

Childhood Studies and Pastoral Counseling

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Abstract This article explores the emergence of childhood studies and its implications for pastoral counseling. A decade of scholarship has accrued since its advent in religious studies with little notice among pastoral care specialists. Although several pastoral theologians have written about children generally, it has been almost twenty years since a scholar in the discipline has written a book on pastoral care and counseling of children that takes into consideration the intervening research. I chart some of the developments and characteristic features in the social sciences and theological studies that need to be kept in mind and argue that distinct advances have occurred, worthy of greater engagement by the pastoral counseling community, in both the recognition of children as active agents in families and other social institutions and the understanding of religion as shaped as much by routine practices as by verbal confession of belief claims.

Keywords Childhood studies, Religion, Children's Agency, Religious Practices

In the last two decades, childhood studies has emerged as a recognized area of academic research bridging several disciplines, similar to programs in gender or race studies. Its appearance is especially prominent in social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. But interest has also arisen within humanities such as art history, literature, and philosophy. In the last decade, childhood studies has even earned a place in the study of

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religion, becoming a new program unit in the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 2002, for example, and receiving attention from scholars across a number of disciplines in religious studies.

Scholars in religion, however, have been late in coming to the table (see Miller-McLemore, 2006a). Some regard children as a less than respectable subject matter. This is illustrated in the evaluation of such studies by the AAR. When the new program unit of Childhood Studies and Religion sought AAR renewal in 2005-2006, one of the concerns raised by the Program Committee was the unit's proximity to what the committee described as normative, Christian, and practical interests. Although traits such as normative, Christian, and practical may sound like valid concerns for those engaged in pastoral counseling, for many scholars in religion they raise red flags. Behind such labels lie deeper anxieties about narrow, subjective, confessional, and ministerial biases creeping into academic scholarship in religion. The presumption on the part of Program Unit committee members seems to be that studying children means lowering one's academic standards and promoting parochial agendas. Even though this judgment seemed to be a gross misperception to those responsible for the unit's programming who took special care to include a range of religious perspectives and scholarly disciplines in their planning, it captures the general anxiety and prejudice that surrounds the topic of children in religious studies. Children have been misperceived as a low-status subject of little theoretical interest except to those in professional or practical areas such as religious education or pastoral care. Meanwhile, however, even scholars in religious education and pastoral specialists like chaplains have shown less interest in children than others presume they possess (Lester, 1985, pp. 13-16; Miller-McLemore, 2006b).

This benign neglect has consequences for pastoral counselors who may unknowingly adopt a similar attitude, especially if educated in institutions where such a view prevails. Pastoral counselors may also be unaware of new publications in this area. If the 2001 publication of *The Child in Christian Thought*, spearheaded by Marcia Bunge marks the advent of childhood studies in religion, then over a decade of scholarship has accrued since Bunge's edited collection. Significant research has occurred, in other words, since classical mid-to-late twentieth-century works such as Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1950), Ana-Marie Rizzuto's *The Birth of the Living God* (1979), and James Fowler's *Stages of Faith* (1981) became the primary resources on children, development, and religion.

Pastoral counselors are justified in asking: What is so distinctive about childhood studies and why does it matter? After all, the books I just named foreshadow today's burgeoning enterprise of childhood studies, and pastoral counselors have already incorporated their ideas. Although most overviews fail to credit Erikson, Rizzuto, or Fowler, their obvious investment in children played a fundamental role in the creation of a formal enterprise called *childhood studies*. Sigmund Freud, an important figure in pastoral counseling's history, deserves credit for turning public eyes to children, even though his primary interest was not children but the relevance of their sexual and emotional experiences for adult pathology (e.g., Freud, 1962). Via Freud and his legacy, pastoral counselors already understand the importance of childhood for adult development, the impact of trust in infancy on adult faith, the influence of parents on god imagery, the connections between early transitional objects and adult ritual, and the

progression of faith from concrete to abstract imagery. Has childhood studies really added all that much to the understandings pastoral counselors already have?

This essay will argue that distinct advances have occurred in the last two decades, worthy of greater engagement by the pastoral counseling community. I chart some of the developments and characteristic features in the social sciences and theological studies. I envision my account as largely a research report, designed for those who might benefit from the knowledge but lack the time to analyze this terrain. A good deal of my argument therefore lies in recounting insights within the growing literature itself, which I believe have important implications for pastoral counseling and care, a topic to which I return in the concluding sections. However, I will suggest that this body of research is distinguished by two major reconstructions about which pastoral counselors should be informed more generally: Childhood studies in general has consistently promoted children as active agents in families and other social institutions. And childhood studies in religion has shown that children's religious faith is shaped as much by routine practices as by verbal confession of belief claims by parents and religious authorities.

Although I will not spend much time describing my own research, these two transformations are reflected in my books, with *Let the Children Come* (2003) focused on the dramatic cultural reconstruction of children underway and the question of what Christianity has to contribute and *In the Midst of Chaos* (2006) devoted to tracing how religion forms children and children form parents in the midst of the most routine practices of everyday life. I came to the study of children through experiences of birthing and raising three boys, and in another essay (2011) I identify an earlier book, *Also a Mother* (1994), as the first in this trilogy. In fact, acute recognition two decades ago that

few feminist theologians, Christian or otherwise, had addressed the dilemmas of work and family led me to suspend my own pastoral counseling practice and turn to the project on mothers. I felt a real need to give voice to such issues, especially as they have taken shape within the Christian tradition (a perspective that I continue in this chapter), and then the demands of teaching and research kept me from returning to clinical work. I continue to miss engaging in counseling as an intimate and tangible form of healing. But I was troubled then and still find disturbing how women and children are idealized *and* devalued all at once. This chapter is one more effort to correct distortions and expand understanding, and I am grateful for the opportunity to return to the realm of pastoral counseling by another way.

Childhood studies in the social sciences

One of the most important distinctions between modern psychology and today's childhood studies is the portrait of children themselves. Although some people borrow a phrase from an important book by Swedish social theorist Ellen Key (1909) to designate the last century as the "century of the child," those in childhood studies raise questions about the approach to children characteristic of much twentieth-century research in the social sciences, especially psychology. As Key hoped, many Western societies devoted new resources to children's welfare and development. This coincided with increased research on children in education and the social sciences. Child psychology especially grew after World War II. Child experts eventually included not only psychologists and psychiatrists but also pediatricians and educators. Pastoral counselors themselves benefited from these advances and sometimes included children among their clientele.

