Parenting During a Pandemic: Exploring the Experience of Evangelical Parents Cultivating a Spiritual Orthodoxy in Their Children During the Covid-19 Quarantine

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PARENTING DURING A PANDEMIC: 
EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF EVANGELICAL PARENTS CULTIVATING A 
SPIRITUAL ORTHODOXY IN THEIR CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 
QUARANTINE

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT 
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS 
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
JOSEPH E. BROWN
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
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ABSTRACT

Beginning in March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic forced evangelical parents to adjust their parenting and Christian discipleship. With in-person gatherings limited, families and churches had to reorient to more isolation and less community. This study sought to explore this experience among evangelical parents of congregations of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in the Greater Richmond area. Using an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants, the researcher gathered data from one hundred one participants representing about sixty families units through virtual focus groups, in-person interviews, and online surveys.

This research began with an extensive biblical, theological, and historical survey regarding the history of childhood in the church, the church’s responsibility to its covenant children, the nature of spiritual orthodoxy and its relationship to the growth of Christian disciples, the field of spiritual development and stage development theories, the role of catechesis in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, and the impact of involuntary isolation and subsequent loss of community. Once this preliminary research was conducted, the researcher conducted his field research using the insights from his earlier biblical and literature review. Through this research, the researcher came to seven conclusions and discovered three principles about parenting as part of a church community during a pandemic. Among these conclusions, the researcher found that Christian education without the church community is at best adequate but incomplete,
rife with stress and anxiety, and that the COVID-19 quarantine created suffering in the lives of parents and children that will play a role in their Christian discipleship for years to come. More longitudinal studies should be conducted to discover whether or not the effects of the COVID-19 quarantine on parents, children, and churches will be long-lasting.
CHAPTER ONE: PARENTING DURING THE COVID-19 QUARANTINE

Presenting the Problem

COVID-19 Quarantine and the Church

The first known case of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the United States was confirmed in January 2020, and the first known death was in February. By March, cases had occurred in all 50 U.S. states. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned that widespread disease transmission might force large numbers of people to seek healthcare, which could overload healthcare systems and lead to otherwise preventable deaths. As a result, beginning in mid-March 2020, federal, state, and local governments instated restrictions to slow the spread of infection to mitigate these threats. Examples of these restrictions included: stay-at-home orders; closures of schools, gyms, and shopping malls; and the prohibition of public gatherings like festivals, sporting events, and worship services. Using mobile device location data, Lei Zhang at the University of Maryland’s COVID-19 Impact Analysis Platform found that Americans’ compliance with and tolerance for staying at home were high initially but waned in the subsequent months.1 As weeks extended into months, evidence of “quarantine fatigue” appeared to be increasing.2 As infection rates slowed in many areas of the U.S., state and local


authorities began relaxing restrictions while continuing to discourage larger gatherings and promoting health and safety measures (i.e. physical distancing and mask wearing). As the development, manufacturing, and distribution of a safe and effective vaccine have been a slow and often contentious process, Americans are contending with the idea that COVID-19 and its profound and multifaceted effects on our lives will be a long-term situation.

The extended quarantine is having an impact on individuals and on the broader culture in profound ways. The American church, for example, has struggled in the tension between supporting government mandates and fulfilling its biblical ones. Stay-at-home orders caused most congregations suddenly to cease all in-person meetings. While many churches found ways to transition their weekly worship services and other ministry gatherings to a virtual format, some gatherings had to be postponed or even canceled. In an institution built upon the community gathering together (Acts 2:42, 46; Heb. 10:24-25), these shifts have caused much collective stress, strife, and even grief. As restrictions are gradually lifted, and congregations return to in-person gatherings, questions remain about how to do so safely while continuing to prioritize spiritual development. In particular, churches are considering how to consistently foster the spiritual development

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of their youngest members (children) while experiencing the disruptions that quarantine brings.

### Education of Children and the Church

Scripture affirms the centrality of Christian education in the church’s mission and work (Deut. 6:6-7, Eph. 4:11, 2 Tim. 3:15). We see this in the instructions that Jesus gives His disciples shortly before His ascension:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20).6

In what the church has since called the “Great Commission,” Jesus directs the disciples, who were known to be fearful (John 6:19) and weak (Mark 14:37), to evangelize the world, create church community involvement, baptize and institute sacraments, and teach the faith and commandments of Jesus. In light of this, Jesus comforts them with a double reminder of the sovereignty of God: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” and “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18, 20). Couched between these promises of Jesus’ dominion and presence is the church’s chief mandate – to educate its learners and instruct them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ for ongoing individual and corporate growth. As God’s children, we “are called and charged to be people who, having themselves learned, now reach out to teach what they have learned.”7

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6 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), (Wheaton, Il: Crossway Publishing, 2001).

Because the Great Commission commands us to teach the Gospel both inside and outside the church, we are assured that covenant children of the church are included in that mandate. As early as AD 200, the church knew that “Christians are made, not born,” highlighting the enduring importance of Christian education. The Great Commission drove the creation and institution of a Christian educational process known as catechesis. The origin of this word and a further explanation of the process will be explained in Chapter 3. Suffice it to say, for the purposes of this research, the term “catechesis” is used interchangeably with the church’s process of Christian education. As John Calvin wrote, “the church of God will never be preserved without catechesis [sans Cathechisme; catechesis carero].” Prone to forget the great Gospel story, God’s people are told over and over again to remind and teach the next generation of the great works of God (Deut. 4:9, Ps. 78:1-4, Acts 16:31; Eph. 6:4). Since its inception, the local congregation has had a covenantal obligation to help teach its covenant children the doctrines of the faith. Just as the people of God in the Old Testament time had covenantal promises and obligations, so do the people of God in the New Testament time. As Susan Hunt wrote:

Covenant children are entitled to certain benefits of the covenant. These benefits include hearing God’s Word in the context of loving relationships in the home

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8 The term “covenant children” is used in Reformed and Presbyterian churches to refer to the children of believers. They are solemnly received into the fold of the visible church and receive all the blessings of being part of the covenant community, such as edification in Scripture encouragement in the Gospel. Cf. Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998).


and church, prayer, and the blessed privilege of growing up as a part of the community of faith as he/she participates in church life from infancy.  

This covenantal obligation, then, means far more than inculcating our covenant children with a set of doctrinal statements (1 Cor. 8:1, Matt. 7:21-23). Instead, the call is to teach them “the word of truth, the gospel of… salvation” so that they can believe, being “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). It is through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), and on the vivifying power of the Gospel (John 3:3), that Christian education relies. This is what Richard Lovelace defined as a “live orthodoxy.” It is in direct contrast to a dead orthodoxy – fidelity to a certain set of orthodox belief statements and devoid of any renewing work of the Spirit. On the contrary, a live orthodoxy, or a spiritual orthodoxy, is that fidelity to a certain set of orthodox beliefs while simultaneously being vivified and empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the desire to find the “proper balance between Spirit and the Word, with appropriate attention given to the role of each.” Jonathan Edwards’ statement in 1742 that “our people do not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched” remains relevant to the church today as it pursues the worthy goal of catechesis.

12 Susan Hunt, Heirs of the Covenant, 98.


**Catechesis During the COVID-19 quarantine**

The local church has the covenantal obligation to teach its children not just orthodoxy but the Spirit-empowered faith that quickens this orthodoxy. Cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy is difficult under normal circumstances, yet the American church is faced with unprecedented challenges with the COVID-19 quarantine. From March 2020 through most of 2021, in-person gatherings were largely suspended, and families are more isolated than ever. It was only in late 2021 and into the beginning of 2022 that families slowly and hesitantly began to emerge from quarantine. During this time church members are not able to engage with the church community in their accustomed ways. Churches may not be able to rely on their usual methods for catechesis. The local congregation may also need to consider children’s social-emotional needs in a new way and adapt their approach, given the psychological and emotional impacts of the quarantine on children. However, whatever the challenges presented by the current circumstances, catechesis is a Great Commission mandate for the church and nonnegotiable.

