

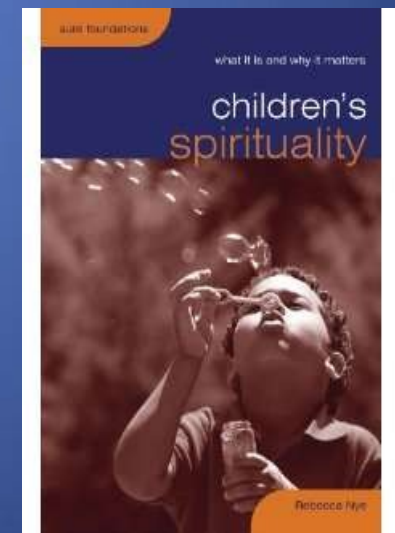
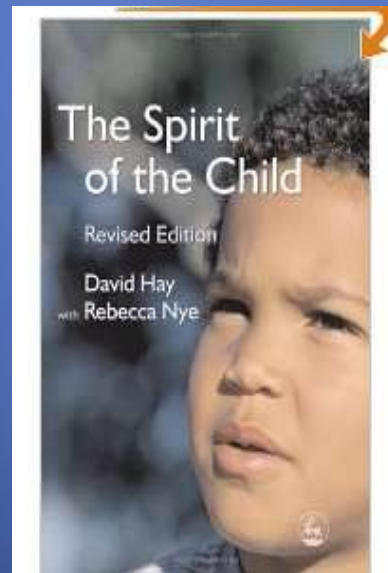
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Children's Spirituality

Its nature, its nurture
& school practices

Dr Rebecca Nye
Exeter May 2011



Planning for effective
nurture?

Understand first the
nature
of childhood spirituality

Spirituality

*“if you hold it too tight
you might kill it,
too loose and
it could fly away
altogether”*

Rabbi Hugo Gryn



Challenging views on children's spirituality

1. The 'there's nothing there' view
2. The 'romantic' – 'all is perfect' view
3. The 'I'm glad that's over' view

Critique of the 'there's nothing there' view

Spirituality=Maturity?

Future not Present Reality?

Meanwhile... We need to
educate/prepare/entertain children

Critique of the 'there's nothing there' view

- children report more religious experience than adults (Tamminen 1992)
- as children get older, spirituality is more suppressed (Hay and Nye 2006)
- Adult spiritual experiences require psychological skills children have in abundance (Nye 1998)
- Children are more sensitive to key supports for spiritual life (SPIRIT: **Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, Trust**) (Nye 2009)

Critique of the highly positive 'romantic' view

- Ignores the erratic
- Ignores individual differences in spirituality
- Ignores the hard , dry, or empty times

Critique of the “just for kids / glad that’s over and done with’ view

The spiritual importance of re-connecting

Jesus
Rahner
Berryman



INNATE SPIRITUALITY?



Grounds for Children's Spirituality?