However, according to Martin Woodhead, a professor in a new childhood studies program in the United Kingdom, there are problems with how these studies “objectify ‘the child’ as subject of processes of development, socialization or acculturation” (2004, p.x). In his Foreword to *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, he suggests that childhood studies emerged out of “frustration” with “narrow versions of ‘the child’ offered by traditional academic discourses” (2004, p.x). Psychology is often held up as the most culpable. In a flagship essay contrasting the old paradigm with the emerging one, Alan Prout and Allison James use as illustrative Piaget’s Kantian typology built around modern notions of rationality and universality. His theory of cognitive development assumes “progression from simplicity to complexity of thought, from irrational to rational behavior” as natural and widespread (1997, p.10). It also focuses on what children are becoming, their apprenticeship into adulthood, rather than on what they already are. According to Prout and James, this view was uncritically absorbed into other disciplines such as sociology, perpetuating an unfortunate binary, described by sociologist Robert Mackay, between the “immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial [and] accultural” child and the “mature, rational, competent, social and autonomous” adult (Mackay, 1973, p.28, cited by Prout & James, 1997, p.13), almost as if children and adults were instances of “two different . . . species” (p.13).

Over and over, in different words but consistent fashion, scholars in childhood studies insist that there is no such cohesive reality as “the child.” In fact, there is a problem, James (2004) says, when “a singular term comes to represent an entire category of people” (p.33). In place of the static universal type studied in abstraction from context in the dominant paradigm, childhood is described as a social construction. French

historian (and not coincidentally a friend of Michel Foucault) Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) is pivotal here. Although historians have since debated the veracity of his argument for the modern "invention" of childhood, contending that people of earlier periods did indeed have a such a conception as well as endearing connections to children (see de Mause, 1976; Pollock, 1983), his larger insight that historical periods differ in their constructions has endured. Even though childhood is demarcated by biological immaturity across cultures, it is now seen as a "product of culture," an institution created by society that varies considerably "across time and place" (Kehily, 2004, p.7). In her introduction to the new field, Mary Jane Kehily describes the "recognition that there may be different ways of being a child and different kinds of childhood" as "important." (p.7). I would go a step further and describe this as a crucial turning point in understandings of children.

The view of childhood as socially constructed is closely linked to a second feature—that children should be seen as actors in their own right, constructing and determining their social lives and the lives and societies around them, rather than "passive subjects" (Prout & James, 1997, p.8). In line with other movements to empower marginalized groups, a primary intent is to "give a voice" to children as "people . . . and not just. . . receptacles of adult teaching" (Hardman, 1973, p.87, cited by Prout & James, p.8). The problem in the previous century "of the child" therefore is not "an absence of interest." There are abundant studies. The problem is children's "silence" as active contributors (Prout & James, 1997, p.7).

The novelty today, as James (2004) states, "lies in the ways the academy currently engages with children" (p.26). Scholars increasingly turn to an ethnographical

methodology that grounds theory in children’s own words, actions, and thoughts. They are repeatedly dubbed “agents.” Childhood is not a stage to be outgrown or a space where adult socialization and religious rituals get enacted or adult pathology develops. Nor is adulthood all about forming children. Children also form adults and the institutions in which they live. As editors of *Rethinking Childhood* Peter Pufall and Richard Unsworth (2004a) contend, research in childhood studies “demonstrates unmistakably that children not only have minds of their own but also have values, aspirations, and societies of their own” (p.xi).

These three features—the social construction of childhood, their agency as active participants in creating knowledge, and the usefulness of ethnography in hearing their voices—are among those listed by James and Prout as part of the emerging paradigm (1997, p.8). There is a notable preference in this new kind of analysis for sociology, seen as already sensitive to culture, over psychology, characterized as particularly essentialist in its views of children and their stages of development. But traditional sociology also comes under scrutiny for having ignored and misperceived children and psychology is seen by some scholars as a discipline capable of being reshaped under the guidance of the new paradigm (see Walkerdine, 2004; Woodhead, 1997). It is also interesting that the primary characteristics of childhood studies cohere with traits common to the rise of postmodernity—questions about objectivity and universality, sensitivity to marginalized groups, promotion of agency and voice, awareness of the relationship between power and knowledge, and appreciation for everyday experiences and ethnography.

I lift up one more attribute that Prout and James include—the “reconstructive” dimension of childhood studies or what I would call its inevitably normative dimension—

and two items they overlook but which are often presumed—the need for advocacy and interdisciplinarity. Although Woodhead characterizes the impetus behind childhood studies as primarily intellectual—in my words a *concern about proper conceptualization of children*—I think the impetus also arises out of practical and political concerns about *the need to act* on children’s behalf. This awareness puts social scientists into an awkward bind, however, given the non-normative intent of modern science. So, for example, Prout and James observe that while social scientists “seek only to understand the world as it is,” their seemingly neutral “findings” are “nevertheless absorbed back into . . . and become constitutive” of the very societies which they study (1997, p.21). That is, the social sciences not only study childhood but also contribute to childhood’s cultural construction. As they recognize, the “detached scholar” is displaced. But they are unsure about “what will replace” this modality (p.29). Their own answer is strikingly tentative: scholars should proceed “cautiously” (p.21) adopting a “degree of analytical detachment . . . whilst at the same time not denying responsibility” (p.30). Because children rarely organize on their own behalf, how can adults do so without foisting adult presumptions on children? Hence the need for caution. They are less sure about assuming responsibility. So, most tellingly, they begin their landmark volume, which marks the advent of childhood studies in the social sciences in the 1990s, with comments on war, famine, poverty, and abuse. But in the end they are more interested in the theoretical question of how escalating awareness of these problems has challenged conventional views of childhood than in addressing the problems themselves.

Recent scholars are more forthright about the need for political advocacy. In editing her *Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Kehily (2004), for example, makes “policy

perspectives” the third section of a three-part overview of the emerging field (the other two are “historical approaches” and “sociocultural approaches”). Likewise, the editors and contributors to *Rethinking Childhood* identify addressing children’s welfare as a primary motivation. Pufall and Unsworth describe the “seed” behind the book’s inception as the “rapidly growing triad of abuse, neglect, and poverty afflicting children in our society” and a Coalition for Children created by students and faculty on the campus of Smith College (2004a, p.ix). Authors of individual chapters suggest public policies and practices “that are in the best interest of children” (2004b, p.4).

Rethinking Childhood illustrates one further noteworthy attribute of the field—the heightened value and necessity of interdisciplinary interchange. Studying children in a narrow fashion, “under the methodological glass of each particular academic discipline” (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004a, p.x), makes it almost impossible to respond adequately to the problems children face. Children suffer if only studied in disciplinary isolation and detachment from social implications. The *interdisciplinarity* toward which Pufall and Unsworth (2004b) strive differs from a more limited *multidisciplinary* approach in its effort to avoid academic jargon, resist intellectual territoriality, and work toward active listening across disciplines (pp.7-8).