**Statement of the Problem**

This study explored the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. The researcher selected an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants, applied through the following three steps.\(^{16}\)

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First, the researcher reviewed the relevant biblical, theological, and historical research relating to the Christian education of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children. The researcher gave special focus to the issue of isolation and loss of community on Christian education. Second, the researcher investigated this phenomenon following three streams of data-gathering. He chose among evangelical parents within congregations of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination in the Greater Richmond area who have experienced a loss of in-person faith community during the COVID-19 quarantine. These streams of data-gathering were virtual focus group interviews, selected in-home interviews, and survey participants. Third, the researcher synthesized the results to understand and describe the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. This led to the development of some principles that will aid parents, the local church, and the wider evangelical church.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie this study. First, the researcher assumes that the Bible is the foundation and ultimate authority of life and practice, as summarized by the Reformation mantra of *sola Scriptura*. A.A. Hodge defined this mantra further, saying that “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, having been given by inspiration of God, are the all-sufficient and only rule of faith and practice, and judge of
controversies.”\textsuperscript{17} This assumption will underpin the entire study, especially as the research touches upon the definition of orthodoxy and a statement of biblical faith.

Related to this first assumption, the researcher also assumes that the church is guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). As stated in the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith}, Chapter 1.5: “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”\textsuperscript{18} Scripture affirms that any doctrine taught without the connection to the work of the Holy Spirit is a dead orthodoxy. Word and Spirit are thus not in conflict with one another but are, in fact, the source and Source, guide and Guide, authority and Authority, of the church in renewal.

Third, the research assumes that as the church is guided by the Holy Spirit and is grounded in the faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures; God desires the spiritual growth of His people. Scripture affirms that salvation is not the end goal of the Christian life; it is instead only the beginning. Justification, the righteous standing that one has before the holy God, has been secured once and for all in the work of Jesus as applied by the Spirit. Sanctification is the outworking of this justification. It is the gracious work of God’s free grace whereby a sinner lives in repentant faith and is increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ only to be concluded in heaven. In other words, sanctification is the continuous work of God to develop a spiritual orthodoxy in His people through their engagement with the gospel in the life of faith.

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\textsuperscript{17} Archibald Alexander Hodge, \textit{Outlines of Theology} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1860), 82.
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Delimitations and Limitations

Research in the field of Christian education, spiritual development, isolation, and ministry toward covenant children has wide-ranging implications for today’s church. The numerous variables involved in the experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in children during involuntary isolation are beyond the scope of this research. To narrow the focus of this study, the research is limited to a sample of parents of covenant children involved in the ministries of some of the congregations within the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination in the Greater Richmond, Virginia region. The issue of whether this experience is typical and normative to individuals outside of this region and group will need to be addressed.

Primary Research Questions and Methodology

This investigation into the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine was conducted with the following three research questions and methodology. First, what are the biblical, historical, and theological bases of children, spiritual orthodoxy, education, and isolation? To answer this question, the researcher examined what Scripture and modern literature say about the church’s responsibility to its covenant children, the nature of spiritual orthodoxy and its relationship to the growth of Christian disciples, the role of catechesis in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, and the impact of isolation and loss of community on education. The researcher synthesized these data points to understand the phenomenon of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine.

Second, what are the characteristics of the experience of the COVID-19 quarantine for evangelical parents and their covenant children in the Greater Richmond
region? To answer this question, the researcher gathered data from three streams: a virtual focus group interview with parents in the WEPC congregation, 13 selected in-home interviews with parents from seven PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area, and 53 survey participants from eight PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area.

Third, what is the relationship between the loss of an in-person faith community and the growth of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children? This question was addressed through the analysis and integration of the field research with Scripture and the writings of scholars and theologians regarding the cultivation of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children and its relationship to the loss of in-person faith community, such as during the COVID-19 quarantine.

The data generated through these sources were evaluated and synthesized to understand better and articulate the common themes that transcend each case. The results of this project have implications for the researcher’s immediate context and for the wider evangelical world.

Setting of the Project

The researcher lives and serves as an Associate Pastor for Discipleship at West End Presbyterian Church (WEPC), a large Presbyterian congregation located in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia. WEPC is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination. The PCA is a Presbyterian denomination founded in 1973 which subscribes to The Westminster Standards as the best summary of Scriptural

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19 Yin, Case Study Research and Applications, 200.
doctrine, and ultimately bound and governed by the Word of God alone. The PCA is an evangelical denomination “faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.” Planted in 1993 in an area north of the James River when there were no other PCA congregations, WEPC has grown over the years to its current size of around 700 adult worshippers each Sunday and another 300 covenant children.

Demographically, WEPC’s church membership (around 800) is predominantly white, upper-middle-class, as are the people who make up the attendance on Sunday mornings. However, the other six days of the week look much more diverse due to its various ministries that focus on the refugees, immigrants, and minority populations that live near the church building. The building hosts English as a Second Language (ESL) classes attended by people from dozens of countries, tutoring immigrant children, sewing circles of Muslim women, a food pantry for anyone in need, and other Christian congregations who worship in multiple languages. One of the distinctive qualities of WEPC is its dynamic and large children’s ministry. Although multiple new PCA congregations have been established throughout the region through church planting efforts, and many WEPC families and members have become part of those newer congregations, children continue to come from all around the Greater Richmond region.

20 These include the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), and Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC).

**Importance of the Project**

*The Importance of the Project to the Researcher*

For over twenty years, the researcher has been directly involved in teaching children, teenagers, and adults the foundations of the Gospel. He has valued the relational aspects of ministry since his coming to faith through the ministry of Young Life while in high school. Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life, famously built his ministry vision on such terms as “earning the right to be heard,” “friendship evangelism,” and “incarnational ministry.”22 Through these formative years, the researcher developed the belief that ministry must be done personally and corporately, and he purposefully embeds these values in his roles in both adult and children’s ministries.

Another foundational principle that has informed the researcher’s ministry since 2001 is the reformed view of the Gospel. Richard Lovelace’s book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* had a profound and transformational impact on the researcher’s understanding of concepts such as sanctification by grace, adoption as a son, and assurance of salvation. As the researcher considered Lovelace’s view that “The heart of faith is an absolute trust in God’s grace and comparable distrust toward one’s own stamina and faithfulness,” the researcher began seeing the power of the Gospel for what it truly is: the power of God.23 In light of considerable historical and theological support, Lovelace argued that a true Spirit-filled awakening is possible for the evangelical church and the world through a live orthodoxy in the individual Christian. This is a life standing on the lavish grace of the

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23 Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 119.
Lord and the quickening work of the Holy Spirit. The researcher thus came to believe that these are not just core biblical truths, they are exactly what every child desires to hear and know.

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

As part of his role as Associate Pastor for Discipleship, the researcher is responsible for WEPC’s large children’s ministry, including a special focus on the spiritual development of its covenant children. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of stay-at-home orders and other restrictions caused all of WEPC’s ministries toward children to cease abruptly in March 2020. The impact of these decisions was significant. Canceling scores of weekly in-person gatherings meant that hundreds of children and youth, as well as a similar number of parents and volunteers, were suddenly unable to experience, be taught, and share the Gospel through these ministries. The researcher was able to transition some gatherings to virtual experiences. For example, the researcher recorded videos for the children to replace their Vacation Bible School, recorded video lessons on the Apostles’ Creed, live-streamed book panel discussion, and began recording podcasts, all in a desire to reach those who were isolated at home. With only the online worship service to anchor the congregation, the weekly discipleship process for adults and children changed drastically.

