

Children's Voices, Religious Experience, and Mature Faith

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Under the general rubric of our seminar of taking children more seriously, I have been primarily interested in two areas in my previous work—mining the resources of the Christian tradition to respond to changing cultural constructions of children (the focus of *Let the Children Come*) and reconsidering the nature of faith practices of children and those who care for them (the focus of *In the Midst of Chaos*). This paper draws on prior research to address the question of the nature of children's spirituality. It touches on several sub-questions in our seminar outline on this topic in a slightly reconstituted form: *How might common understandings of spirituality, many of which truncate children's experience and knowledge, be more inclusive of their distinctive situation, contribution, and limitations?* I will argue that Western Christianity has framed spirituality in two general ways – one around *space* and the other around *time* – that have left little *place* for children and those who tend them. Where the early Christian tradition perpetuates a spatial dichotomy of inside over outside, developmental theory has presumed a chronological divide between young and old. Although this does not mean we have not learned anything about children's spirituality through spatial categories of contemplation and through chronological categories of faith development, it does mean we have missed other dimensions of children's religious experience. I will draw on alternative approaches arising in psychology, philosophy, systematic theology, and religious education to articulate new understandings of children's spirituality and to invite richer participation in this discussion by those in religion.