Childhood studies in religion

At the turn of the twentieth-first century, several journals in religion recognized the growing import of childhood studies and published issues devoted to the subject.² In one

² See, for example, *Dialog* 37 (Summer 1998); *Theology Today* 56: 4 (January 2000); *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Tradition* 55, no. 2 (April 2001); *New Theology Review: An American Catholic Journal of Ministry* 14, no. 3 (August 2001);

of the more distinguished journals, Marcia Bunge (2006) and John Wall (2006) offer overviews. Their essays are useful here in grasping what is happening in religion.

Both articles are a goldmine of bibliographical resources with extensive footnotes listing representative publications. As they both recognize, other scholars have lamented the “undeveloped” state of childhood studies in religion. For Catholic historian Robert Orsi, the oversight is dire because of its direct implications for clergy sexual abuse. A scholarly and priestly community unable to imagine the reality of children’s lives leads to travesty. Projection of adult fantasies on children, whether about their innocence, depravity, or innate holiness, “renders them porous to adult need and desire” (Orsi, 2002, p.29). Ethicist Todd Whitmore (1997) is equally alarmed by the colonization of childhood by a capitalist market bent on exploiting desire. Children face unique suffering in a world where money dictates worth and people are reduced to consumers, products, or burdens. Do religious traditions have any “countervailing understanding[s]” to offer, he asks, comparable to the extensive Catholic teachings, say, on just war (p.175)?

Given the state of the world’s children—the influence of poverty, poor health care, sex and drug trafficking, disintegrating families and communities, advertising and media enticements—Wall (2006) also wonders why theological ethicists have “played such a limited role in social debates,” dealing instead with children, if at all, as a subcategory of other issues like abortion or marriage (p.524). Bunge (2006) rues the condescension among religion scholars who see the subject as “beneath” them or “suitable only for practitioners or educators” (p.552). Wall (2010) is interested in how childhood studies

Conservative Judaism 53, no. 4 (Summer 2001); *The Living Pulpit* 12, no. 4 (2003); *African Ecclesial Review* 46, no. 2 (2004); and *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (October 2006). A new on-line journal in religion on children was founded in 2010 (see <http://www.childhoodandreligion.com/JCR/Welcome.html>, accessed July 15, 2014).

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transforms the enterprise of ethics itself, a theme he develops into a book-length argument whereas Bunge is an historical theologian intent on capturing the best that religious traditions have to offer. Modeling his effort after similar movements among feminists and environmentalists, Wall (2006) dubs his approach “childist,” a term that has not yet caught on but is still suggestive of the “fundamental rethinking” (p.524) needed. In this regard, his work is more creative and constructive than Bunge’s descriptive and summative efforts. He uses religious and philosophical insights to critique secular assumptions about children’s agency, for example. Inversely, he uses the sciences to show how theological ethics has misunderstood dynamics of poverty. At the same time, Bunge has a richer sense of the resources in Christianity and has been especially instrumental in bringing scholars together from diverse contexts to contribute to edited collections (see Bunge, 2001, 2008, 2012) and in creating structures that undergird the emerging field of childhood studies in religion, such as the AAR program unit.

Wall (2006) is especially gifted in creating typologies and offering his own improvement on previous paradigms. He divides the evolution of childhood studies into four approaches (pp.525-528) with “developmental-psychological” (e.g., Freud, Erikson, Piaget) and “family-psychological” (e.g., family systems and marriage education therapists) on one side of the “greatest fault line” in the literature, with their more biological and universalist leanings, while two others approaches, “politico-sociological” (e.g., James & Prout) and “family-sociological” (e.g., David Popenoe), that focus on children “as they participate in and are constructed by their diverse cultures and societies” stand on the other side. In turning a two-phase development into four parts and including scholars like Judith Wallerstein (1989) and Popenoe (1988) who actually self-identify

more with the marriage movement than with childhood studies, Wall stretches the umbrella farther than I would. Despite what seems to me like a slight misreading of such scholars, Wall does recognize a diverse body of social scientists who share an anxiety about the state of today's children.

Wall also provides a useful typology for religion and ethics. He names three approaches: "communitarians" like Stanley Hauerwas (1981) and Jean Bethke Elshtain (1990) who believe children need stronger communities that resist modern pressures; "liberationists" like Pamela Couture (2000) and Adrian Thatcher (1999) who find science more useful in returning voice and power to children; and "progressive familists" like Don Browning (2003) and Lisa Cahill (2000) who promote children's inclusion but also recommend strengthening families and parenting (Wall, 2006, pp.529-533).³ He uses directional metaphors to elucidate distinctions among these groups based on where they locate authority: top-down (tradition and communities shape children); bottom-up (sciences and children deserve voice); and circular (mutual interaction between tradition and science, parents and children). He returns to this typology in his book where he adds to the top-down and bottom-up groups a "horizontal" or "developmental" approach of those who believe that children only progressively realize their potential over time (Fowler would be a good example here). This approach turns out to be "just as morally ambiguous" as the others (Wall, 2010, p.25). That is, in Wall's view each approach has strengths and limitations and his intent in both his essay and book is to fashion a more adequate postmodern model that puts "children themselves at the center" (Wall, 2006, p.533). When he does so, he discovers that the hermeneutical circle is decentered or

³ I am ambivalent about Wall's putting my work in this latter group but I leave that debate for another time.

asymmetrical. That is, the irreducible “otherness” of children turns the circle into an ellipse that orbits around “not one point but two: the interpreter and the interpreter’s irreducible other.” Children are the same as adults *and* an irreducible mystery, and this is their gift to adult understanding. They “must be allowed to disrupt and constantly open up even the interpretive assumptions adults bring to them” (p.537). In the end, they reveal the asymmetry of the love demand—that moral responsibility requires “superabundance toward others in the service of realizing a common humanity.” In this, children are “morality’s greatest test” (p.547). He illustrates by showing the limitations of the modern ideal, so uncritically promoted by many scholars in childhood studies, of children as agents. Yes, children have influence but they are also acted upon by many forces. Their unique vulnerabilities impel distinct adult response and care.

Whereas Wall stands out for his typologies and constructive agenda, Bunge excels in providing comprehensive synopsis of neglected themes. She organizes the introduction to her first edited collection (2001) and other articles around an itemization of subjects she believes scholars in religion need to address. Here’s an example of the range of relevant religious issues from her overview article in *The Journal of Religion*:

the nature and status of children; distinctions between boys and girls; the duties and responsibilities of children; the role of children in religious practices and rituals; parental obligations to children; the role of religious communities and the state in protecting children and providing them with the resources they need to thrive; the moral and spiritual formation of children; the role of children in the spiritual maturation of adults; children’s rights; and adoption (Wall, 2006, pp.551-552).

