beth Barnett and Claire Pickering for contributing so generously from their time, their experience and their research for the benefit of others. Whether you attended the Symposium or not, may you be challenged to reflect on your engagement with children and their families as you read this booklet.

Chris Barnett (September, 2011)

CHILDHOOD AS A CHALLENGE TO TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY

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Theology has always reflected the perspective of the theologian, almost inevitably male, and always adult. Childhood has either been ignored or dealt with by applying propositions about adults to children, whether that was appropriate or not. Passages about children are construed as referring to disciples, and in some cases are even translated todisguise the reference to children. Consequently, children are devalued in Christian theology, and conclusions drawn about them often contradict specific scriptural references to them.

When I first started to study the theology of childhood I was assured by several Bible scholars that it was a waste of time because the Bible had almost nothing to say about children. What they meant was that the Bible has little systematic theology about childhood. But children pepper the biblical narratives and there is a clear biblical understanding of, and attitude to, children. The other thing I was told was as a warning, that the theology of childhood challenges every doctrine and practice of the church.

Foolishly I persisted, and twenty-four years later I am still wrestling with the implications because, while the assurance was wrong, the warning was not. However, today I will only identify a few themes where, if we include children in our frame of reference, we are confronted with challenges. These are exemplary, not comprehensive.The themes are:

- The nature of faith;

- The nature of worship;

- How to live as a Christian;

- Children's relationship to God;

To understand these themes, we must identify whom the biblical authorsconsidered a 'child'.

Who is a child?

Biblical childhood was functional, based on dependence on the direction and nurture of others, rather than being between birth and some particular age. The terms for

children describe a characteristic (like 'toddler') or limitation (as 'pre-pubescent').[1] Children lacked moral discernment, ability to understand, practical sense, ability to express themselves, and power.[2] It is childlike to ask, to trust that your needs will be met, and to have God meet them.[3] Paul assumed 'openness of mind' was characteristic of childhood.[4]

That is, children are those who cannot exercise mature competency, or lack the capacity to act effectively on their own behalf. They are necessarily under care and authority, and they identified with, and shared common fate with, adults, especially their parents, unless God directly intervened on their behalf. Because they had no-one to defend them, God became "father of orphans, defender of widows".[5] God's special concern for the parentless child gives an assured status in the faith community to children without familial status.

'Child' encompassed those who shared such characteristics either involuntarily, as the retarded, the possessed, and even the helplessly ill,[6] or voluntarily, as disciples were urged to do. Childhood ended when the person demonstrated the ability to act as an autonomous spiritual entity, most clearly evident when they rejected the ethical or religious demands of their household and community. So, a child is a person of any age, though normally young, who is unable, for any reason, to exercise autonomous competence but relies on others to take care of, and decide for, them.

The nature of faith

Let's start with an event in the life of Jesus, one of a few that deal specifically with children.

So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. …..Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck. (Matthew 18: 2, 5-6)

The most obvious reading is that these 'little ones' are children. Jesus describes

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1   *ben* and *yalad* -descendant; *brephos* - newly born; *huios* - acknowledged inheritor; *nepios* - limited in speech; *olel* and *ul* - suckling; *paidion* - little, or under authority, or requiring direction or education; *taph* - little; *teknon* - born; and *zera* - progeny.
2   Deuteronomy 1:39; 1 Kings 3:9; Hebrews 5:14; Nehemiah 8:1-3; 1 Kings 3:7; Jeremiah 1:1-7; Galatians 4:1-9.
3   Matthew 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13
4   2 Corinthians 6:13
5   Psalm 68:5; also Exodus 22:21-24
6   Mark 2: 5

them as those "...who have faith in me".[7] This is only 'incongruous'[8] if one's theology, by requiring a level of understanding as the basis for faith, denies the possibility that children can exercise it. The phrase has two possible meanings. It could differentiate 'faithful' children from 'unfaithful'. This is hard to reconcile with the child Jesus called to him, whose faith was not apparently ascertained, and it means Jesus excluded most children from divine concern which contradicts other statements he made. That faith in Jesus is characteristic of children is a claim of great gravity. Harkness says: "When Jesus challenged adults to welcome children, it was because in children he saw qualities which are marks of the 'faith-ful' person, but which tend to be 'enculturated out' of people in the course of their cultural conditioning."[9] Aleshire shares this viewpoint: "...children's faith is not unerringly wonderful. It has fault lines and pitfalls, just like the faith adults have. Children's faith is not magically pure. They quickly learn about sin and the shadow side of self. But children can be - are - people of faith."[10]

Faithfulness is not lasting for all children because they can be "brought down" (18:6). This is not faith that endures; 'saving faith', as Salvationists use the term. Yet Jesus asserted that some manner of faith, fundamental to childhood, was important to God. Gower explains this as grace: "Only if God abolishes means of approach to him through merit, qualifications, qualities, deeds, are all men equally able to approach Him, and that which all men, women and children are able to exercise quite simply, is faith."[11]

What challenge does this pose for our theology? Does it suggest that association of faith with beliefs is ill founded? Does faith transcend the limits of the Christian community as far as children and those like them are concerned? What is the nature of this faith that all men, women and children are able to exercise? If children are 'faithful', what do they teach us about the nature of what is required of the faithful person? How does the faith of childhood mature yet remain child-like?

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7   Typical of the need to avoid applying the passage to children is Pridmore who sees this statement both here and in Mark 9 as the early church applying a saying originally about children to disciples. [Pridmore, J. S. (1977). The New Testament theology of childhood. Hobart: Buckland, p.125.] Yet, if Mark is the oldest synoptic gospel, the reference to faith is in the earliest document and must have been removed by Luke. This contradicts Pridmore's account of increasing reference to disciples by the early church. Matthew focuses the passage on faith being in the person of Jesus, the only Synoptic to do so, but why this should "make plain" that Matthew was thinking of "weak Christians" is unexplained. Argyle sees the reference to children as inescapable and therefore concludes that, "...these little ones are old enough to be believers". [Argyle, A. W. (1963). The Gospel according to Matthew. Cambridge: The University Press, p.138.]