The quarantine’s emotional and psychological toll on parents has begun to show itself. Early in the quarantine, the researcher reached out to the families of second

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24 Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, 210.

graders in the church with an offer to meet with their children over Zoom and to pray with them. Only one family responded. Eighteen months into the quarantine, parents remain frazzled by unyielding challenges presented by remote work, virtual schooling, and housebound elementary school kids. The effects of these challenges on families cannot be ignored even after quarantine restrictions are eased and life begins to return to “normal.” Beginning in the fall of 2021, WEPC began to reopen in-person discipleship gatherings for children and adults while maneuvering around the psychological effects of the quarantine on families and children.26 This research is an attempt to understand the impact of the loss of the faith community during a time of quarantine or isolation on the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

Along with his calling as Associate Pastor to WEPC, the researcher serves the larger church as the Stated Clerk to the PCA’s James River Presbytery (JRP). The JRP is composed of all of the pastors and local congregations of the PCA in the mid-eastern counties and cities of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and his role as Stated Clerk has enabled him to see the far-reaching impact of the pandemic and quarantine on churches far and wide. Though the research will be restricted to the 13 PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond, Virginia region, the results may have far-reaching implications. Scripture validates that the heart’s desire of any Christian parent is to raise children who will fear the Lord above all else (Prov. 1:7-8) and that, while the Gospel should always be

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26 As WEPC programs began to reopen in the fall of 2021, most families remained committed to the ministry of WEPC, some families have left. Some were upset over the imposition of mask mandates, while a few others were upset over the laxity of mask-wearing by some members.
shared far and wide, the primary mission field for most parents is their own children.\textsuperscript{27} Further, these mandates remain in place notwithstanding circumstances – parents are to teach their children the grace of Christ, trusting that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to (Jesus)” (Matt. 28:18), perhaps even more so when life is challenging. This role can be daunting even when done in the context of a partnership with the church; however, for parents to do this in isolation and without the aid of in-person faith community presents more challenges and potential to overwhelm than ever, especially since parents themselves must contend with issues stemming from the pandemic. The purpose of this research is to understand the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. This is not confined to one branch of Christendom but is an experience of any Christian congregation or Christian parent who faces a time of isolation and loss but who also desires to continue the faith that was once delivered (Jude 1:3) in the lives of their children and friends.

\textbf{Research Design}

\textit{Nature of the Research}

Using an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants, this project seeks to explore the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. To analyze and develop overarching themes about the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-

19 quarantine, the researcher followed the three streams of data-gathering: virtual focus
group interviews, selected in-home interviews, and survey participants. All participants
were evangelical parents at PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. The data-
gathering occurred during the months of January to July 2021.

Data

Primary Data

Primary data includes the transcripts and field notes from the focus group of
parents in the congregation of WEPC, the transcripts and field notes of interviews with
the 13 evangelical parents who attend one of the 13 PCA congregations in the Greater
Richmond region, and the survey data from 53 evangelical parents in the Richmond
region, covering eight PCA congregations.

Secondary Data

Secondary data include the biblical, historical, theological, and secular resources
related to issues relevant to the problem of the project, as well as the site documents from
the interviews and direct observations.

Project Overview

The first step was to study the biblical, theological and historical literature related
to the research to determine: the church’s responsibility to its covenant children, the
nature of spiritual orthodoxy and its relationship to the growth of Christian disciples, the
role of catechesis in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, the impact of
isolation and loss of community on this cultivation.

The second step in the research was to gather data from a virtual focus group with
parents in the West End Presbyterian Church congregation, led by the researcher, about
the effects of quarantine on the spiritual development of their children. This enabled the researcher not only to understand the phenomenon better but also allowed the researcher to develop a script of questions for the selected in-home interviews.

The third step in the research was to interview 13 evangelical parents within PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area who have experienced a loss of in-person faith community during the COVID-19 quarantine. The researcher interviewed the participants to address attitudes about Christian education and the spiritual development of their children, and their experience of the impact of the loss of the faith community during a time of quarantine. Along with these interviews, site observations and documents were collected from these parents that further give context and depth to their experience. These documents included books, websites, and music which were either part of their experience or noticeably missing from their experience.

The fourth step in the research was to survey a larger swath of evangelical parents in the Greater Richmond region. This survey data was used to determine whether the experience of the 13 interviewees was indicative of the average evangelical parent and to align the synthesized results with reality.

The fifth and final step was to analyze and synthesize the data from each preceding source to help understand the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine develop guidelines for action based on these findings.
CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter intends to answer the question: What does Scripture say about how the church and parents are to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their covenant children during a time of isolation such as the COVID-19 quarantine? To answer this question systematically, this chapter will examine Scripture’s view regarding the church’s responsibility to its covenant children; the nature of spiritual orthodoxy and its relationship to the growth of Christian disciples; the role of catechesis in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children; and, lastly, the impact of isolation on spiritual development.

In an effort to glorify himself, Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue and demanded that three Israelite boys bow down before it or suffer death. How the boys responded was unexpected:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan. 3:16-18).

Many human beings would likely have looked at their circumstances and answered differently. For all they knew, the boys’ answer was ensuring their death sentence.

Instead, God rescued Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace that day. What gave these young Israelite boys, living in the Diaspora because of God’s judgment on Israel and Judah, such strong faith in their God? Or what about the young Israelite girl
in 2 Kings 5 who pointed the leprous Namaan to God’s prophet Elisha? Or even young Queen Esther risking her life to rescue her fellow Jews from the plot of Haman?

Scripture contains these as shining examples of young children or teenagers exemplifying extraordinary faith in their LORD. What makes this even more shocking are the circumstances surrounding these exhibitions of faith, namely the moral decay and eventual Exile of the people of God from the Promised Land. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all abducted and trained in isolation in hostile Babylon (Dan. 1:7), while Queen Esther lived in the Persian Empire, under extreme persecution by Haman (Esther 3). Certainly, it is possible that their faith was an isolated gift from the LORD, without any influence from parents or their community. More probable, secondary influences helped cultivate this kind of godly faith, such as their dire circumstances. If such faith is built over time through involvement with a broader faith community, it is vital for the church to exemplify this behavior and actively support parents in growing the faith of their covenant children, despite, and perhaps even more because of, current circumstances.

The Church’s Responsibility to Its Covenant Children

All Children Belong to God

Scripture affirms that children are a part of the family of God. When Jesus takes children into his arms and blesses them (Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:16), somewhat to the shock of those in His midst, He reveals God’s view about children: the children of the people of God have a special relationship to Him. Jesus was exemplifying the behavior of the God about whom the Psalmist sings, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps. 127:3). From the very beginning, God has given children a role in the ordering of human affairs (Gen. 1:28). What is more, the birth of a
child played the central role of the first Gospel promise (the *Protoevangelium*) and fount of biblical hope\textsuperscript{28} in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Not only do Adam and Eve have the creational mandate to produce children as a blessing, but they also have the promise that one of their descendants will destroy Satan.

Scriptural assertions of the eternal value of children aside, the world’s wisdom reveals an insidious ambivalence toward children. On the surface, it appears that children are beloved in the world, and their arrival remains a community celebration in many cultures. After all, “it takes a village to raise a child.”\textsuperscript{29} Further investigation, however, exposes a profound discrepancy. Across the world, an estimated one billion children are exposed to various forms of violence every year. Hundreds of millions of children are involved in child labor, and children continue to suffer from practices of infanticide, abortion, female genital mutilation, child abuse,\textsuperscript{30} and the normalization of the sexualization of children.\textsuperscript{31} In the world’s ambivalent attitude toward children, they are both idealized and resented. They are both pure and rude, at once innocent and guilty. In

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other words, the world holds up children as an ideal state of humanity while relegating them to child-appropriate places until they are old enough to be valuable to society.