Like Wall, she urges people to adopt what she calls the “‘lens’ of the child” to see theology anew (pp.555, 574). However, she reveals an ideational bias that presumes new ideas will automatically translate into practice, changing how families and societies advance children’s well-being, something that has not exactly been the case in the past. Nonetheless, her leadership in projects covering major bodies of knowledge (e.g., classic theologians, scriptural texts, the three Abrahamic faith traditions) gives her precisely the bird’s eye view necessary to distill what she describes as “at least six important and almost paradoxical perspectives on children” (p.562) that offset both the reductive views of Christianity as harboring only punitive attitudes and the simplistic or harmful views in culture at large. In the tradition, children are seen in at least the following diverse ways:

- Gifts of God and sources of joy
- Sinful creatures and moral agents
- Developing beings that need instruction and guidance
- Fully human and made in God’s image
- Models of faith and sources of revelation
- Orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of justice and compassion

She says these divergent images must be viewed “together instead of in isolation” (p. 563), thereby underscoring the tradition’s complexity on children.

Bunge also lifts up something called “child theology,” a confusing term she does not completely clarify. She describes its origin and some of its practices, but offers little critical analysis of its history or orientation beyond what one can learn from its website (see Child Theology Movement, n.d.b). The term appears to have been used initially by Keith White, a pastor and tutor at Spurgeon’s College in the United Kingdom, and then

further developed after sparking interest at an international consultation of Christians working with at risk children in 2000. Now known as the Child Theology Movement, groups of scholars, educators, youth ministers, relief agency leaders, and so forth have continued to gather biannually in Penang, Malaysia with the intent of “putting the child in the midst of any and every theological issue” to refashion “the whole of Christian theology,” words Bunge uses that also appear in various forms on the movement’s website (Bunge, 2006, p.570; see also Child Theology Movement, n.d.a). The intent is to rethink doctrine and practice from a child’s perspective, thus influencing those who seldom approach belief and ministry from this vantage point.

How “child theology” differs from “theologies of children,” which seem to include all scholars beyond this movement who also attempt to reconceptualize the methods and substance of theology, is unclear. This is a distinction Bunge uses but does not elucidate clearly enough. Judging from the website, child theology receives structural support from those in the United Kingdom but sustains deep international connections and commitments, especially in the southern hemisphere. The language on the website reflects an evangelical orientation as does a rather flat reading of Jesus putting “a child in the centre of the disciples when they were having a theological argument” as the movement’s rationale (Child Theology Movement, n.d.b, para. 6). As best as I can discern, the non-profit organization serves largely as an umbrella for strategy-based ministries, fostering networking and alliances, with recent efforts to enhance its intellectual foundations beyond newsletters and reports.

Bunge also attempts a one-paragraph summation of recent constructive Christian theologies of children. She mentions books by David Jensen (2005), Kristin Herzog

(2005), Marshall and Parvis (2004), and one of my own books (2003). But it quickly becomes apparent that her one-sentence depictions of publications cannot do justice to either the individual arguments or the magnitude of production that has occurred. Nor can I begin to identify, much less expound on this body of work. At risk of repeating what I have just criticized Bunge for doing, I think it worth expanding her list just to give a sense of the immense literature that has appeared within a ten-year span. Besides those she names, Joyce Ann Mercer (2005), Pamela Couture (2000, 2007), Mary Doyle Roche (2009), Martin Marty (2007), and John Wall (2010) are among those who have also written constructive theological books. The specific emphasis of each contribution is apparent in their book titles and subtitles. A careful analysis of these works would have real merit. I know of only one such effort by creator of *Godly Play* Jerome Berryman found in two of his other publications—a *Religious Studies Review* essay (2007) and a chapter of a survey book (2009, pp.170-195). But I would assess these attempts less than satisfying. His coverage and summation is limited and his evaluation muddled. In the words of reviewer John Wall, Berryman's reading is "cursory," "light on historical analysis," skewed toward Protestantism and male scholars "despite [their] coming later to the field," and essentialist in its depiction of the child (Wall, 2010a, p.3).

Even if we had a good review essay on constructive theological books, this would not begin to cover recent scholarship. There are publications on practical ministries of education and care (e.g., Davis, 2001; Dykstra, Cole, & Capps, 2007; Parker, 2003; Wigger, 2003); sociological studies (e.g., Bales, 2005; Lytch, 2004; Smith, 2005); biblical and historical research (e.g., Bakke, 2005; Murphy, 2013); interreligious exploration (e.g., Browning & Bunge, 2009; Browning & Miller-McLemore, 2009;

Bunge, 2012); tools for research on children and religion (e.g., Bales, 2011); and multiple explorations of children's spirituality, including synthetic collections (e.g., Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartan, 2006). Scholarly attention to children also appears in literature on families more broadly (e.g., Rubio, 2010) and on sub-issues within childhood studies like adoption (e.g., Stevenson-Moessner, 2003) and divorce (e.g., Flesberg, 2008). Suffice it to say that rarely has one thematic topic attracted such intense study during such an abbreviated period of time. Even though I do not expect constructive theologies to continue appearing at the current pace, I doubt productivity more generally has reached its climax, particularly as new issues arise and as scholars from other religious traditions besides Christianity make additional contributions (as a start, see authors and bibliography in Browning & Miller-McLemore, 2009; Yust et. al., 2006).

One last concern that I would expect among pastoral counselors: Strangely absent in the otherwise fairly comprehensive overviews of Bunge and Wall is commentary on literature on child abuse and religion. Wall does not mention this at all and Bunge does so parenthetically. She is actually more worried about an inverse problem—that the analysis of abuse has swamped the discussion and that this has misled people into thinking negatively about Christianity, assuming that claims about original sin and child discipline are all Christianity has said on children (see Bunge, 2001, pp. 4-5; Bunge, 2006, pp. 560-561).

Unfortunately, disregard for children as a subject of study *and* religious tolerance for their abuse go hand in hand, as Orsi (2002) argues. To omit mention or downplay the significance of the problem and religion's influence seems like a serious oversight and more so in light of pastoral counseling practice where consequences of abuse for mental

health are so obvious. An extensive pastoral literature exists around child abuse and religion, including in particular pastoral theologian Donald Capps's book *The Child's Song* (1995). Perhaps Wall and Bunge considered this a subject area all its own or, inversely, too narrow and focused to warrant inclusion in the emerging arena of childhood studies. But the two bodies of scholarship have a more complicated connection than appears in the overviews. As Orsi (2002) argues, the clergy abuse crisis is not only about bodily urges, celibacy, or immorality (p.27); it is about a crisis of theology—the “kind of stories that have been told about children in Christian cultures over time” (e.g., as innocent or depraved, innately spiritual or in need of adult authority) and their negative consequences. The solution is to “find ways of making children more authentically . . . present” and “giving them greater voice” (p.29).