8   Pridmore, J. S. (1977), op. cit., p.157.

9   Harkness, A. (1996) Intergenerational Christian education: Reclaiming a significant educational strategy in Christian faith communities. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, p.228.

10   Aleshire, D. O. (1988).Faithcare: Ministering to all God's people through the stages of life. Philadelphia: Westminster, p.99.

11   Gower, R. R. (1971) Child development and its relationship to children's evangelism.Unpublished manuscript, pp.1, 3. This is difficult to reconcile with his later demand that faith requires "an element of understanding".

The nature of worship

In the final week of his life Jesus defends some children.

> At the sight of the wonderful things he did and of the children shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David' in the Temple, the chief priests and scribes were indignant. 'Do you hear what they are saying?' they said to him. 'Yes,' Jesus answered 'have you never read this:
>
> *By the mouths of children, babes in arms,*
> *you have made sure of praise?'* (Matthew 21: 15-16)

Matthew's narrative begins with a parade during which Jesus gained a retinue of children who, like most children, lacked a proper sense of decorum. The adults stopped when they reached the Temple; their children did not. We can imagine children crowding around the centre of attention, wriggling their way to the front and, after each healing, renewing the chant they learnt during the parade, saying precisely what the adults said (21:9,15). They did not understand the historical, political and theological implications of acknowledging Jesus as the Son of David. Their praise was spontaneous for person and occasion; not considered for content.

Jesus responded to the priests' indignation by quoting the Septuagint version of Psalm 8:2.[12]Rather than the immediate children, he referred to the youngest possible: nepios, (pre-verbal child) and thelazonton, (sucking ones). His opponents complain about children's noise in the Temple but the One the Temple honoured ensured himself of praise by giving voices to those too young to forms words.[13]Considering the range of sounds which infants make, their theological sophistication, and stability of their faith commitment, God's conception of praise is confronting. The ability to respond to God is not contingent on language, understanding, conviction, nor even decorum. Children's responses are not insignificant; their source is in God. Rather, children's praise "...doesn't need maturing, it doesn't need refining, it is 'perfect praise' just as it is now."[14]This also contradicts any theology that asserts that children are born so marked by sin as to be unacceptable to God.

How can the praise of the church reflect praise that God finds acceptable? What have we to learn from children about the nature of perfect praise? What do we say when we send children out from worship because they disrupt adult worship? Could seeking order and decorum in worship militate against those for whom such characteristics are alien?

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12   The Hebrew reads: "Above the heavens is your majesty chanted by the mouths of children, babes in arms". Jesus quotes the Greek: "Out of the mouths of infants and sucking ones you prepared praise".

13   Schweizer diminishes this teaching about children, by interpolating regularly the phrase "little ones", which is elsewhere used of disciples, but is not used in this passage at all. [Schweizer, E. (1976). The good news according to Matthew. London: SPCK, pp.407-409]

14   Copsey, K. (1994). Become like a child: Working with 5 to 7+ in church. London: SU, p.69.

How to live as a Christian

> '… the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said, 'I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 18:1-4)

The relationship between God and children is not a marginal adjunct to adult relationship to God. Rather, it specifies the relationship with humans that God desires. A Psalmist takes the trustful contentment of the young child in its mother's arms as his desire. (Psalm 131) Relationship with God is not characterised by adult sophistication.

Jesus identified children as models for adults to emulate if they were even to enter the Kingdom. (Matthew 18:3) This compels us to consider how adults are to imitate children. Egger's suggestionthat Jesus meant "as one who has neither obedience nor obligation to the Law"[15] is interesting but contradictshis attitude expressed elsewhere (Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 16:17) and ignores the detail of what Matthew records. His audience would interpret this as narration of an event, not as text. Rather than talk about children as an abstract category; Jesus insinuated a very concrete child into the discussion. Disciples were not to become "like children" but "as this little child". (18:4)[16] Moreover, he was quite specific about the similarity required. Adults must become "little" (*tapeinosei*),[17] which carries the sense of status or estate rather than mere size. For disciples concerned about status, Jesus took a specific child as an example of those who have no power, no rights, and no position, and can only approach God as a small child approaches their father. Pridmore helpfully calls attention to Jesus' own habitual and unprecedented use of the Aramaic infant term "Abba" to address God.[18] "We must forget our Christian and romantic views of childhood and realise that, at the time of Jesus, children were pieces of property without any rights, powerless to defend themselves, they had to rely totally on others."[19]

Is the view that adults are more fully spiritual than children sustainable?Is Christian education that suggests children learn spirituality from us allowed?What are the implications of saying children arethe model of the spirituality God desires of all

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15   Egger, W. παιδιον, Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament. Cited in Copsey.
16   McDermott deals with an abstract child who admits their faults, learns in silence and accepts 'discipline' for wrongdoing. No such child exists and it misses Jesus' point. [McDermott, G. R.(1995). Seeing God: 12 reliable signs of true spirituality. Downers Grove: IVP, pp.167-168.]
17   Pridmore follows older translations in seeing tapeinosei as a reference to the subjective quality of 'humility' and therefore has to divide 18:4 from 18:3. [Pridmore, J. S. (1977), op. cit., pp.149-151.] The Jerusalem translation, by capturing the alternative sense of the child's objective state, is both consistent with Jesus' argument and allows the more likely conclusion that consecutive verses are related.
18   Pridmore, J. S. (1977), op. cit., p.154. The closest English equivalent is 'Dada'. There is an echo of Psalm 131.
19   Meier, J. P.(1980). Matthew. Wilmington: Glazier, p.201.

people? Will adults only achieve mature spirituality by emulating the spirituality of children?Can we only foster children's spirituality by ourselves adopting the humility and spiritual helplessness that comes naturally to children?