The world’s ambivalent view of children stands directly in opposition to the biblical view. The 19th century English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon echoed Scripture’s view when he said, “where society is rightly ordered children are regarded, not as an incumbrance, but as an inheritance; and they are received, not with regret, but as a reward.”32 All children, according to Scripture, are gifts from God – whether from biological birth or adoption, whether born with or without disabilities, or whether or not the child was born into a family of believing parents. As part of the creational mandate, and as those who struggle under the confines of the Fall of humanity, all children everywhere speak to the personal and careful craftsmanship of God. Scripture proclaims that God fearfully and wonderful makes (Ps. 139:14) each and every human being after His own image (Gen. 1:26).

Children of Believers Specially Belong to God

All children are a gift of God, but there is a special relationship God has with children of believers. This distinction is further clarified through the study of the covenantal structure of biblical history and will be addressed later. However, first, it is important to highlight two Scripture passages that reveal this inherent connection between God and covenant children. The apostle Peter’s monumental sermon at Pentecost concluded with a call to his fellow Jews, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you

crucified” (Acts 2:36). The Holy Spirit worked that day through the preached word of Peter, producing a quickening in the hearers’ hearts and prompting their response, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter’s answer is indicative of the relationship children have as part of the people of God. “Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself’” (Acts 2:38-39). The promise of the Gospel of which Peter speaks here is for believers and their children. It is beyond the purview of this paper to discuss the debate between credobaptism and paedobaptism. However, whatever position one holds, it is clear from this passage that children of believers, or covenant children, “have a special place within the church.” These children are to be raised in the truth of the Christian faith as part of God’s covenant people. They have responsibilities to learn, to grow, and to believe the Gospel, thus growing into their role as covenant-keepers. Like the Philippian Jailer in Acts 16, covenant children have the responsibility to believe the Gospel and to one day “believe in the Lord Jesus, and (they) will be saved” (Acts 16:31). For if they reject the Gospel, they become covenant-breakers, and “it would have been better for them never to have known

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33 Paedobaptism, which is the viewpoint of the author, connects the covenantal sign of circumcision to the covenantal sign of baptism. As seen in Colossians 2:11-12, Paul makes a connection between the true circumcision of the heart with the sacrament of baptism. And if this is so, then just as infant boys of the people of God were circumcised on the eighth day under the Old Covenant, so too are children of the New Covenant baptized as infants to signify their entrance into the people of God. Cf. The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, WCF 28.4. This sacrament does not make them believers, like a magic incantation or sacramental regeneration. But it does signify and seal the identity of the people of God on children. “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:39).

34 Susan Hunt, Heirs of the Covenant, 100.
the way of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:21). Instead, the church anticipates the day when covenant children can stand and confess their belief in Christ and His claim for their lives because they belong to Him.

Children of Believers Specially Belong to the Church

Scripture also affirms children’s involvement in church gatherings such as weekly worship. Years after the early church was established, Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. This letter clearly outlines aspects of Christian doctrine and its application to the Christian’s life. Unlike many of Paul’s other letters to churches that addressed specific problems, his letter to the church in Ephesus is universal and easily accessible to any Christian. The general relatability of Ephesians makes sense, given that one of the letter’s main themes is the unity of the church (Eph. 2:11-22, 4:4-16). The letter contains a balance of doctrine in the first few chapters and practical considerations in the later chapters. By the time the reader gets to chapter 6, he has both heard of the great truths of the Gospel as well as learned how they can be applied to his life.

Interestingly, Ephesians 6 is also where Paul speaks directly to the children. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’” (Eph. 6:1-3). Paul directly quotes and comments on the Fifth Commandment in these verses, speaking to the fundamental nature of children’s


37 Exod. 20:12, Deut. 5:16.
submission to their parents. Immediately following these exhortations for children, Paul quickly shifts his focus to the parents: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Taken by itself, this is an essential biblical dictum that the family is orderly, federal, and the basic unit of human affairs. Taken in context, however, it is important to note that these four short verses are embedded within a letter that was meant to be read as part of the worship service. Paul’s direct address to children assumed that children were worshipping alongside their parents and hearing this letter read aloud simultaneously with their siblings, mother, and father. In the New Testament context, children are both taught the Gospel in worship through the worshipping community, as well as commanded to learn from their parents.

Since corporate worship is a communal act, isolation from this corporate body holds the potential for deprivation. As children are removed from their faith community, as has occurred in the pandemic, they lose more than their Christian education – they lose the experience of dwelling in the presence of God. “Where education attempts to explain and interpret mystery, worship allows us to experience and dwell in the presence of God as a way of knowing.”

The local congregation has a biblical imperative toward its covenant children (Deut. 4:9, Ps. 78:1-4, Acts 16:31, Eph. 6:4). Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reminds us that this educational and worshipful mandate is a joint venture between parents and the entire worshipping community. The Bible consistently affirms

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the enduring intention that corporate worship is a family gathering of all ages, races, and tribes, united by the one faith (Eph. 4:3-7).

While it is true that the spiritual growth and development of children is primarily the responsibility of the parents, the church is commanded to have a role as well. The cooperative work of parent(s) and local church leaders has been, and will continue to be, a subject of much research. At a minimum, corporate worship is indisputably part of the life of the local church in educating covenant children in the truths of the Gospel. The loss of such corporate worship will therefore have a detrimental effect on the catechesis of covenant children. Before examining the church’s catechesis of covenant children, the content of this education – what children must be taught – must be explored.

**Spiritual Orthodoxy and Its Relationship to the Growth of Christian Disciples**

Since its establishment, the worldwide church has contended for “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). What the specific content of this “faith” is, however, is the question that has driven the church to define what is true and what is false over these centuries – delineating the line between orthodoxy and heresy. Even though the Nicene Creed was only officially established in 325, there was likely

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significant adherence to its statements long in advance of their being codified. After all, these councils arose out of the need to address the presence of heterodox (or heretical) views. Therefore, the Christian faith’s major doctrines were “implicit… from the beginning, even though they did not become explicit until considerably later.” As to the question of how the church knows where the line is between the true Christian faith, that is orthodoxy, and its counterfeits, that is, heterodoxy or even heresy, an examination of the roles of each of the Persons of the Trinity is enlightening.

**God the Father Enters into a Covenant with His People**

The design of knowledge and faith is evident in Scripture as early as the creation narrative in Genesis. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it’” (Gen. 1:27-28). Since the beginning, children have been part of God’s design to not only fill the earth, but also to show forth His blessing on His people. The word used here – “be fruitful” (פרה prh) – is both a command to reproduce and populate and a promise of blessing from Yahweh (cf. Ps. 127-28). The nature of God’s initial words to humankind is covenantal – a divine

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42 The most common version of the creed recited today in the church is the revised creed, known as the Nicene-Constantinople Creed in AD 381.


44 Brown, Heresies, 20.

mixture of promise and command. From inception, then, covenant has been God’s primary way of relating with the children of His people.

Throughout Scripture, covenants are the way that God chooses to reveal Himself to His people. This word, “covenant” (בְּרִית berîṯ), is arguably best defined by O. Palmer Robertson as “a bond in blood sovereignly administered.” In other words, a covenant is a solemn contract entered into by two parties, of such importance and power that, while keeping is mutually beneficial to both parties, but if broken, would mean a death sentence for the violator. While there are covenants between human parties in Scripture, the usual reference is with respect to the covenants between God and his people. A prominent example of such a covenant is described in Genesis 15, when God is establishing His covenant with Abram. After Abram laid out a heifer, a female goat, and a ram, all cut in half, God made Abram fall into a deep sleep. “When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram” (Gen. 15:17-18a).

In contrast to covenants between humans, here God distinguishes what it means to enter a covenant with Him. These verses indicate God’s intention that, if either party was to break the covenant, it may be done to God (the only party to “walk” through the animals) what has been done to these animals. To be clear, God implicates Himself vis-à-

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47 Gen. 21:27, 26:28, 31:44; Exod. 23:32; Deut. 7:2; Josh. 9:15; Judg. 2:2; 1 Sam. 11:1, 18:3, 20:8; 1 Kings 5:12, 15:19; 2 Kings 11:4; Ezek. 17:13-18; Jer. 34:8; Mal. 2:14.
vis the obligation of both parties of this covenant. In that moment of redemptive history, 
God was revealing His divine mixture of promise and command.