1 . Research evidence Base

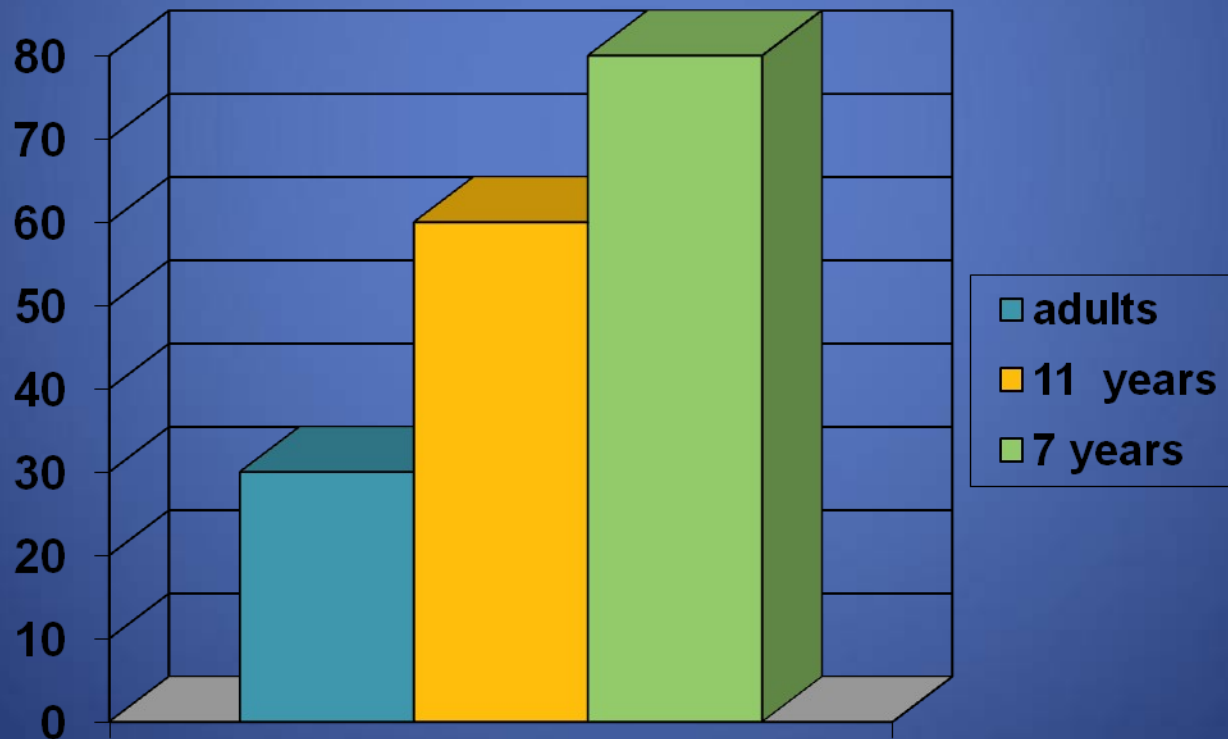
2. Psychological Base

3. Theological Rationale

Or :The Younger the Better?

K Tamminen

% who had specific experience
when felt 'close to God'



Grounds for Innate Spirituality?

#1 Research Base

- Robinson, E. The Original Vision (1983)
- Coles, R. The Spiritual World of Children
- Tamminen, K. (1992)
- Berryman, J. And Cavalletti. S
- Hay, D. And Nye, R. (1998/2006) 'Spirit of the child' - 3 year research project with UK primary school children

'John' (age 6)

- *I worked about it and received..one day..I was with my mum and I begged her..um..for me to go to some Church. And we did it and I prayers..and after that praying I knew that good was on my side. And I heard Him in my mind say this: "I am with you. Every step you go. The Lord is with you. May sins be forgiven".*

'Maggie' (age 10)

- *Weird, because I think like He's talking to me. But I never know whether it's him or whether it's just my conscience. I never know. It happens when I'm upset or worried about something..it feels all comfortable and tingling, I don't know, it just, I can't describe it, it's just weird, it's nice. Normally I feel it at night, I mean when I am on my own and near the end of the day when I am tired. So the next day it's all gone..*

Thomas age 5, Humming and drawing an elephant at the table while I write my notes for a lecture on children's spirituality

Mummy, do you know.. if anyone believes in Jesus they won't die. That's what our song said in assembly

mmm..... What do you think?

It means.. if you believe in Jesus , you won't die, in life.
You will not die without life

What do you think?

I think that's true

Oh....err....(working out what I can possibly say next?)

I need the loo...(runs off)

Other ways mentioned included...

- 'switching on to God'
- 'popping out of my body'
- 'with my mind, in my mind, in me'
- 'a tickly feeling in my brain'

Grounds for Innate Spirituality?

#2 Psychological Basis

- Psychologically, spiritual experiences often involve one or more of these states of mind...

sensing mystery,

sensing the noetic,

experiencing holistic perception -> unity of things

sensing of wonder,

searching for meaning,

a sensing the ineffable ,

*experiencing surrender of self to what is greater
than 'me'*

Grounds for innate spirituality?

#3 Theological Basis



Hallmarks of Child Spirituality

- Children felt positive/inspired in the immediate term
- But felt negative about the spiritual thoughts etc in the long term.. something to grow out of
- Sense of being alone – no one else is like this, least of all 'religious people'





Nurturing Children's Spirituality

is more than just a question of
'how to?'