Children's relationship to God

This theme cannot be exemplified by a single biblical passage. Instead I offer the outcome of two decades studying all the Biblical passages that refer to children as part of my doctoral study of children's spirituality. I present it in depth in my book on children's spirituality but in this address I can only state my conclusions and ask you to explore them with me later. I offer a series of assertions, some of which have sub-conclusions.

Children share a distinct relationship with God simply through being children.

- All children belong within the Kingdom of God in their own right;

- The existing relationship between children and God is the model of a desirable relationship between adults and God;

- The spiritual obligations of children are limited and directly related to their characteristics as children;

- God shows interest in the lives of individual children.

- God's acceptance of children is unconditional.

- God is well disposed towards children regardless of accidents of birth, membership of a community of faith, or rites related to that membership;

- God's acceptance of children is independent of any faith commitment they may or may not make;

- Children are not held responsible for their own or humanity's sin.

Children's encounters with God's Spirit have impacts upon them consistent with their nature as children.

- Children are open to being controlled by God's Spirit to fulfil its purposes,

- Spirituality totally pleasing to God is fully consistent with any phase of childhood and may be marked by evidence of the Spirit's work in their lives.

- Spirituality develops as children mature and children are active participants in that development.

Children's spirituality is usually mediated rather than through direct encounter.

- The household, and especially those who fulfil parental rôles, are central to the children's developing spirituality;

- The spirituality of parents is imputed to their children;

- While children are not held responsible by God for sin in which they are involved, they are identified with the spirituality of their households and local community and share the immediate common consequences of that identification;

- Sources of spiritual encounters other than household and community (e.g., media, education) also mediate spirituality to children.

- Children encounter spiritual evil and cannot resist being influenced to their detriment.

Each of those assertions requires unwrapping, and if we take them seriously, they would require us to rethink much of our teaching and practice. But the critical question is whether they reflect what the Bible and, particularly, what Jesus, teach us about children and, through them, about what God requires of us as individuals, and as churches.

FOREGROUNDING THE CHILD'S VOICE IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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Although we strive to listen to and honour the voices of children in our ministry, the reality is that often this is not achieved. Could it be that the structures in which we carry out our ministry actually seek to silence children's voices by labelling them and (albeit unintentionally) exert power of them? This is known as "colonization". Can children and family ministry be explored in another way - a way which seeks to reclaim and foreground the voice of the child? This paper will explore such a possibility.

Three short vignettes

In beginning this short paper, I would like to consider three short vignettes about children in the Church:

1.   *Rebecca was baptized at two weeks of age. Every week she was taken to the parish Eucharist. She was a great delight to the congregation, which consisted largely of older people. As a baby she was "shared" by the congregation until the moment came to receive the Eucharistic elements, at which point her parents held her for a blessing. As she grew and became more vocal, she realized, one Sunday, that she was "missing out" since she did not receive the bread. It seemed she was not accepted. Rebecca asked, "Where's mine?"* (cf Carter, 2007).

2.   *To prepare the congregation for this transgenerational and child-friendly worship, I preached a sermon about the necessity of having the whole community together worshipping God as an act of spiritual formation. The negative response I got from one member of the congregation was "Having children in the worship service disturbs my worship of God."* (cf Beckwith, 2004).

3.   *I have a friend who is the children's pastor at a large midwestern church. Each week he has to give a report to the senior pastor citing how many children have been "saved" in his programs.* (cf Beckwith, 2004).

Each of these three vignettes is an example of how the Church, albeit unintentionally, silences, excludes, or treats children as a special case in need of salvation. Each is an

example of how the Church is involved in the act of colonizing children. What does this word "colonizing" mean? How might it be relevant to our work in children's ministry?

Colonization

When we think about the word "colonization", we tend to think about the physical taking over or settling of land by a so-called dominant nation to build an empire, or to create imperialist structures. For example, the British colonized Australia, and the Portuguese colonized Brazil with such aims in mind. It is also a concept that tends to be associated with the past and with conquests that no longer occur. However, when colonization is limited to a particular time and place in history, we miss seeing similar experiences which even today impact on marginalised people all over the world. In other words, colonization still happens today. There are many unchallenged legacies of colonialism, typically expressed in the fixing of socially constructed categories as truth.

Similarly, colonization has often been associated with indigenous people, and the way in which the so-called dominant culture exerted power over them. Much has been written about this (for example, Battiste, 2000; Smith, 2001). However, Swadener and Mutua (2007) also stress the importance of considering colonization beyond indigenous contexts. If we broaden our understanding of colonization in this way, then it can be seen as a way of "representing, producing/inscribing, and consuming the Other through silencing and denial of agency" (p. 191) which stretches beyond specific places and times in history. In other words, the process of colonization is recognised as being at work whenever particular structures act to silence specific groups of people, such as children, through the ways they construct and consume knowledge and experiences about such groups.

This is interesting, because, generally speaking, children in recent times have been given considerable voice and agency in all sorts of arenas in life. Charters such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gave children the right to participate in decisions which affect them (Article 12), the right to freedom of expression (Article 13), and the right to thought, conscience and religion (Article 14). As a result, children are today are increasingly heard in relation to all sorts of issues, including opinions in matters of teaching, health, family separation and child protection. In general terms, children now have more opportunities to express their views and to shape their experiences than ever before in history (Adams, Hyde, & Woolley, 2008).