The Bible contains multiple examples of God’s covenantal relationship with His 
people. While the first mention of בְּרִית (berîṯ) was in Genesis 6:18 when God made a 
covenant with Noah, the same covenantal elements are evident in God’s relationship with 
Adam.48 These elements include an obligation of God to His people (Gen. 2:17), benefits 
to the covenant people (1:28-31, 2:15-17), a curse directed toward others while His 
people are protected (2:15-17), a reward given for covenant faithfulness (1:30), and its 
promise of conditions met (3:15). In the Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9), God’s covenant with 
Noah had these elements: an obligation of God to His people (8:21), benefits to the 
covenant people (8:21-22, 9:1-4), a curse directed toward others while His people are 
protected (6:11-13, 9:5-6), a reward is given for covenant faithfulness (6:7-9, 22), and the 
nature of its promise of conditions met (8:21). Later, the establishment of the “called out 
people of God” had these elements, when God made His covenant with Abram:
obligation (Gen. 15), benefits (12:1-2, 7, 15:4-7), curse and protection (12:3), reward 
loyalty (12:4, 22:16-17), and nature of conditions met (Heb. 6:13-20). As seen through 
these stories, the entire arc of Scripture is covenantal in nature, with God’s character

48 Although not formally stated in Scripture, most Covenant and Reformed theologians see the 
relationship between God and Adam as a covenant commonly called “the Covenant of Works” or “the 
Edenic covenant.” For a full-bodied defense of referring to this relationship as the covenant of works, see 
Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 516-18. For the classic 
critique of this term, see John Murray, “Covenant Theology,” Collected Writings of John Murray, 4 vols. 
increasingly revealed to His people through these unfolding covenants throughout redemptive history.\textsuperscript{49}

Successive covenants are consistent with earlier ones, though, in some respects, they are distinctive. The Mosaic covenant, for example, has the same elements as those before it but adds an emphasis on the responsibility of the people of God to “keep” the covenant (Exod. 19:5): obligation (Exod. 24:7-8); benefits (Deut. 28:1-14); curse and protection (Deut. 27:11-26, 28:15-68); reward loyalty (Deut. 27-28); and, while it is conditional by nature because of its distinctiveness, it still does not nullify the covenant promises made beforehand (Gal. 3:17). In fact, “the most developed expression of the Mosaic covenant is in Deuteronomy… (which) achieves a careful balance between promise and command, between God’s initiative and Israel’s required response (e.g., 7:9).”\textsuperscript{50} The unfolding of the relationship between God and His people continues through the Davidic Covenant. This covenant, which was explicitly Messianic as it points to Christ as David’s descendant (Mark 10:47, Heb. 1:5), contains the same elements as the previous covenants: obligation (2 Sam. 7:12, Ps. 132:11), benefits (2 Sam. 7:10, 13-14), curse and protection (2 Sam. 7:9-11), reward loyalty (1 Kings 3:6), and nature of conditions met (2 Sam. 7:14-16). The successive and expanding covenants of God drive home the point that the Father remains faithful to His people.

The connotation of covenant in the Old Testament is significantly informed by the Hebrew word הֶסֶד hēsed, which is translated as “steadfast love” or “faithfulness.” Found

\textsuperscript{49} O. Palmer Robertson, \textit{The Christ of the Covenants}, 62.

in the Old Testament about 250 times, it is occasionally used to describe human attitude and behavior to one another, “but more frequently (ratio 3:1) [it] describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God toward the faithful, Israel his people, and humanity in general.”51 In fact, divine ḥēsēḏ is the driving force of God’s relationship with His people. It describes His desire to save people (Gen. 19:19; Ps. 31:7, 21, 32:10, 57:3), to sustain life (Gen. 24:12, 14, 27; Ps. 6:4), to counteract God’s wrath (Isa. 54:8; Mic. 7:18), and it reveals that God’s ḥēsēḏ love is “enduring, persistent and eternal.”52

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love (חֶ֫סֶד) shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isa. 54:10)

This understanding of covenant and steadfast love forms an important basis for spiritual orthodoxy and children as part of the family of God and connects these ideas to God’s covenant with His people. As O. Palmer Robertson wrote, “the very purpose of the covenant consists of God’s intention to make a people to be his own.”53 His promise to Abraham (father of many nations) is a promise to be exceedingly fruitful as he and Sarah are the beginning of many generations of God’s people: “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen.


53 Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants, 47.
17:7). God worked through Abraham to create a people of His own, through faith and hope in the promises of their covenantal God.

As such, a fascinating and important truth is revealed: biblical orthodoxy is fundamentally relational. To know the true faith without belonging to God is impossible. Cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy involves the mind. After all, Jesus tells His disciples that He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Thus, one cannot know the true God without being in cognitive harmony with the ultimate truth of the universe.

However, Scripture reveals that there is much more than cognition involved here. “The knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (intellectual assent), but “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (trust) (Prov. 9:10). In other words, true saving faith is knowledge plus trust plus assent. John Murray similarly referred to it as “intellect, feeling, and will,” which focuses upon Christ as a “whole-souled movement.”\(^{54}\) Abraham believed the LORD, “and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, quoted in Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23). Abraham’s belief was more than an intellectual acknowledgment; it included his trusting that the LORD would accomplish what He promised to do. Abraham’s faith was knowledge plus trust plus assent. This is a foundational understanding of biblical faith.\(^{55}\) The Heidelberg Catechism describes true faith as “knowledge and conviction.”\(^{56}\) Kevin DeYoung wrote that faith is part


\(^{56}\) Heidelberg Catechism Q21, “What is True Faith? A. True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word. At the same time it is a firm confidence that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation,
knowledge; otherwise, we have a “content-less Christ.” Moreover, it is part conviction because it is in our conviction that we “embrace and feel something of the glory of the knowledge we possess.” 57 After all, “even the demons believe – and shudder!” (James 2:19).

Nevertheless, there is one more covenant made explicit in Scripture, and it is in this covenant that we find the mystery of spiritual orthodoxy made clear. As the people of God were exiled from the Promised Land, the longsuffering prophet Jeremiah prophesied of God’s judgment and the Israelites’ need to repent and trust in the LORD. In a seemingly hopeless environment, and with little to no fruit of his labor, Jeremiah prophesied to a glorious future – a New Covenant. In Jeremiah 31, through the ministry and mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD tells His people:

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34, italics mine)

When Moses received the words of the covenant, they were written on stone (Exod. 31:18, 32:16). However, here we are told that this new covenant will be written not on stone but “on their hearts.” This contrast is not saying that the Old Testament

out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits. This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel.”

57 Kevin DeYoung, Good News We Almost Forgot (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010), 44-47.
administrations did not include an orientation toward the heart. Old Testament faith also expected an internal change; the law of God was not exclusively external. “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deut. 6:6). That God’s law has both external and internal implications is the basis for much of Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisaical sect – they had warped the biblical faith into only external behaviors. Jesus indicts them as “whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:27) – beautiful on the outside and yet dead on the inside. For the Pharisees, there was certainly no *live orthodoxy*.

What Jeremiah 31:33 speaks to is the immediacy of God that is available to His people.58 Whereas the First Person of the Trinity has always been with His people, the incarnation of the Second Person revealed and established an aspect of God’s relationship to His people that had heretofore been hidden. Furthermore, the gift of the Third Person was to accomplish the work of God in initiating the work of faith in the hearts of believers. Just as the very finger of God wrote the tablets of the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus, so too does the Holy Spirit write faith on the hearts of new covenant believers.

*God the Son is the Source and Substance of Orthodoxy*

In the Old Testament, the Israelites are described as God’s “treasured possession among all peoples… a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). Their faithfulness to Yahweh and His covenant were intended to be the markers of their status as God’s chosen people. It is precisely this aspect of their relationship with God that renders their repetitive unfaithfulness to Yahweh and His covenant so disturbing.