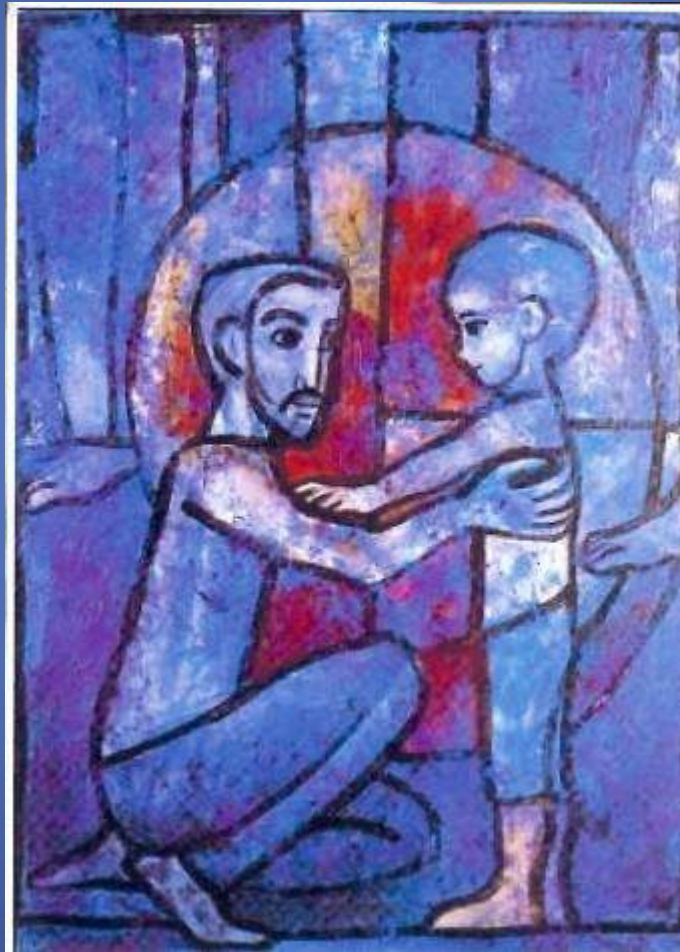
What a child is?



What is the goal, aim or endpoint of spiritual nurture ?



Who does what to whom?



Naturally Spiritual Capacities

- Holistic ways of seeing, less analytical → *capacity for mystical*
- open and curious → *capacity for wonder*
- discovering new things daily → *capacity for noetic*
- feelings dominate & matter (thoughts less so) → *capacity for surrender*
- Used to partial understandings → *capacity for mystery*
- Knowing there is more than what I know now
 - *capacity for awe,*
 - *desire to search for meaning*
- Feel and know more than I can say in words or thought → *sense of the ineffable*



Prophetic

If God has a key role,
what are our roles?



What helps children's spirituality to thrive?

- Adult attitude – expectation of spirituality
- Blessing mindset
- Resources which live up to children's existential depth and range
- Invitation, Absence of Force, Accept the Erratic
- SPIRIT