Religion in childhood studies

So far I have examined scholarly developments but spoken only indirectly about children's religious experience and the way religion itself is characterized. To gain a sense of some new insights in the study of religion, I want to look briefly at three books outside theology proper in the social scientific study of religion (psychology, sociology, and anthropology respectively). When I teach a class on children and religion, I use these books to help students understand children from a variety of fresh perspectives or at least to consider how one might go about gaining such an understanding. Only Susan Rigley Bales (2005) explicitly situates her work in relationship to recent developments in childhood studies. Trained in religious studies and sociology of religion, she uses ethnography to enter into a close study of children's everyday experience and perceptions.

Robert Coles's research (1990) precedes the more formal advent of the field. But as a result, he shows how twentieth-century psychology played a key role in its development and how his own insights are limited by a largely cognitive view of religion. Robert Wuthnow (1999) is an established scholar in an area beyond childhood studies—sociology of American religion—but his examination of “growing up religious” makes an interesting contribution nonetheless. These scholars take us inside children's lives from three different angles—individual and group interview (Cole), adult memory and storytelling (Wuthnow), and ethnographical study of three congregations over a defined time period (Bales). Hence they each give unique answers to one of the challenging questions in childhood studies: how does one gain knowledge of a population that often lacks the power to speak for itself, especially when it comes to religious needs and ideas?

Coles is a child psychiatrist-turned-field-researcher, influenced by Erikson, Anna Freud, and post-Freudian object relation theorists who see religion as potentially a positive force. We gain two immediate lessons from his work: how to listen to children and the richness of their religious ideation. He is brutally forthright about his own blinders in truly seeing children. This seems surprising from someone well trained as an analyst with a fine reputation for publications based on hours and hours of interviews. Indeed, his book on *The Spiritual Life of Children* (1990) is the last in a trilogy on their political (1986) and moral lives (1986), which follows a Pulitzer-winning five-book series on *Children of Crisis* (1967-1977)—a 30-year period of writing on children all told.

Yet Coles confesses that only provocative interchanges with Anna Freud sent him back to his field notes to discover what he had missed. When it comes to children and religion, he is powerfully shaped, as most psychiatrists and psychologists, by residual

Freudian biases against religion. Even if many therapists no longer see religion as wish fulfillment or a defense against aggressive and sexual desire, fewer are inclined to take children's religious views seriously.

As Coles tells it, it is the six- to 12-year-old-children who set him straight, beyond anything he or Anna or even an apparently astute supervisor (Abraham Fineman) anticipate. Connie, an eight-year old girl whom he had treated for two years, calls him on what he describes as his "wanton imperialist" assumptions caricaturing her "delusions." She finally blurts out, "you're not interested in my religion, only my 'problems'" (Coles, 1990, pp.12-13). Stopped in his tracks, he realizes he has repeatedly disregarded her attempts to let him know more about her Catholic piety. When Coles follows Fineman's advise—"Why not let *her* educate *us* about her Church? [original emphasis]"—Coles discovers her "religious life was far more many-sided than I had been prepared to admit" (Coles, 1990, pp.14-15). Her symptoms show evidence not of conflict but of "high aspirations and yearnings sustained by a faithful vision" (p.18) with religion as an essential dimension.

Coles (1990) models precisely the kind of demeanor one should adopt in approaching children, a refined version of what Freud calls "closely hovering attention" and a foretaste of the mantra now common within childhood studies that the child is the authority. "Let the children help you with their ideas on the subject," Anna herself suggests when Coles is unsure whether to go ahead with his project (as cited by Coles, 1990, p.xvi). So he pushes years of analytic practice of listening to a new level. He gives example after example of what he describes as a "phenomenological acceptance of the immediate" (p.21). Sometimes this is fostered by not rushing to fill the space. In a Boston

Sunday School class, he seems uncannily able to suspend his own plan when the seven-year-olds take over the discussion of what church means for them (pp.27-35). His vivid account of interview and classroom conversations is sprinkled with comments like, “we both reflected in silence for ten or fifteen seconds” or “I fell into a silence that lasted long enough for us to know that we had exhausted the subject” (pp.81-82). In a fourth-grade art history class, he learns “to ask nothing, to say nothing” when a hush falls over the children on viewing a nineteenth-century portrait of a doctor with a sick girl (p.110). He knows from experience the children will offer up more than anything he might anticipate.

In Coles’ (1990) view, linear developmental categories of “cumulative cognitive awareness” (p.38) based on what children display when presented with a hypothetical situation are insufficient to measure their resourcefulness if listened to in their own good time. Different from some psychological approaches and most theological analysis, direct observation precedes theoretical classification. Learning happens through prolonged encounter, weekly visits, the development of trust, and an acute sensitivity to context (he learns the hard way that Hopi children will say more in their homes than in a school environment). Coles also makes use of open-ended methods, such as asking children to draw pictures and talk about them. He discovers that they are “as anxious to make sense of [life] as those of us who are farther along in the time allotted us” (p.xvi).

Perhaps reflecting his contextual limitations, Coles never questions his own male image of God (always capitalized as “He”) and what seems like an unquestioned chauvinist reliance on his wife and kids as assistants. But a more serious limitation—where he might have benefited from childhood studies—is apparent when we turn to Wuthnow and Bales. Even though Coles has moved beyond Freudian interpretations of

religion, he still harbors a modernist view. Religion is about cerebral belief in God, examined by asking kids how they picture God's face, for example, hear God's voice, or deal with conceptual frameworks such as salvation. Therefore, Coles assumes he can study religion outside its context. Besides comments about classrooms, hospitals, or Native American reservations, readers have minimal sense of where the children live, where they worship, or what familial and social forces shape their lives. Rather than understanding spirituality and religion as inextricably intermixed and embedded in particular contexts, spirituality is set off sharply from religion, as if one can actually isolate "children as soulful" from their practice of "this or that religion" (p.xviii).

By contrast, Wuthnow (1999) shows how deeply seeded religion is in everyday life. As an empirical sociologist, he designs national surveys and examines biographies and other research on growing up religious as a preliminary step to the qualitative research that lies at the heart of his work. His study of growing up religious centers on semi-structured interviews conducted by a team of scholars over a three-year period with 200 adults chosen through quotas and a snowball technique to foster diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, education, and religion. The aim is to ask "ordinary people to talk at length" to determine how they "conceive of their religious upbringing . . . what seems memorable and significant to them" (p.xxxi).

Wuthnow does not study children themselves in other words. But he is greatly interested in childhood experiences of religion understood in retrospect. He even contends that learning about children's faith requires just the kind of evaluative perspective that adulthood lends—a view that is quite different from current efforts in childhood studies to listen to children instead of adults. In his words, "accounts of

childhood can only be given by people who are no longer children” because they are able to make judgments about “what is actually of value” in such memories (pp.xxxiv-xxxv). Moreover, childhood religiosity is not simply left behind but ripens with age and lives on into the present. Religious upbringing is “part of the continuing experience of adults,” not “an event occurring only in childhood.” In fact, people who make an effort to reflect on pivotal faith experiences “felt they were able to live a more fully integrated life as a result” (p. xxxvii).