So, why then, when it comes to religious and spiritual matters, are children's voices effectively silenced? Why are children often (although not always) seen as the "church of tomorrow" – when they have grown and matured – rather than as having a positive contribution to make in the here-and-now? Why, in some Christian

traditions, are children denied the opportunity to come to the table and to share in Communion, until they are deemed as being old enough? It is as if the church sees them as not ready, that is, they are lacking in some way and in need of salvation. This is colonization because it exerts power of children, and "keeps them in their place". It marginalizes them, categorizes them, and silences them. Of course the Church did not deliberately set out to do this (…or did it?). Nonetheless, by denying children voice and agency, the Church has colonized them…and dare I say it, most of us who actively work in children's ministry.

Postcolonial perspectives

Perhaps we need to begin to look at children and children's ministry in our communities through a "postcolonial", or "decolonizing lens". What does this mean? It concerns the process of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding the voices of those who are silenced through colonizing practices (Swadener & Mutua, 2007), in this instance, children. It also concerns questions of privilege, and of the decentering of privilege (Rogers & Swadener, 1999). But we need to be careful. Decolonization does not consist of a neat set of simple solutions. There is no one model for decolonial practice, since such a model would in fact be likely to colonize (Cannella and Viruru, 2004). Those who attempt to create such models would create for themselves positions as colonizers. That is why, in this paper, I do not suggest any specific ways in which to address this issue. Rather, decolonial practice must hold in tension a number of ideas which seem opposite to each other. It must be emergent while at the same time planned. It must be individual while at the same time community-based. Further, it must "recognise dominant discourses while at the same time turning them upside down" (p. 124).

However, it possible to ask questions which may lead us to reconsider our practice in children's ministry. Adapted from the work of Cannella and Viruru (2004), the following questions may provide a critical disposition from which those of us in children's ministry might begin to view (or at least to consider) our work with children through a decolonizing lens:

- Is children's ministry/how is children's ministry producing and perpetuating forms of exclusion through practices?

- What is the position of privilege that is created by unconscious ways of functioning that is/are Western and/or dominant (for example, knowledge, theories)?

- How can we in children's ministry honour the voices of children without imposing predetermined ideas of saving, as well as who needs saving, from what, and why?

- How can our work in children's ministry be conceived of in ways which places value on the children's experiential ways of knowing?

- Can children's ministry honour both the creativity of the children as well as being faithful to the orthodoxy of the Tradition?

- How can we in children's ministry critique our own practice to ensure that power is not generated for one group over another?

In essence, each of the above questions really asks us to consider the ways in which we can consciously foreground and begin to take seriously the voices and actions of children in our ministry with them. Do we authentically seek to include them – in worship, in decision-making, in planning, in discussion? Do we view children as members of the church in the here-and-now, rather than as 'future members' who do not as yet have a voice? Do we take seriously their experiences and attempts to know God? Jerome Berryman (2009) reminds us that children are, in fact, theologians who seek meaning and direction in life in relation to their existential issues and concerns. Do we really see children in this way? Do we respect their theological inquiry (albeit that it might seem or appear to be somewhat different from our own)?

Perhaps, in some instances, we believe that we already take seriously the voices of. Maybe so. But is our inclusion of children tokenistic? Do we consciously act on what they have to say (or teach us)? Or, as Peter Privett, a Godly Play trainer from England asked recently when he was in Sydney, do we actually allow children to minister to us (as well as us as adults ministering to them)? Similarly, and in a very provocative way, Berryman (2009) challenges us to think of children as sacraments, and as a means of grace:

> The children's faces embody Christ's presence at least as much as the bread and wine do...Part of the strangeness of thinking about *children* as sacraments is that we are accustomed to thinking about sacraments as being something we can control better than children, like a touch, oil, water, bread, or wine (p. 231).

Considering our work in children's ministry from a postcolonial perspective enables us to ask and to ponder such questions. Indeed, considering our work in children's ministry from postcolonial perspectives enable us to dare to imagine and think of children as sacrament – as signs of God's presence – not in some future manifestation of the church, but rather in the here-and-now. In doing so, congregations will become health places, and the church will no longer be a place of ambivalence, ambiguity, or indifference to anyone. As Berryman (2009) reminds us, the church will be a place of grace.

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FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE: TRENDS, TRANSITIONS AND CHALLENGES

- Claire Pickering

During 2010, I completed a field placement for ministerial formation at the Christian Research Association, and I primarily investigated and learned about the perceptions and experiences of young people (aged from 13-24). For example, the major influences in life (what shapes their sense of 'self' and identity), and the place of religion and spirituality (affiliation, attendance, belief and the Bible). In reflecting on various data and findings, it occurred to me that aspects of this reveal particular trends or transitions that happen from late childhood to adolescence, and this provides some significant insights for ministry, including some challenges and potential approaches. In this paper, I would like to share some of these reflections.

Family and Friendships

When asked about the major influences in their life, young people commonly identify relationships as most significant, especially with family and friends. These relationships impact on their identity, their sense of worth and purpose, and overall wellbeing. During childhood and early teenage years, family relationships are usually more prominent (over friends), due to their dependence on the guidance, provision and support of parents or guardians. However, by late teenage years and early adulthood, friendships often become more important, due to their increasing need for independence, freedom and expression. Survey data shows that two-thirds of young people, between ages 13-15, report a high satisfaction with 'life at home', which is most likely greater when they are younger and decreases with age (see Table 1). In turn, 'deep friendships' become more important as they get older (see Table 2).