Spiritual Nurture

Checklist for 'Thriving' Conditions

Space

Process

Imagination

Relationship

Intimacy

Trust

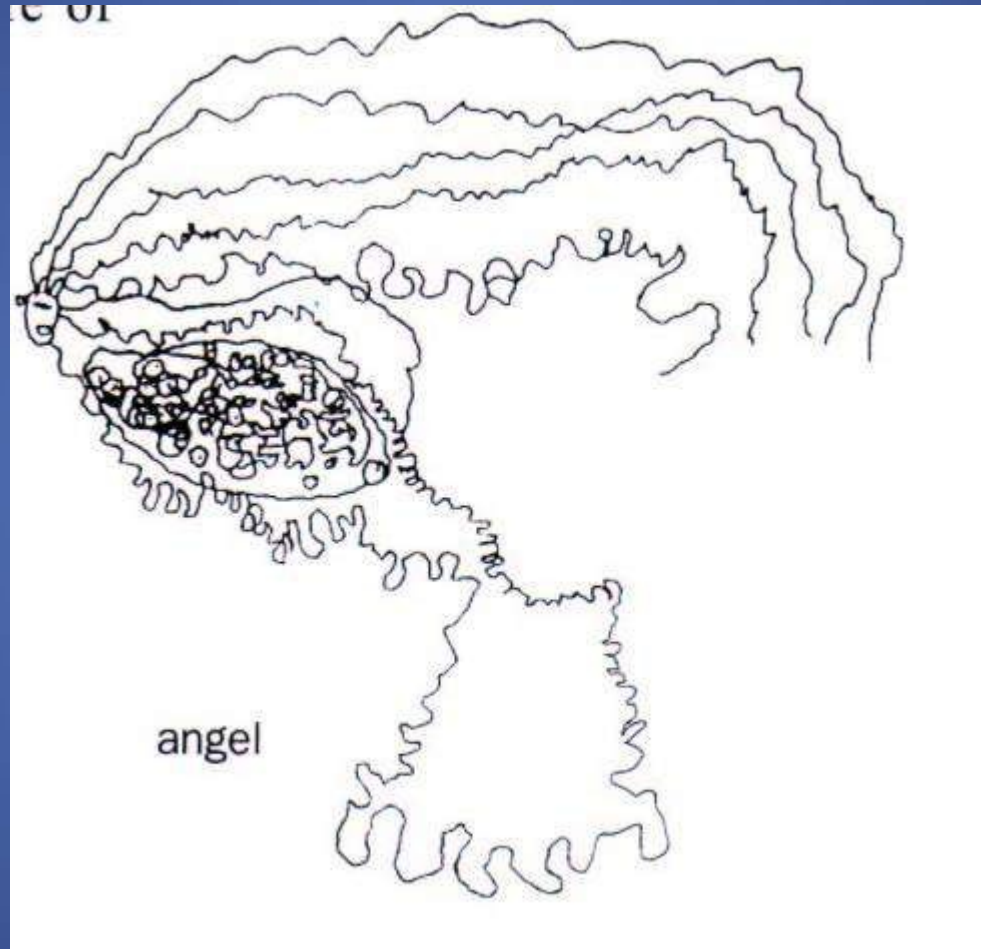
Space



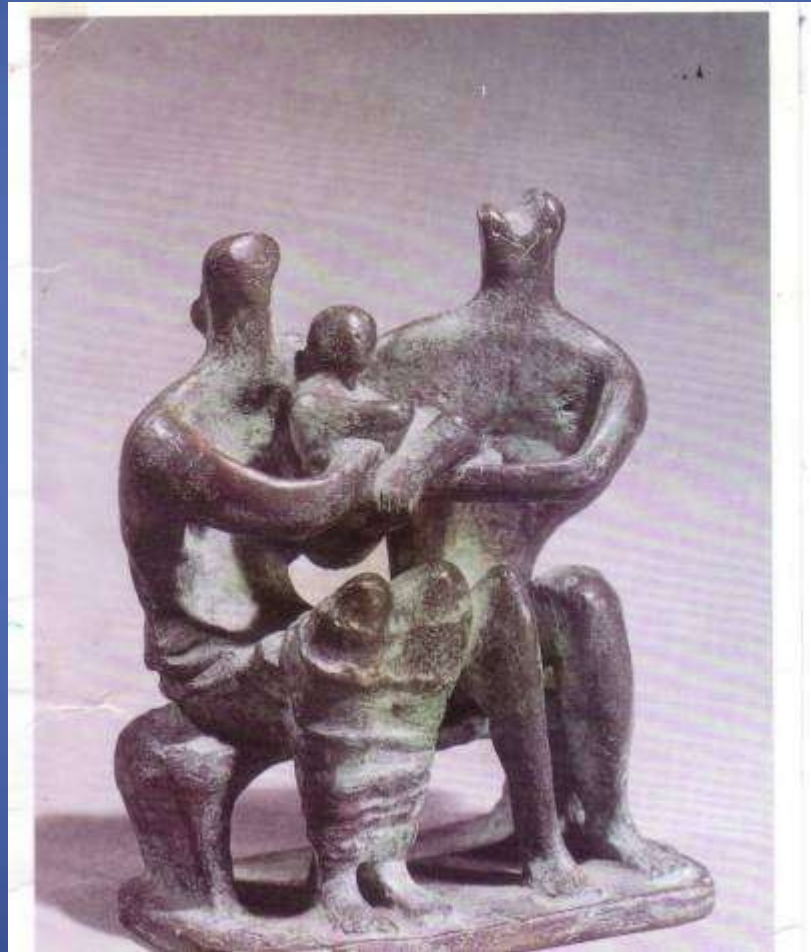
Process