Growing up Religious is chocked full of narratives of “embedded practices” that connect people to those around them—holiday customs, home and congregational rituals, bedtime and table prayers, family bibles and spiritual artifacts, particular foods, and daily routines. These narratives reflect what I see as Wuthnow’s most impressive finding, one that stands in contrast to Coles’ research: Growing up religious has as much to do with habits and routines as it does with existential reflection on the meaning of existence or God’s reality. In fact, few interviewees “remembered being especially curious about metaphysical questions as children” (1999, p.xxxvii), although Coles’ research seems to at least partially disprove this. Like Coles, Wuthnow finds “little evidence” among his interviewees for progress through cognitive stages toward a more sophisticated adult faith (p. xxxvii). Spirituality is fluid, dynamic, and journey-like. But in contrast to Coles, Wuthnow sees religion as “much more deeply rooted in our personal histories, in our families, and congregations, than in anything else” (p.xi). He distinguishes his research from studies over the last half century that focus on children as “mental machines.” Children assimilate religion “more by osmosis than by instruction” (p.xxxvi-xxxvii).

In this vein, Wuthnow (1999) makes several fascinating observations: “Having the Bible read to them as children is not nearly as good a predictor of feeling that one’s family took religion seriously as having seen parents reading the Bible themselves” (p.12). Or, again, “the act of praying was more important than the content” (p.xxxvii). People remember “short simple, rote prayers learned by heart and repeated almost automatically” rather than specific petitions, teachings on the nature of prayer, or anything more elaborate (p.8). They are also “deeply influenced by the pictures and other representations of the sacred that were in their immediate environment,” including Bibles, jewelry, and statues (p.18). In a national study, bible reading and table grace are cited as greater factors in religion’s importance than Sunday school (p.80). And if they did attend Sunday school, being there “was more memorable than anything they may have been taught” (p. xxxvii).

All this is not to negate the value of catechetical instruction but to underscore religion as a “way of life.” Over and over, it is clear that material culture and social connections matter: candles, stain glass windows, clothes and routines in preparation for worship, “ritual” family meals, congregational meals, and congregational picnics. Indeed, children absorb quite a bit more than most people ever consider simply by “staring at the altar, the paintings, and the stained glass windows week after week” (p.70).

Even more radically than Wuthnow, Bales also challenges what adults think children learn through adult-led classes.⁴ She would disagree with Wuthnow that talking to adults about their childhood memories provides the best perspective. She sets her book apart not just from developmental views, which see children as part of a group or

⁴ I have written elsewhere about my appreciation for her research in understanding how bodies and sensual experience form religious understandings not just for children but also for adults (2012; forthcoming 2015). So I keep my comments here more circumscribed.

category rather than as distinct individuals, but also from efforts to understand children retrospectively. Memory is notoriously inaccurate as a source for reconstructing history and experience. Distinct from both Wuthnow and Coles, Bales (2005) accords significant space to what she has learned from childhood studies, although she identifies Coles as a “notable exception” (p.13) from the tendency to dismiss children’s religious experience (and whose example she follows in using drawings to engage children). Her work is an instance of the broader effort in childhood studies to return agency and voice to children. She adopts ethnographic methods that take her into three Roman Catholic parishes, a predominantly African-American congregation and Anglo and Latino congregations that share worship space. She spends time observing children and adults in all three settings as they participate in faith-formation classes, retreats, and rehearsals in preparation for First Communion, during the mass itself, and in the aftermath. Her study includes interviews and participant-observation.

Although one would think that people would have wondered what children think of their First Communion, scholars have not pursued the question. There is plenty of literature on the Eucharist’s role in the rite of initiation. But “why . . . [are] the voices of the primary participants . . . , the children, not included in the scholarship?” (Bales, 2005, p.2). Bales discovers “that children have their own revealing interpretations . . . that differ from those of adults” (p.1). This may not seem all that remarkable since adults often assume children do not listen to them. But by and large the adults she interviews rarely see children as interpreters themselves, evaluating and even transforming the information they receive. In contrast to the adult aims, children do not absorb official beliefs or see the sacrament as a ritual that draws them into the wider universal Catholic church. They

are more focused on joining their particular family and community, “coming to know Jesus,” and enacting the ritual correctly (p.4).

Of greater interest is a second thesis about how heavily children rely on material, physical, and sensual knowledge to construct their interpretations, a finding that partially agrees with Wuthnow’s research. As Bales (2005) states, “much of the information that they use . . . comes through their sense—taste, sound, and movement—rather than through classroom lectures and workbook exercises alone” (p.1). Children develop what she calls a “theology of taste” (p.92), understandings based on heightened preoccupation with how the bread will taste. Ryan, a communicant in the African American congregation, captures the theology “most succinctly when he explains that First Communion is ‘about tasting and learning about Jesus’” (p.99). One child even explains her understanding of transubstantiation through taste, saying that the real bread tastes better than the practice bread (p.101). They also seem to develop what I would call a “theology of movement.” That is, they see their belonging to the church as based as much on action as belief and on their ability to emulate the actions of the community. So they are hyper-vigilant about movement; they want to teach “their bodies to move as the adults moved during the liturgy” (p.103). In general, Bales helps us see the value of a central theme in childhood studies: Age deserves to be as important a category of analysis as other commonly recognized categories such as gender and race.

Read together and in conversation with each other, Coles, Wuthnow, and Bales offer fresh insight into children’s religious experience. They question previous assumptions about children’s inability to grapple with existential and highly theoretical questions and the idea that children move in lock-step fashion through faith stages from

concrete to symbolic ideation. Through the eyes of all three scholars, children come alive, revealing just how much children construct their versions of life's meaning and value. Children formulate their own unique theories about God, religion, faith, ritual, and so forth. Bales and Wuthnow also disrupt previous presumptions that being religious largely means cognitive belief in God. Children reveal the powerful and life-long influence of everyday bodily experience and practices, especially material practices and artifacts that have social meaning or occur in the midst of important social relationships. Belief in God's existence almost seems like a relatively minor detail when religion is viewed through children's experience and eyes. In short, these authors reveal that, whether studied through the retrospective reflection, direct observation, or in-depth interviews, children deserve greater consideration as full participants in religious life.