Table 1.   Level of satisfaction with 'life at home'

	Age 13-15	Age 16-18
High	67%	53%
Moderate	25%	35%
Low level	8%	12%

Table 2.   Importance of 'deep friendships' (score /5)

	Age 13-15	Age 16-18	Age 19-24
5 (/5)	63%	66%	72%
4 (/5)	28%	27%	21%

(Hughes 2007, 77, 81)

These trends are most likely related to the many physiological and socio-psychological changes that occur over these ages. For example, the process of identity formation and the growing need for autonomy often leads to conflict with parents or guardians about what is appropriate (in terms of values, attitudes, behaviour, appearance and

friends). Perceived like-mindedness, sympathy, acceptance and belonging are, in turn, found with friends and in peer groups. Nevertheless, many young people express an admiration and respect for their parents or guardians, appreciate their care and support and acknowledge the sacrifices made. A level of continued communication and guidance is also valued. Survey data shows that nine out of ten young people, between ages 13-18, are definitely likely or quite likely to talk about 'problems or decisions' with their parents or guardians (Hughes 2007, 78-79).

In terms of ministry, from late childhood to adolescence, one challenge is to avoid wholly and unintentionally supporting the trend (away from parents, towards friends), and giving this undue weight in activities, systems and strategies. For example, interview data shows that some young people recall reading the Bible, hearing faith stories, sharing devotions and praying with their parent/s or grandparent/s (who attended a faith community) when they were younger, and this gradually ceasing as they got older.

Some youth pastors and leaders in churches, and chaplains in schools feel that parents or grandparents steadily withdraw as the children get older due to diminishing confidence and greater uncertainty with what/how to discuss faith and spiritual practices, and integrate this with the emerging alternative interests of young people. Others also feel that parents, and other adults in their communities, expect them to be principally responsible for the faith formation and religious commitment of young people. Some perceive their communities as overstating the role of youth groups and peer centred approaches, and giving less attention to concurrently fostering meaningful cross-generational relationships and discussion.

Many youth pastors and leaders, and chaplains certainly value the continued involvement of parents, grandparents and other adults where possible. Without a wider base of involved adult support, and purposeful dialogue and sharing, and without strategies, activities and resources that encourage this, it seems difficult to adequately stimulate and sustain the interest and engagement of young people as they get older. There is perhaps a need to better equip, resource and inspire parents, grandparents and other adults in the vicinity, to remain or become involved in the faith formation and commitment of young people from late childhood to adolescence.

Religion and Spirituality

When asked about the place of institutional religion and spiritual practice, young people commonly portray a scenario of steady decline and detachment, in terms of affiliation, attendance, belief and confidence. Census data in 1996 and 2006, for young people aged between 14-25, shows a decrease in identification with a Christian denomination, and an increase in identification with 'other' religion (particularly Islam

and Buddhism) and 'no religion' (see Table 3). For those who identify with a Christian denomination, low levels of attachment are often expressed. They do not necessarily feel bound or loyal to a particular church or denomination, and will often move from one to another with ease (for example, from Lutheran to Pentecostal to Baptist, or from Catholic to Baptist to Church of Christ). In addition, survey data for worship service attendance, for young people when they were aged 11-12 and currently, shows a significant decrease for 'monthly' attendance and a significant increase for 'never' (see Table 4). As such, in comparing the data for affiliation and attendance, it can be concluded that identification does not lead to institutional practice.

Table 3. Religious identification

	Christian	Other	None
1996	67%	4%	29%
2006	57%	8%	35%

(Australian Census 1996, 2006)

Table 4. Attendance of worship services

	Monthly	Yearly	Never	Missing
Age 11-12	28%	36%	32%	4%
Current	8%	31%	61%	0%

(Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2009)

In terms of belief, survey data shows that almost two-thirds of young people either indicate 'belief in God' with some certainty/doubt (41%), or belief in a 'Higher Power' (22%). The remainder indicate no belief or 'don't know' (37%). As such, comparing this with the data for affiliation, it is possible to conclude that religious identification does not prompt or preclude belief in something transcendent. However, such belief is gradually decreasing overall, with more young people indicating that they used to believe in God but not anymore (19%), and fewer indicating that they believe in God now but did not before (4%). The place of institutional religion and spiritual practice for young people, from early adolescence onwards, can certainly be characterised by decline and detachment.

These trends probably partly reflect low levels of confidence in religious institutions, with 51% of young people indicating 'little' confidence or 'none', and only 19% indicating a 'great deal' or 'complete' confidence. According to Frame (2009, 80), declining religious affiliation, attendance and confidence, and overall detachment from religious institutions "...has to do with believing, belonging and behaving...", and issues or changes in one or more of these areas. For example, in terms of 'believing', the diminishing of held beliefs, struggles with doubt, and/or attraction to other belief systems. In terms of 'belonging', recurrent disappointments or conflict within communities, and/or increasing tensions between individual experiences and perceptions and religious teachings and practices. In terms of 'behaving', the lessening of parental influence, increasing external commitments or influences in employment and relationships, and/or the recognition of a widening gap between religious ethics and personal ideals. Such factors are most likely contributing to these trends.

In addition, importantly, Tacey (2003, 78-79) identifies a 'paradigm gap' between the expressed or inherent religious and spiritual concerns of younger people, and the formal practices and perceptions of institutional religion. Whereby this is not "…a generation gap that will be healed in time and with attention to the different needs and demands of the young and the old", but is rather "…a 'lack of fit' between different models or paradigms of the sacred". Arguably, a way to understand this 'paradigm gap' is by drawing links between macro eras of communication and aspects of faith communities (see Table 5), wherein 'Digital' represents the concerns of newer generations (young people), and 'Print' and 'Broadcast' represent the practices and perceptions of older generations (often the leaders) and the institution itself.