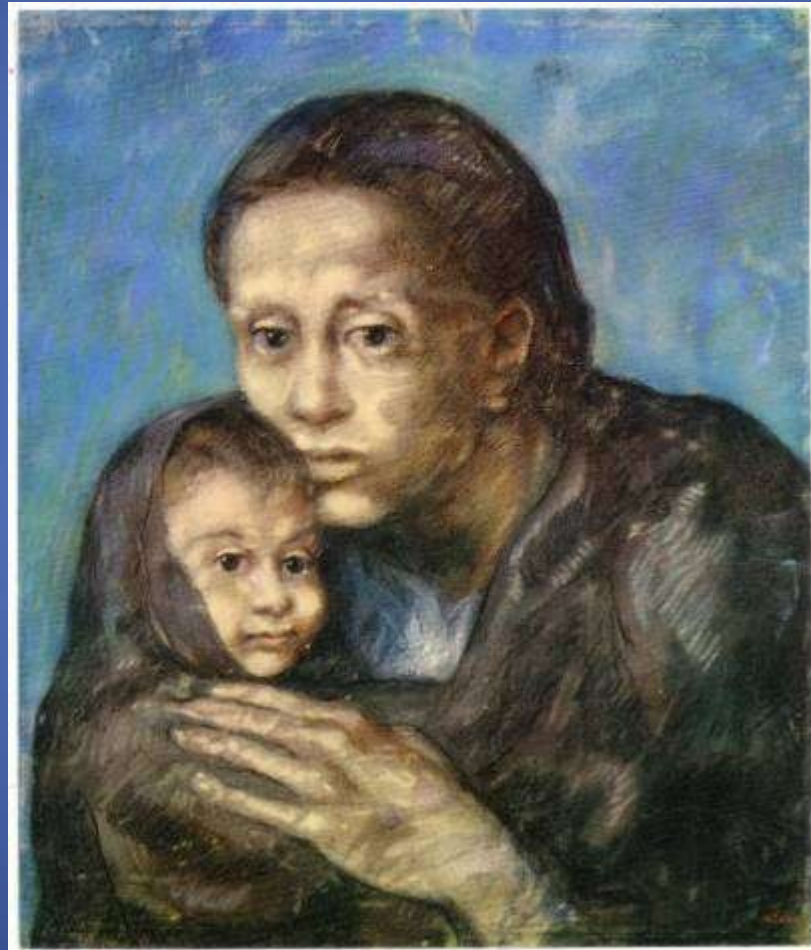
Imagination



Relationship



Intimacy



Trust

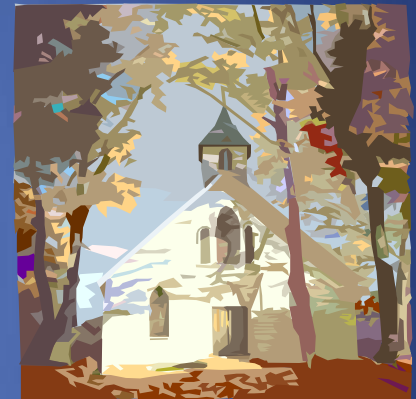


What does Children's Spirituality need to thrive?



What challenges does this pose for the church?