However, it also provides a window into the beautiful longsuffering and merciful grace of Yahweh.

One of the central tenets of Old Testament orthodoxy is found in the *Shema*:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-5). At the time of Moses and beyond, any good Israelite knew the *Shema* by memory. This declaration of their monotheistic religion, and even of their God (Yahweh), was central to the Jewish identity.\(^{59}\) Old Testament orthodoxy is grounded in the identity of their God, as seen in the *Shema* above, but also in His work on their behalf.\(^{60}\) Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites were repeatedly told to remember what God has done.\(^{61}\) His continual covenant faithfulness, and their continual covenant faithlessness, are themes that stretch through the entire Old Testament.

If Old Testament orthodoxy is grounded in the identity of God and His work, the New Testament is an advancement of that orthodoxy: the identity of God in His Son, Jesus Christ, and His work, is the Gospel. In the pivotal moment of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus asks his disciples, “But who do you say that I am?”\(^{62}\) Peter’s answer, “You are the Christ,” was the first time someone declared open fidelity to the person of Jesus Christ (Mark 8:29). From this moment on, Jesus is decidedly focused on Jerusalem and His


ultimate crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Narratively speaking, the Synoptic Gospel writers wanted the readers to see this as a pivotal moment because at this moment, the Gospel, Jesus’ true agenda, was revealed. Mark began his biography with the statement, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1) because all other doctrines of orthodoxy stem from the identity of Jesus as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Gospel is centered on the very person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is more than the declaration of the identity of Jesus; it also includes the purpose of His coming. The very first words spoken by Jesus in Mark’s Gospel are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). Through this pronouncement, Jesus is connecting His incarnation and ministry and identity to the Gospel, but it is more. Jesus is also revealing a message. Just prior to this verse, Mark records that “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God” (1:14). The statement and the message of repentance and belief are together defined as the “gospel of God.” The content of this message is further defined in the remainder of Mark’s Gospel.

Once Peter makes his public declaration, Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (8:31). He reminds His disciples again in 9:30-32 and a third time in 10:32-34. It was upon the conclusion of Jesus’ third reminder that we get Mark’s main thesis statement of his book. Two of Jesus’ disciples, the sons of thunder, James and John, completely misunderstand Jesus’ words and begin...
to vie for second and third place in Jesus’ upcoming kingdom. Jesus rebukes them and concludes his rebuke with, “for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This reprimand is a direct allusion to the substitutionary atonement that Jesus would provide for his people. Jesus is saying that He came into this world to die (“give his life”) to buy back the slaves to sin (“ransom”) of His people.

It was not long before this prophetic word of Mark 10:45 regarding Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice is fulfilled. As Mark brings his book to a rapid conclusion, Jesus is betrayed and dies a horrendous death. It is the very last few verses of Mark’s book when the women find an empty tomb and an angelic proclamation that “He has risen; he is not here” (16:6). At this moment, the reader sees what 10:45 is all about. The Son of Man, Jesus, gave his life as a ransom for many. His death, completed upon His victory over His death, served as a full atonement for His people. For Mark, the source and substance of the Gospel story are that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, preaches a gospel of repentance and belief and provides the substance of this gospel in his sacrificial atonement for his people.

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65 Cf. 1 Tim. 2:6.

66 The substitutionary atonement of Christ was first popularly explained in detail by St. Anselm (1033-1109) in his classic study *Cur Deus Homo: Why God Became Man*. A more modern scholarly examination of this doctrine can be found in T.F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
This viewpoint is not just Marcan; it is corroborated by the other gospel writers as well.67 For example, Matthew’s concern is to show that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, and his recording of Jesus’ teachings point to His divinity (cf. Matt. 11:27-30). Luke’s account reveals Jesus as the Savior to the world, including the weakest and lowest. This inclination of Luke is most apparent in the parable of Great Banquet when the man tells his servants to “Go out to the highways and hedges” to call people into his banquet (Luke 14:23). In John’s Gospel, Jesus declares openly that “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). For the four Gospel writers, the heart of the Gospel is expressed through Jesus’ identity and work, defining the source and substance of Christian orthodoxy.

After Jesus’ ascension, the church takes the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaims it broadly. Paul further clarified this a few years later when he wrote, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). In all of Paul’s letters, Paul uses the word euangelion “the gospel” sixty-seven times68 and it is “his favorite term for his message of salvation and one that embraces all that he says about the person and work of Christ.”69 We see this term immediately in his greeting in the letter to the Romans:

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68 Rom. 1:1, 9, 15, 16, 2:16, 10:16, 11:28, 15:16, 19, 20, 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:17, 4:15, 9:12, 14, 16, 18, 23, 15:1; 2 Cor. 2:12, 4:3, 4, 8:18, 9:13, 10:14, 16, 11:4, 7; Gal. 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 2:2, 5, 7, 14, 3:8, 4:13; Eph. 1:13, 3:6, 7, 6:15, 19; Phil. 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27, 2:22, 4:3, 15; Col. 1:5, 23; 1 Thess. 1:5, 2:2, 4, 8, 9, 3:2; 2 Thess. 1:8, 2:14; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:8, 10, 2:8; Philem. 1:13.

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom. 1:1-4, italics mine).

In four short introductory verses, Paul asserts himself as set apart and called to proclaim the gospel, the good news, to the Roman Gentile church. What is instructive about these verses is Paul’s use of two modifiers.\(^70\) First, the Gospel was known and promised in the Old Testament (1:2). Paul was not inventing a new religion, nor was he modifying the faith of Jesus. For Paul, the Old Testament is part of God’s Word that the unfolding New Testament makes clearer. Second, the Gospel concerns the person and work of Jesus Christ (1:3-4).\(^71\) While this statement may be a pre-Pauline confession, as many commentators believe,\(^72\) the fact that Paul is using this confession as a significant explanation of his gospel remains unchanged. As described by F.F. Bruce, “Paul has remained unsurpassed in his insight into the mind of Christ.”\(^73\) This Jesus Christ, who descended from David, and who has power with the Holy Spirit, is the substance of our Gospel. To prove this point, Paul ends with the declarative title: “Jesus Christ our Lord.” This declaration is the climax and sum of “the gospel of his Son” (Rom. 1:9). “The gospel is the sole and constant subject of his epistles.”\(^74\) Paul’s Gospel is about our Lord,

\(^{70}\) William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 40-42.

\(^{71}\) Hendriksen, *Romans*, 41-44.


Jesus Christ, and his work. And this is the same Gospel that is proclaimed through all of Scripture.

In summary, Scripture defines what orthodoxy is – it is adherence to the Gospel, to the very person and work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel must be more than affirming Christian doctrine as objective truth, lest we develop a new generation of “men without chests.” It cannot simply be affirming another set of philosophical statements that one can hold, examine, incise, and dissect. It must be vivified. It is, after all, the very power of God (Rom. 1:16).

*God the Holy Spirit Brings Life to Orthodoxy*

If orthodoxy is adherence to the Gospel, and the Gospel is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, then the commands that Jesus gives His people must be significant. In Matthew 22, when asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus’ response was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). In conflating the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5) with Leviticus 19:18, Jesus was summarizing the law into its most basic form – loving God and others. Though basic in form, this command’s execution proves frustratingly difficult.

As Jesus provides the greatest commandment in Matthew 22, He knows His answer – to love God and others – is impossible without the work of God Himself. Here Jesus alludes to what His life, death, and resurrection will attain on behalf of His people –

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75 C.S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man* (New York: C.S. Lewis Pte, Ltd., 1944).
the coming Holy Spirit to provide the power to obey God’s commands. As Andrew Murray wrote, “By faith (the Christian) rejoices in what he does not see or feel: he knows, and is confident that the blessed Spirit within is doing His work silently but surely, guiding him into the life of full abiding and unbroken communion.”76 Through the Holy Spirit’s work in someone’s life, a believer receives the Gospel power to love God and others. Loving God and others can only be the purview of someone who is alive, not the work of white-washed tombs (Matt. 23:27-28).