Table 5. Comparing church in different eras of communication

	Print	Broadcast	Digital
Leader credibility	credentials	charisma	connection
Worship program	ordered/liturgical	crowd/entertaining	personal experience
Music style	hymns	praise & worship	faith stories
Symbol	a pulpit	a stage	a chair
Discipling	head knowledge	head & emotion	holistic
Danger	intellectualism	experience	superficiality

(Hinks, 2006, 141)

In terms of ministry, from late childhood to adolescence, one challenge is to understand and begin to redress these trends for affiliation, attendance, belief and confidence, by working towards building and sustaining more meaningful and authentic bonds and engagement. Overall, religious institutions and practices are not connecting well with young people. For example, interview data shows that many young people have mixed attitudes about worship services in church/chapel and religious education in school. Many have found leaders and church communities welcoming and friendly, and have sometimes found the content helpful and motivating. However, many have also found the content irrelevant and boring, and are deterred by the formality and language of traditional services, the music and lecture-style delivery, and also sometimes the 'full on' experiential dimension of charismatic services.

In addition, when asked about Bible engagement, young people indicate various factors that encourage or hinder this. Survey data shows that less than half of young people between the ages of 11-18 report positive attitudes to the Bible. Many of these young people see the Bible as 'God's word', holy/sacred, or an ancient text, and emphasise the 'truth' of the stories and miracles within. They comment that the

Bible should be treated with respect, and find the content practical and relevant, in terms of offering an understanding of God, morals or guidelines for life, and help or assurance. However, over half identify various barriers that hinder their engagement. More young people see the Bible as a 'book' and work of story-telling, containing 'myths and legends', but largely acknowledge the rights of others and freedom of belief. They reveal uncertainty, scepticism and disbelief, and deep exegetical questions regarding its transmission and composition, and its completeness and inherent contradictions. Many also perceive other issues, including academic issues (such as, creation/Christian narratives and evolution/scientific theory), and social issues (such as, Catholic attitudes to contraception).

In terms of ministry, from late childhood to adolescence, one challenge is to begin addressing such exegetical questions and concerns. Young people can feel isolated or excluded from the processes and outcomes in religious institutions, both churches and schools, in terms of decision-making, production and contribution. They can perceive religion and associated organisations as judgemental, aggressive or hypocritical, and think that their lifestyle, appearance or ethic is just not compatible. Interview data shows that many young people want less teaching and lecturing, and more discussion and mentoring, particularly regarding the Bible. For example, generating spaces and being invited to ask exegetical questions, to understand the history of the Bible, the order and genre of Biblical books, and acquire different reading methods and skills, in order to form their own ideas, discuss perspectives and connect. It seems that many younger people would appreciate such opportunities in trusted groups and/or with a mentor, in churches and schools, in worship services and religious education classes, to have the chance to establish meaningful and authentic bonds and engagement.

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CHILDREN OF FLESH AND SPIRIT:
'1 CORINTHIANS 2 AND 3

Elizabeth Waldron Barnett

The compulsion to define things, ideas, identities, even ourselves oppositionally, against something else is a powerful and pervasive psychological reflex. As black is to white, as off is to on, as hot is to cold, as right is to wrong (and isn't that a favourite among us?) and so often in relation to life in Christ, as flesh is (antithetically) to Spirit.

But we are also taken by the ideas of 'both, and' not either/or.

'Black and White' thinking, we soon recognise is clunky and forces distinctions that do not reflect our lived experience. We yearn for a more nuanced recognition of variations and shades. Qualitative evaluations are important, along with quantitative.

Paul is a nimble and nuanced thinker. We become breathless trying to keep up with his darting and swerving and leaping agile logic.

Before we attempt to run his gauntlet we are wise to do a few stretches, and limber ourselves up, readying ourselves for the twists and turns and the cracking pace he will set.

In this paper, we are going to run the first leg of 1 Corinthians – chapters 1-3. We are particularly watching for the way Paul will take the corner from chapter 2 into chapter 3 – from language of the ψυχικὸς – σαρκίνοις;- πνευματικοῖς into a metaphor embracing the image of infants, babies, feeding on milk.

> " And so Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for Solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you , are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul' and another 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human. "

Sometimes we find it impossible to keep abreast with Paul, and so we tail a commentator who tails Paul. A commentator makes it easier to keep up from a little distance behind, but in doing so, we do not feel the turns as sharply.

I wish to highlight some aspects of translation and interpretation and the way these make the text an easier run for us, but which ultimately mean that we have not actually run the same course as Paul. To demonstrate this we will follow the coaching

of one particular commentator, CK Barrett. Barrett represents solid, established scholarship, written in reference to a range of other thinkers. His reading of Paul is mainstream and while making a contribution to the conversation, resembles, in this part, the general consensus of views.

Let's listen to Barrett's explanation of Paul's use of these terms -

> There is a Christian wisdom, and there is a difference between infant and mature, natural and spiritual , Christians.[1]

And so his translation of 1 Corinthians 2:6 -

> We do however speak wisdom among mature Christians (teleioi)

Immediately we are stuck by his 'Christian' language – nomenclature that is completely outside Paul or the Corinthian community's experience. So let us hear Barrett further as he develops a theology of the relationship between these key terms.

> Christian wisdom … is given at the disposition of the Spirit. The gift is however one for the *mature Christian*. For this word in Paul (as applied to men) see xiv.20; phil iii.15; col 1. 28; iv. 12. It is not common in the Greek Old Testament, but it's use there suggests ethical perfection (eg Wisdom ix. 6; Sirach xliv. 17); elsewhere it is generally used of those who are full-grown, adult. The sense here is given by ii. 12, iii. 1; compare also the spiritual man of ii.15. By their behaviour the Corinthians Christians show themselves, in general, to be still infants; thus they are not mature, not spiritual and not ready for Christian wisdom. … The significant point here is that Paul does not have a simple gospel of the cross for Babes (iii.1) and a different wisdom-gospel for the perfect (teleioi). All Christians are potentially perfect or mature in Christ (Col i. 28) though only some are actually what all ought to be.