Calling for a new pastoral care of children

As it turns out, the pastoral counseling community has sources for caring for children within pastoral care literature. Two books by pastoral theologians predate the heyday of childhood studies but anticipate its arguments—Andrew Lester's *Pastoral Care of Children in Crisis* (1985) and Herbert Anderson and Susan Johnson's *Regarding Children* (1994). Only the latter earns honorary mention in Bunge (2001, p.6; 2006, p.556) and Wall's footnotes (2006, p.530). But both books made unique contributions. Notably, they begin by lamenting the lack of interest in children. Lester titles his first chapter, "The Pastoral Neglect of Children." During marital crises, medical emergencies, and funerals, ministers often fail to consider children even though they are among those most affected. Lester's students recall life-changing struggles when they were children

that went unnoticed by their pastors and congregations. The problem is not insensitivity or dislike but simply lack of awareness, magnified by limits of expertise and time. Western society has idealized children, allowing assumptions about their innocence to obscure their struggles. Children do not communicate their needs in verbal ways typical of adults. Yet, at the same time, they are far more aware of what is happening around them than adults realize, even if children misconstrue the meaning and exaggerate their responsibility (e.g., blaming themselves for a parental fight). People devalue children's constructive contributions in home and church, see them as "women's work," and restrict obligation for them to parents alone. Seminaries do not focus on children and, even more than Lester realizes, awareness of clergy abuse makes pastoral attention to them more complicated. But whatever the causes of neglect, the consequences are twofold: few pastors give "*systematic attention* [original emphasis]" to children and those who do feel inadequately informed (Lester, 1985, p.27).

Anderson and Johnson (1994) are harsher in their assessment than Lester. On the first page, they say children are in trouble because "adults disdain childhood" (p.1). Although this seems overstated, they give instances where disdain is evident—the unimpeded prevalence of gang warfare and domestic abuse, the unquestioned presumption that parents "own" children, the Christian emphasis on breaking a child's will, the perception of childhood as merely a stepping stone to adulthood, and the corresponding view of children as incomplete. Rather than simply an issue within the pastoral office, they locate the problem at the cultural level—the perpetuation of a "*culture of indifference* [original emphasis]" (p.2). One of their main aims is attitudinal—to "transform the ways we think about children and childhood" (p.1), hence the book's

title, *Regarding Children*. Adequate response involves ideological change within congregations and society, not just within clerical practice. The church itself must become a “sanctuary for childhood” (p.111) that makes greater effort to welcome children, support parents, forge partnerships, respond to crises, and challenge social indifference. Adults must regard children as people, fully human even if their emerging potential is not fully realized, and, speaking theologically, as capable of “bearing transcendence” (p.20) through qualities of dependence, openness, immediacy, and vulnerability that are particularly prominent in childhood.

To my knowledge, although several pastoral theologians like myself have written about children more generally, it has been almost 20 years since a scholar in the discipline has written a book like Lester’s on care and counseling. Apart from a book by pediatric chaplain and pastoral counselor Daniel Grossoehme (1999), which is focused on care of ill children, there is a dearth of pastoral care and counseling literature on children. More significant for this essay, there has been little attempt among pastoral counselors and theologians alike to take into consideration new findings in childhood studies or new challenges, such as social media, when writing on the pastoral needs of children. I hope this essay will serve as a clarion call on this score.

At least two major reconstructions in childhood studies and religion should inform any such effort. There is a demand to see children as commanding greater agency and meriting inclusion as full participants within families and congregations, respected for the distinct contributions and needs they bring. For pastoral counselors, this raises the question of how to hear children and include them more completely. Unlike other marginalized groups who at least theoretically have the “adult” capacity and right to

speak for themselves, counselors need to assure that children's voices are adequately represented, especially when their very definition as children suggests their vulnerability, dependency, and emerging maturity.

There is also a demand to see religion in fuller ways. Throughout the twentieth century, religion was defined flatly in terms of belief. This view is still alive and well among secularists and fundamentalists. One decides in college, for example, that one is no longer a Christian or a Jew (etc.) because one no longer believes in God. Research on religion reveals that such educated dismissal is not as easy as it seems. As known through truism and underscored by research, children are shaped more by what their parents and extended communities *do* as habitual religious or spiritual practices than by anything they *profess* about religion. One can disassociate from belief but overthrowing religious formation is harder. Moreover, as families and communities are disrupted, scattered, urbanized, and diversified in today's neoliberal capitalistic society, shared religious practices become less cohesive, pervasive, and persuasive.

Implications for pastoral counseling

What does this mean for pastoral counselors? Plenty of concrete suggestions for counseling lie between the lines of this chapter's exploration of childhood studies. I lift up a few implications in four areas—the first two focused on religion and theology, the second two on listening to children.

First, in this literature we discover fresh ways to understand and incorporate religion and theology into clinical practice. Listening for religion and pursuing religion's benefits in securing children's welfare means far more than asking about cerebral *belief*

in a *divine figure*. It includes wondering about the very materiality of our daily lives and how material religion shapes and forms children in mundane daily life. So, as vividly portrayed in Wuthnow's account of growing up religious, clinicians need to consider social structures, community practices, and cultural ideologies as well as routine habits, holiday celebrations, household art and artifacts, and other modalities that clutter our lives but often go unrecognized for their impact on religious understanding and healing. Children absorb a great deal from their surroundings, far more than most adults previously assumed. They glean as much from watching adults worship, pray, read the Bible, and engage in social service, for example, as they do from catechetical instruction on any of these acts. Moreover, when we consider religion as a "way of life" rather than merely cognitive doctrinal confession, we recognize that children also have a spiritually transformation impact on parents and other adults who care for them. We assume adults should form children but we neglect how much children impact adults. So, clinicians interested in understanding the role of religion in the lives of their clients need to focus on both adults and children and their spiritually formative influence on one another.

Attending to religion as more than intellectual assent to belief also means exploring how the best of such "embedded practices" can be strengthened in a changing world to ensure children's welfare within the daily habits of family and social institutions. Despite their problems and limitations, religious communities and traditions have given children meaning, allayed loneliness, offered material support, countered adolescent peer pressure, provided intergenerational relationships, and so forth. The continued presence of religion (and its absence) in children's lives requires clinical sensitivity and attention, especially as religious communities and traditions face the disruptive pressures of today's

society. I dare say pastoral counselors have a responsibility to do what they can, even if only in the most limited way, to sustain the vitality of these wider networks of care and to challenge them when they become destructive—for the sake of their clients.

Second, pastoral counselors not only observe religion as practiced by their clients. They also bring their own constructive religious and theological framework for understanding children to the clinical context. They need to become more conscious about these frameworks as they overtly and covertly shape clinical practice. Childhood studies suggests that societies construct images of childhood that have evolved over time and place. In Western society in particular, cultural constructions of children have shifted from pre-modern images of sinful and adult-like children to eighteenth-century portraits of the naturally innocent child to today's "Knowing child" who blurs the sharp distinction between adult and child (see Higonnet, 1998; Miller-McLemore, 2003). Each of these images has positive *and* adverse consequences for children. In the turnover of cultural imagery, the wider culture has also happily filled in today's picture of who kids are and what they need with problematic notions. So, for example, prevalent images that romanticize children as innocent and hence less capable or that exploit them economically as commodity, consumer, and burden have serious negative consequences and deserve critique by those in clinical practice (see Whitmore, 1997; Miller-McLemore, 2003; Mercer, 2005; Roche, 2009).