The indwelling Holy Spirit is what makes sanctification possible. Sanctification, the progressive transformation of the Christian from sinner to saint, is the constant Christian experience on this side of the veil. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism defined it, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”77 This work is performed under the watchful guidance, and by the Gospel power, of the Holy Spirit. Lovelace, in commenting on sanctification, wrote, “(a)n unrepentant faith is a theoretical belief which originates outside the sphere of the Spirit’s illumination in a heart which is still in darkness concerning its own need and the grace and grandeur of God.”78 A dead man cannot follow God’s commands, while a Spirit-filled, vivified man can.

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77 Westminster Shorter Catechism Q35: “What is sanctification? A35: Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”

78 Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, 103.
To follow Jesus’ command to love God and others, one must have the power of the Spirit to repent and believe, even to do anything deemed worthy. The Holy Spirit has many jobs,⁷⁹ but arguably His greatest job is to shepherd His people into full abiding and unbroken communion with God. “Abide in me, and I in you… for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). The Holy Spirit makes us alive for the purpose of, and by the power of, being made alive in Christ.

John further expounds on this idea in his first epistle. In 1 John 4:7-16, John reveals to his readers that the source of a Christian’s love for God is, in fact, the love of God for the Christian. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). God’s character is love, and it is expressed in the Gospel’s proclamation of propitiation for our sins. And from this very fact of salvation, the Christian is able to love. Human love is eternally connected to the very being of God as love. “All that God created is an extension of (God’s) love.”⁸⁰ We love because he first loved us.

In contrast to a gnostic or pantheistic view of love, John immediately connects this love to our behavior and the Holy Spirit’s work. “Beloved, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7) is a command to love. Our behavior is intimately tied to our relationship with God. As Jesus told his disciples, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in

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⁷⁹ He intercedes for us, sanctifies us, convicts us, prays for us, prays with us, guides our will, quickens our faith, breathes into our hearts, subdues the chaos in our hearts and lives, teaches us, dwells in us. J.D. Greear, Jesus, Continued (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014); Michael Horton, Rediscovering the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017); J.I. Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984).

“my love” (John 15:10). Throughout Scripture, the obedience of believers is inextricably linked to the concept of abiding. John often describes the life of a Christian using the term “abiding,” with reminders of union with the Holy Spirit. “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (4:13). The Spirit and His work are proof of Jesus’ abiding presence with His people. Andrew Murray wrote that “(t)he Holy Spirit is indeed the mighty power of God. And He comes to us from the heart of Christ, the bearer of Christ’s life, the revealer and communicator of Christ Himself within us.”81 The Holy Spirit, acting as the great communicator of Christ to the church, gives to us His gifts – His fruit (Gal. 5:22-24). The church cannot grow this fruit on her own, but it must come from the Spirit. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (John 15:4). All of our fruit, including our ability to love others, is part of the work of the Spirit.

As affirmed in Scripture, anyone who believes the Gospel is spiritually united with Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. Our salvation, growth in discipleship, and glorification are all because of our union with Christ. Spiritual disciplines, or “means of grace” (media gratia) in Reformed theology, are ways that we, in responding to the Gospel, abide in Him.82 Without Christ, we are severed from God – or, to paraphrase

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81 Murray, Abide in Christ, 140.

82 Westminster Shorter Catechism Q88: “What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? A88: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”
John 15, if we are not connected to the True Vine (15:1), then we are nothing but dead sticks on the ground.

The concept that the power of the Gospel comes through believers’ union with God is not an invention by Jesus or the New Testament writers; Old Testament writers also conveyed it. Throughout the Old Testament, the vine was used as an analogy for Israel (Ps. 80:8-16, Jer. 2:21, and Hosea 10:1), as well as Israel as a vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 and Jeremiah 12:10, and as an olive tree in Jeremiah 11:16. So when Jesus called Himself the True Vine, he was connecting with a familiar image evoked throughout all of Scripture. In these analogies, the people of God are either the fruit of the vine or the vine itself. In either case, the power is found in the life of the vine; unless the branch is connected to the vine, the branch is dead. In Ezekiel 15 and 17, Israel had “acted faithlessly” (15:8) and had become the wood of a vine that was fit for only burning. This proclamation was a prophecy of the Exile that was to come for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all as a judgment from God for their idolatrous and unrepentant ways. Most of Ezekiel’s visions speak to God’s judgment on Israel and their false hopes and idols – until these visions are interrupted by hope. This hope is found in Ezekiel 36 and 37.

Ezekiel 36 begins with reminders of the preceding chapters’ description of God’s judgment of Israel’s unrepentant sin: “They made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people” (36:3). It would be an embellishment to say that Israel’s future was bleak. It is more accurate to say that their future looked hopeless at this point. Surprisingly, verse 8 hints at something entirely different. “But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people
Israel, for they will soon come home.” Such bounty from the people of God does not seem possible, after thirty-five chapters of hopelessness. The basis for such change can only be found in the intervention of God and His choice to show His gracious favor because of His own nature. He declares to them, “For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you” (36:9). God’s favor shines upon Israel because of God’s grace (36:32) and for God’s glory (36:22), and so that the people will once again “know that I am the LORD” (36:11). God reveals that He will not only enable the Israelites to return to their home, but He will do something even more miraculous:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (36:26-27)

Ezekiel 36 finds its parallel in Jeremiah 31:33, the promise of the new covenant:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” In both of these passages, God promises to restore Israel both externally and inwardly. This inward working of God, made explicit by the Ezekiel passage, is a work of the third person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit Himself. The Spirit Himself is the main actor of the following chapter, Ezekiel 37, where the Dry Bones are vivified by the Spirit (“רוּח” “wind” “breath” “spirit”) of God. The work of the Spirit – to bring life and bring fruit to God’s people – is evident in these chapters.

The Holy Spirit’s work in the life of the believer is to apply the union of Christ to the believer through real vivifying heart change in the Christian disciple. “The Holy Spirit gives life” (John 6:63). The work of the Spirit in tandem with Christ brings life to
the Christian disciple and grows that life into a full life, as described in Ezekiel 37:14: “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Scripture reveals that orthodoxy is adherence to the Gospel and that this Gospel is found in the very person and work of Jesus Christ. Further, to be effective in a Christian’s life, this orthodoxy must be a vivifying work of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to be a true spiritual orthodoxy. If orthodoxy is the Gospel, then Spiritual Orthodoxy is the Gospel vivified in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit. Next, it is important to consider how the church cultivates this spiritual orthodoxy, this Holy Spirit-empowered union with Christ, in the life of a Christian disciple – what the church has called “catechesis.”

The Role of Catechesis in Cultivating a Spiritual Orthodoxy in Covenant Children

The researcher loves interviewing covenant children for membership in the church. These moments are glimpses into the work of the Spirit as children share how they came to faith, what and who shaped them, and how they see Jesus working in their life today. Over the years, the researcher has interviewed almost 100 children, ranging from as young as six years old to teenagers. In each interview, he has been able to share the basic truth of the Gospel, and this is usually greeted with agreement and Spirit-enabled joy. This reaction, however, did not happen with Emily. The ten-year-old daughter of parents who attended worship at WEPC met with the researcher and another elder on the patio of her parents’ home many years before the quarantine. As the two tried to ascertain what she believed, they both began to wonder if Emily had ever read the Bible. She knew some “church words,” but it became clear that she knew nothing of who
Jesus is, the doctrines of sin and of grace, and what it means to even “believe in Jesus.” She had a true desire to join the church, but she had no real content to her faith.