In taking Barrett as conversation partner, I do so in order to challenge the mainstream reading in a few strategic places.

A common reading of 1 Corinthians chapters 2 and 3, conflates the reference to $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\iota$ (2 verse 6) and νήπιοι (3 verse 1) bringing them together as contrasting opposites. Before deciding on an evaluation of νήπιοι (infants) and before importing the qualitative condition of age retrospectively on $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\iota$, we may read Chapter 2 verse 6 remaining open to contextual meanings for $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\iota$, that are not contingent on a contrast with infants.

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1   C.K. Barrett, *A commentary of the first Epistle to the Corinthians* (London : Adam & Charles Black, 1968) p.68

The translation of τέλειοι takes two distinctly different forms across the Palline corpus. The semantic domain of τέλειοι encompasses completion, perfection, end goals. But here, as in some other places, when speaking about people, 'mature' is used. This distinction should not go unchallenged. Is Christ's 'power… made perfect in weakness' or made 'mature' (2 Corinthians)? In Romans 12, is the will of God 'good and acceptable and perfect' or 'mature'?

Thus, in 1 Corinthians 2:6, is it among the "perfect" or among the "mature" that wisdom is spoken. I would suggest that the context of looking beyond what has been seen or heard and beyond the dimensions and authorities of this age, suggests that neither 'mature' nor 'perfect' in the qualitative sense is quite right. But – in keeping with the orientation towards 'perfection, completion and end goal' it is among 'those looking to the completion and the perfect' that wisdom can be spoken, recognising that 'wisdom' here refers not to advanced understanding, but the wisdom of the 'crucified Lord of glory'.

The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians are fuelled with impassioned appeals to gain the attention and compliance of the Corinthian community.
While the nomenclature of 'babes/infants' will arise (in chapter 3) in the context of criticism, it is not incumbent on us to interpret the title 'babes/infants' itself as a criticism.
The 'critical' questions reflect grown up anxieties:

> Who is wise? Who is 'mature'? Who is Spiritual?
>
> Who is the real leader - Paul or Apollos or Cephas?
>
> Who has the greatest gift - the apostle, prophet or speaker of a mystical tongue?

Who is the trustworthy evangelist – the one who comes with fine words and patrons, or the one who labours and pays their own way?

 An undercurrent beneath each of these questions is a defence against those who claim greater wisdom and power, signs and sophistication.
Does the Childhood terminology in these passages function as a chide against or rebuff of the Corinthians? Or, can it be understood not as an entreaty to eschew childishness and pursue another 'higher' maturity, but rather, as an invitation to the Corinthians to view themselves rightly, as loved and sustained, and essentially relational both in correspondence to Paul, and to Christ. The 'νήπιοι' (infant) nomenclature which Paul uses both for himself and for his readers may be offered as a positive reiteration of the inverted kingdom ethic of Love, expressed through the claim, criterion and consequence of the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17).

A recurring theme throughout these early chapters is the cross of Christ/Christ crucified. These phrases define the apostolic kerygma, embody the wisdom of God

and the folly of God, and proclaim reconciliation of divisions of status.
In the cross of Christ we are confronted not by lofty spiritual wisdom, transcendent mysterious utterances or angelic messages. Rather, in the cross of Christ we are confronted by the fleshly, embodied, weak, broken, foolish, captured and enslaved spectacle of the crucified Christ. All that the Corinthians would deride, and claim to have 'risen above', Paul embraces and affirms as the exclusive and distinctive claim of their faith.

As chapter 3 unfolds, we see the pattern of Paul's ministry characterized by pioneering and Apollos' ministry characterized by follow up activity.
Paul plants and lays foundations – Apollos waters and builds. In this context we understand that Paul is accounting for the style and content of his ministry activities – he is an initiator, he gets things going, establishing the early work. Planting and foundation-setting, these are not less honourable or insignificant endeavours. Seeds and foundations are imperative. So too, feeding a nursing infant milk, rather than solids, is not a lesser task. Feeding/nursing is a wise and (if you've ever tried it – with either breast or bottle) challenging, complex and nuanced process. Paul is not scolding the Corinthians for needing milk. There is no better substance for infants. He is defending the purity and substance of his rich, milky ministry of salvation amongst them. If there is a sense of admonition, it is that the Corinthians want something other than what is good and necessary for them, not that milk is no good and they should hurry to get off it.

In most translations, the punctuation of this phrase obscures the clarity of the spirit/flesh antithesis and the distinction of νήπιος/γάλα as a metaphor functioning in the same vein as planting and building. Several commentators note the metaphorical nature of νήπιος, but interpret it against the sense of the other two metaphors, creating both literary and theological dissonance. Punctuation that follows the units of ideas, leads to reading as follows:

I Corinthians 3:1,2
IDEA 1: And so, brothers I could not speak to you as spiritual but fleshly.
IDEA 2: As infants in Christ I gave you milk to drink not solid food, for you were not ready
IDEA 3: even now you are not ready for you are fleshly.

The sting for the Corinthians is not that they are being called infants. The middle clause relates to a time of tender and fruitful ministry between Paul and the Corinthians. The rebuke of 'fleshliness' which dominates the Corinthians, sandwiches the recollection of infants being appropriately nourished with good things. The nursing infant latched on to the pure gospel creates an alternate model. While

speaking metaphorically, Paul has chosen a very 'fleshly' image to embody spiritual purity. Furthermore, this unity of the fleshly wth the spiritual is consistent with the vision of Christ, who is not proclaimed as transcendent and lofty, but as Christ crucified.