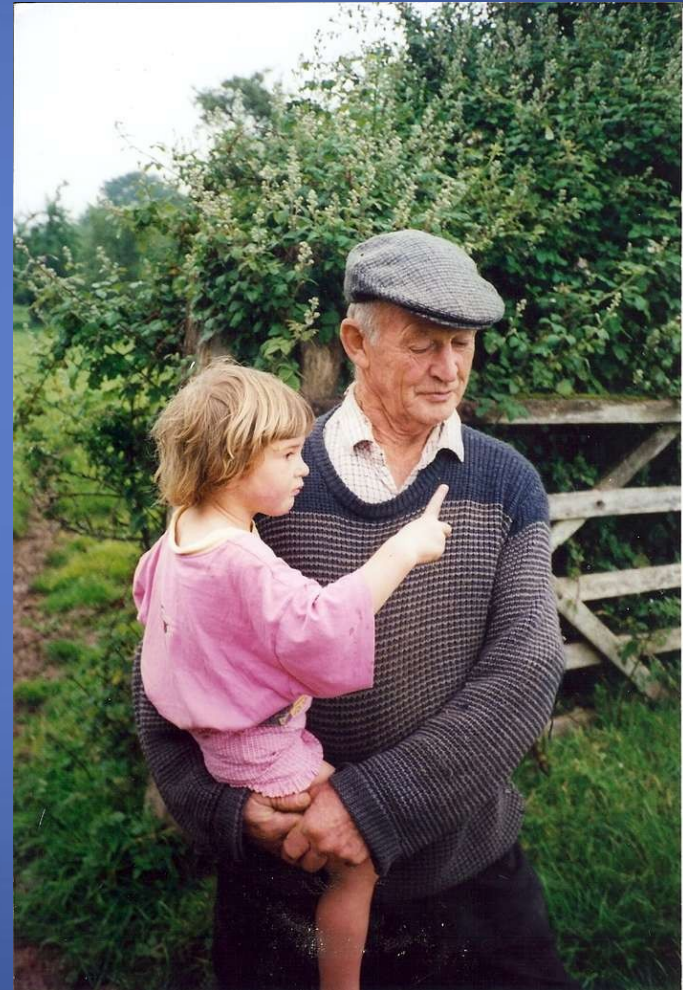
- Adult /Child dynamics – power issues
- Christian education = Top down ‘fill with knowledge’ model?
- Meeting different needs education or sanctuary
- Pedagogy – providing information or developing ‘tool use’



Implications for adults too?

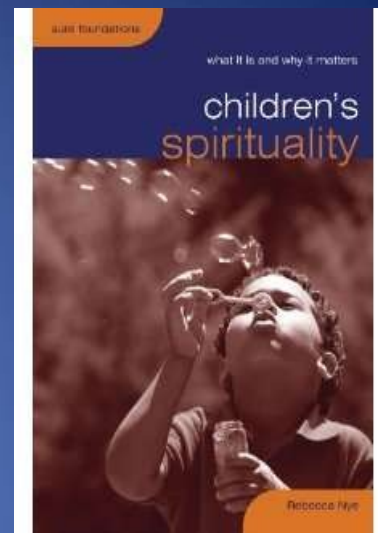
Different kinds of adult might be 'good with children' in these ways?

Healing adult's spiritual damage – recovering the non verbal, the playful , the authentic qualities of spiritual response?



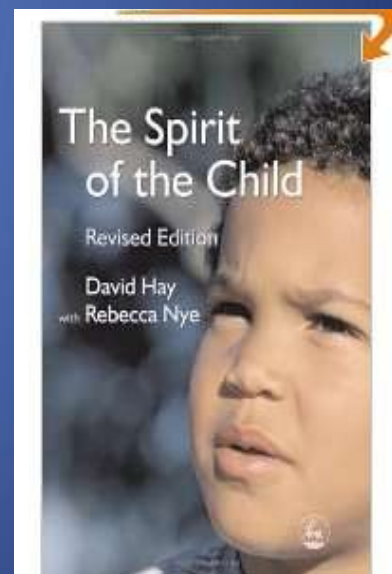
Children's Spirituality: What it is and why it matters

Rebecca Nye (2009) Church House Press



The Spirit of the Child

David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006)
Jessica Kingsley Publications



Psychology for Christian Ministry

Watts, Nye and Savage (2002)
Routledge