Such imagery requires constant evaluation and correction, especially from professionals such as pastoral counselors who are theologically trained and who see the damaging effects of such imagery in the daily lives of their clients. Although many pastoral counselors within mainline and progressive Christian traditions have hesitated to

impose an overtly confessional framework on their counseling practice, more evangelical clinicians, such as Kelley Flanagan and Hall Sarah (2014), have led the way in showing how such theological insights in childhood studies might be incorporated more fully to enrich treatment of families and respect for children (rather than distort or bias clinicians toward Christian confession). Religious traditions—Christianity and beyond—abound with alternative images of children that provide greater respect for their full humanity and their moral and spiritual complexity (Browning & Miller-McLemore, 2009; Browning & Bunge, 2009). Theologians and ethicists, such as Bunge, Couture, Mercer, Jensen, Wall, and myself, have called for a revitalized Christian perspective on children as gift, task, agent, vulnerable, and so forth. As Orsi argues in his writing on the Catholic church and child abuse, we are to think long and hard about the “kind of stories” that we tell “about children in Christian cultures over time”—as innocent or depraved, innately spiritual or in need of adult authority—and their effect on children and adults (2002, p. 29). Pastoral counselors are in a better position to engage in such storytelling and critique than counselors with less background in the study of religion.

Third, in addition to new ways to approach religion as practiced and as theologically and culturally constructed, childhood studies also suggests fresh ways pastoral counselors might listen to children at both a general and a more concrete level. At the most general level, childhood studies demands, in Orsi’s words, that we “find ways of making children more authentically . . . present” and give “them greater voice” (2002, p. 29). Just as other marginalized groups have insisted in recent years, clinical perspectives must begin to include children as subjects, not merely objects of study. They should be seen as full participants and actors with voice, agency, and authentic

responsibilities in contributing to the material and spiritual welfare of families and congregations. As Bales shows so clearly, children have their own “slant,” their own “unique interpretations” that are always more than a mere parroting of adults (2005, p. 58). The push to return agency to children requires a comparable change in adults. We must “regard” children *and* ourselves in new ways, to use Anderson’s and Johnson’s term. As psychologists such as Alice Miller (1986) already made clear a couple decades ago in their work on the dynamics of child abuse, children should never be used as a means to other ends by parents who dote on their achievements to feel better about themselves, for example, or by congregations that want to increase their numbers, companies that want to sell their products, or even clinicians who hope to resolve family problems.

Fourth and possibly of most interest to clinicians, childhood studies also offers practical advice for counseling. For the most part, Coles exemplifies therapeutic practice at its best. He opens himself up for supervisory critique, and his supervisors themselves willingly admit how their own psychoanalytic biases have obscured the richness of children’s religious ideation. Scientific proclivities have led them to miss the startling ways children process existential questions about life, death, and their own suffering. Abraham Fineman and Anna Freud demonstrate extremely sound supervisory insight when they suggest that Coles let the children “educate *us*” about their religious experience and beliefs (Coles, 1990, p. 14, original emphasis). As Coles makes clear, this means the clinician must make space for children’s participation through such basic moves as allowing for silence rather than filling the lull out of discomfort. He uses nonverbal means of communication such as drawing. He notes the even greater impact of context on children and their ability to enter into conversation. Coles had to go to where

Hopi children would talk, and that meant getting away from white schools and entering into their homes.

However, earlier clinicians and researchers, such as Coles and Lester, were not alert to and did not consider the necessary precautions and ethical boundaries when it comes to meeting with children. We are more aware today than ever before about the prevalence of child abuse, its damaging consequences, and the need to establish proper boundaries when caring for children. However, this should not prohibit the effort and need to attend closely to children; in fact, increased respect for children's vulnerability *and* their distinct knowledge has the potential to deepen our connections. Bales (2005) admires Coles and uses some of his methods, such as inviting children to draw. But she offers an interesting correction and advance on how best to listen, shaped by childhood studies. She shares with readers her constant worries about the "many epistemological, practical, and legal" (p.54) challenges to entering fully into the children's world—the power differential, the need for informed consent, her racial and religious differences, her ambiguous status in her participatory observation as neither teacher nor child, and so forth. She asks herself continually if she is "doing everything I could to help them understand what my study was about and why I was conducting it" (p.54). She grants the children as much agency as she can, envisioning them as "partners and teachers" (p.64) in the project and conveying this understanding to them, inviting them, for example, to create their own pseudonym, an exercise they love. She asks children themselves to give consent or permission (see Appendix B, p.186) even though this surprises the parents who mostly buy into cultural assumptions about "innocent" children as "passive entities" whom they protect and "who need not have a say in the activities in which they

participate” (p.63). She knows her perspective constrains her ability to understand the children. She admits that she only shows how they “*represent*” their worlds (p.55, original emphasis), not necessarily how they actually experience their worlds. Bales (2011) commitment to thinking seriously about all these questions is apparent in her later work on methods in studying children. This is the kind and level of thoughtfulness required of clinical work with children.

Finally, recent scholarship in childhood studies suggests that clinicians also need to reconsider widely accepted linear stage theories of cognitive, moral, and faith development that truncate and underestimate the depth and complexity of children’s religious thought and engagement. These theories are based on forced situations in which children are presented with a problem to solve. Their reactions in such settings differ markedly from the insights and declarations that emerge in prolonged and open encounters of longer-term relationships. Coles even implies that “developmental” theory has it backwards: “The longer I do this research, the more I realize how much there is to recover from our Sunday school and Hebrew school past, from our nine-year old or ten-year-old life, when the mysteries of the Bible or the Koran lived hard by the mysteries of childhood itself” (1990, p.37). Philosopher Gareth Matthews (1994) has also done research with children that confirms this. He suggests that many educational settings actually discourage children’s philosophical acuity—their distinctive eye for incongruity and perplexity—and, I would add, their religious imagination (see Miller-McLemore, 2009).

I have identified in these four areas only some of what I hope are the many possible implications that others may see in the new research in childhood studies for the

care of children and families in pastoral counseling. In childhood studies children and religion both receive fresh interpretations, making children more visible and religion more complex. Childhood studies encourages greater intentionality about children's voice, visibility, and inclusion, on the one hand, and more nuanced grasp of how religion shapes their lives, on the other hand. As Anderson and Johnson (1994) state boldly, fostering respect for children is "*one of the fundamental and urgent agendas of our time* [original emphasis]" (p.18). As childhood studies in religion suggests more generally, fostering respect for religion in all its complexity is an equally important dimension of understanding children.

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