As we attend to the language of flesh (σαρχ) and Spirit (πνευμα) it is possible that Paul does not cast them as binary opposites as an antithetical pair – as has become a neoclassical convention. Paul addresses a Gentile community, but they are a strongly roman Polis. Paul is a Jewish thinker, with radical openness to Gentiles, but this does not mean he is conventionally Greek in his thinking. Paul's Torah envisioned the unity of love for God finding primary expression in heart, gut, mind and strength.

I propose that in line with this anthropology we allow for Paul to be casting, not an antithetical structure of flesh against spirit, but rather that he is issuing an impassioned call for reintegration of flesh and spirit. That the Corinthians themselves have made this distinction – some claiming to be 'spiritual' and above fleshly concerns as a criterion of superiority. Paul grounds his radical reordering of the community through the confronting enfleshed vision of the crucified Christ. We do well to recognise the utter earthly materiality of this image in the face of Corinthians claims of esoteric 'sophia' (wisdom) and Musterion (mysteries). Paul counter-intuitively usurps this claim through an offensive, blood and guts and broken flesh Lord.

The image of the infant then, constantly being filled by the nourishing source of milk, functions as a pattern for the intimacy and connection, and the dependence and unity of our incarnate life upon the life giving and energising flow of the Spirit, the essential content of which is not revelations of lofty mysteries, but the irreducibly supreme event in Paul's terms, of the cross of Christ.

The contrast of γάλα and βρῶμα in chapter 3, then is far from a programmatic agenda – in which the Corinthians are being called to 'grow up' and 'move on' from milk (despised) to meat (esteemed). Solid food, is going to emerge as highly problematic.

A significant issue to emerge later in Chapter 8 will feature plenty of 'solid food'(βρῶμα), which was far from being a superior substance to enhance maturity. Evidently the consumption of βρῶμα (as idol food) had been thwarting the unity and humility within the Corinthian community. The matters of food and flesh arise throughout 1 Corinthians; Chapter 3 heralds a premature desire for metaphorical βρῶμα and struggles with the σαρκινος existence. Chapter 8 explores the problems of eating βρῶμα and κρέα in the private and public arenas, Chapter 11 brings to light difficulties for the practices of eating within the ekklesia, and Chapter 12 commandeers not σαρχ but σῶμα body language to provide a model for the community, fulfilled in the resurrection body of Chapter 15.

In light of these references, milk (γάλα) presents as a pure, life giving, suitable nourishment for a community that is in many respects, as we have surveyed, struggling to 'eat well'. In the West, despite our greed and consumption, many of us do not 'eat well' either – in relation to our own bodies, or in relation to our neighbours and environment. The image of milk as a symbol of salvation receded under the rising dominance of the 'economic' images of the cross in enlightenment sensibilities. The recovery of γάλα salvation is once again being championed,[2] and here finds a healthy embrace in Paul.[3]

Where Paul offers his teaching and gospel in terms of 'milk' it cannot be seen to be an inferior substance. Paul claims his gospel to be one of power not merely of words. The manner in which the Corinthians receive this teaching then, is at worst, as neutral infants, though Paul's passion, loyalty and desire for them suggests that this characterization signifies something (a relationship) much stronger and more intimate than participants in a basic training 'Gospel 101'.

The association of the images of infant (vs. 1), agriculture (vs. 6-9) and building (vs. 10-13), corroborate the communal ethic of the other, leaving no room for individualistic interpretations. Just as it is fields and whole buildings that are established, not individual seeds and bricks, the infant metaphor assumes a context of family and community. The (assumed) antithesis of πνευματικοῖς and σαρκίνοις finds resolution in another direction altogether in Chapter 12. The corporate σῶμα, rather than σαρχ or πνεῦμα is championed by Paul as the model for Corinthian Christian unity, in which the life of both the spirit and the flesh are positively animated. This is not relative to maturity or to development, but to life and being – as much for the child as for the adult.

Paul has employed the portrait of the infant healthily nourished on the milk of the gospel as a positive program for the Corinthian community: drink deeply of your salvation, suck thirstily on the life-giving power of the cross of Christ. Whether the Corinthians received this as a positive agenda is another question. A sound-byte of Paul's vocabulary of *fool, least, inferior, 'I am nothing'* in contention with the '*Super-Apostles'* taken from 2 Corinthians 12:11 reveals that the issues of status were still under contention then. It continues to be an unpopular idea in our times.[4]

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2   Margaret R. Miles, 'An Image of Salvation: God's Love, Mother milk', Christian Century 29 (2008) 22-25; Gail Patterson Corrington, 'The Milk of Salvation: Redemption by the mother in Antiquity and early Christianity.' Harvard Theological Review 82 (1989). 393-420

3   While not wishing to over simplify the rich diversity of Pauline scholarship – for the local punter in the pew, in the last century - Paul's gospel has been repeatedly caricatured in economic 'payment/ransom' metaphors. The paucity of Pauline economic language aside, the conflation of this spiritual image with Western materialism makes this framework a problematic one for our faith.

4   Our Christian book stores are full of 'how to become a better, stronger, more skilled, more spiritual, deeper, more mature Christian in 7 highly effective habits or 12 steps or 40 days of something... ' and finely graded Sunday School curricula for every age. I am not criticising these titles as such: their advice is often helpful. It is the genre of self improvement that seems at odds with Paul's expectations of embodied life in the Spirit of the crucified Christ. From Chapter 12 we have seen that the hand serves the mouth, which feeds the stomach, transported by the legs etc. We strengthen and build up not ourselves, but each other.