After some inquiry, they realized that she had never received Christian education outside of corporate worship. As a child who attended worship with her parents, she sat under the singing, reading, and preaching of the Word. However, she had never attended a Children’s Sunday School class, Children’s Worship, or Vacation Bible School. Even more, she had never received biblical teaching at home. All of her “faith” came from the warm feeling of being in worship. The content of her faith was missing; an intellectual assent to doctrinal facts was absent. It was a hard but necessary duty to delay her membership until she grew more in her knowledge of, assent to, and trust in the Gospel. To encourage that growth, they invited her to meet with the other elder over the next few months to learn more of the core Gospel foundations of the faith. In a sad coda to this story, her parents were so offended by this delay that they left the church.

This story illustrates the problem. While it has been established that the Gospel is the content of spiritual orthodoxy and that covenant children belong to the church community as part of the family of God, cultivating this spiritual orthodoxy in their children even under normal circumstances is challenging for the church community. These challenges are only exacerbated when the foundations of the church’s education of their covenant children in the true Gospel are removed, as has happened in the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Emily’s case, both the church and her parents had failed in her catechesis. By focusing on only one aspect of Christian spirituality, Emily was unable to make the connections between her faith and the creedal faith of the church.
Instead, her church leaders and parents should have engaged with her using a catechesis that was creedal, communal, and transformational.

**Catechesis is Creedal**

Between the *Didache*, the Roman Symbol, and the creeds of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Marcellus, and Rufinus, the ancient church was developing a system of summarizing and understanding the Gospel. In speaking of the Roman Symbol, later known as the Apostles’ Creed, Leith writes, “the creed is simply the Church’s understanding of the meaning of Scripture.”\(^{83}\) It is a way in which believers can simplify and express the content and assertions of their faith. Reciting the Apostles’ Creed enables the remembering and retelling of the whole Gospel story, without necessarily going into every detail.

All early creeds helped “sharpen the sense of belonging to one’s group… even heresy contributed to the creation of a sense of Christian identity among the orthodox.”\(^{84}\) And by creating summaries of Scripture, the church leaders were helping to teach their disciples what Scripture truly says. Orthodox creeds clarify; they do not distort Scriptural truth. “The real question is not, as often pretended, between the word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God’s people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of

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creeds.” Creeds grew as the church grew and defended itself from heresies from within and persecution from without. As new believers entered the church, a system of training and education needed to be installed; this came to be known as catechesis. Creeds help clarify the Gospel and aid in the cultivation of faith development.

The church must teach all its disciples the Gospel: adult and child alike. As Paul saw the next generation rising, he wrote to young Timothy, declaring that Timothy must take the faith that Paul delivered to him and, in turn, “entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2). Teaching Christian disciples the content of the faith is a Gospel imperative; teaching Christian disciples the content of the faith during a time of quarantine is the task at hand.

*Catechesis is Communal*

The imperative to teach children and adults the faith by the community occurs throughout Scripture. As sanctification continues through all of life, one only “graduates” from learning true spiritual orthodoxy upon death. As the Heidelberg Catechism eloquently says, “we… never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.” Since sanctification is a life-long endeavor for all

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87 *Heidelberg Catechism* Q115.
believers, catechesis takes on a central, communal role, which is most clearly seen in two passages: Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 78.

On the very last day of his life, Moses spoke/sung a song to the entire assembly of Israel, and it is recorded in Deuteronomy 32.\(^{88}\) It was not an easy song for Moses; in fact, it was a recounting of God’s faithfulness and Israel’s rebellion and apostasy. Beginning with a command to hear and to listen (Deut. 32:1-2), it was a scathing rebuke to this “crooked and twisted generation” (32:5) who continued to forsake and scoff at God (32:15). They had “no understanding in them” (32:28) as they grafted themselves to “the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah” (32:32). In contrast, Moses called their God “The Rock,” who is “a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright” (32:4). He “will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants” (32:36). Alongside Joshua, his successor, Moses spoke these words to the people of God and concluded with the command: “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” (32:46-47).

As seen in Deuteronomy 46, Moses was purposefully speaking to the next generation. The first “perverse generation” (32:20) would not enter the Promised Land, but the warning was for their children: “that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.” The parents and the leaders of the covenant people were to teach the next

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88 Deut. 32:48-50.
generation the words of the Law of Moses. Moses makes this distinction because the children are “your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land.” In other words, the Gospel truth that had been delivered to the people of God, which was eternal and true despite their faithlessness, was to be taught to the children. This is the responsibility the church has to their covenant children – to teach them the words of life.

Tragically, the people of God did not take Moses’ final words to heart. In Psalm 78, the author recounts the history of God’s people up until that point. Much of this psalm (78:5-72) exposes the cyclical pattern of God’s people’s rebellion and God’s gracious mercy: “They did not keep God’s covenant” (78:10); “he performed wonders” (78:12); “they sinned still more against Him” (78:17); “despite his wonders, they did not believe.” (78:32); “how often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert” (78:40); “Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them” (78:52). From the Psalm’s first verse, “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching” (78:1), it petitions the hearers to be reminded of God’s continual forbearance, as it serves as a teaching device to rebuke any potential rebellion in the future.89 In the first eight verses of the Psalm, the key words of “fathers,” “children,” and “generation” are repeated to underscore that the people of God must be teaching their children. This is a church imperative; this is a family imperative. The shared responsibility is clear in the text. Scripture speaks throughout that catechesis is a community endeavor. The Scriptural command to teach

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89 Sadly, future readers would know that their rebellion did continue, and it resulted in the exile to come, similar to God’s judgment explained in verses 21-31 and 44-55.
the next generation the basics of the faith has continued through the time of the kingdom of God, through the prophets, and into the New Testament.

*Catechesis is Transformational*

As this biblical survey of catechesis in spiritual orthodoxy concludes, the transformational power of the Gospel is evident. The Apostle Paul emphasized this point in his commendation to the Roman church:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

These verses mark a turning point in the book of Romans. They follow eleven chapters in which Paul explains the work God had done through the Gospel; now, Paul reminds the Roman church of their work – to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” What Paul means in these verses can only be understood when viewed through the lens of earlier sections of his letter.

Paul’s letter to the Romans has been much studied. Martin Luther wrote that Paul’s letter to the Romans was “the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel.” The theme of the letter is the gospel, and its theological depth is without peer. Almost immediately, Paul reminds his readers of the purpose of his letter: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from

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91 Isa. 8:16; Jer. 9:20; Ezra 7:10.
92 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), xiii.
faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17). And from here, Paul leads his Jewish readers to see the Gentiles’ active and willful rebellion from God (1:18-32). But before the Jewish Christians could celebrate, he reveals how they themselves are no better (2:1-3:8). In fact, “both Jews and Greeks are under sin” (3:9) because all are law-breakers. Paul’s message is clear – the only hope is found in “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:22). One of the most important of Protestant theology, this revolutionary tenet is the foundation of justification by faith.\textsuperscript{93} By the instrument of faith, a sinner is imputed with the righteousness of Christ as a gift of God by grace.\textsuperscript{94} And he spends the remainder of chapter 4 defending this doctrine.

In Romans 5, Paul turns a corner in his argumentation. He has laid out his basic premise – all men are sinners and need justification, and it is offered to anyone and can be received through faith. Dependent upon the previous passages (“οὖν” “therefore”), this is the beginning of Paul’s treatise on the Christian life and how this justification by faith works itself out in the believer’s life.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does

\textsuperscript{93} Once again we hear from Martin Luther who wrote, “This article of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, is the head and cornerstone of the church, which alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves and protects the church. Without it, the church of God cannot subsist but one hour,” quoted in R.C. Sproul, \textit{Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine Of Justification} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 18. Further, John Calvin saw this doctrine as “the main hinge on which religion turns.” John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, 3.11.1.

\textsuperscript{94} Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XI. “Of Justification;” \textit{Heidelberg Catechism} Q59-Q64; \textit{Baptist Confession of 1689}, Chapter 11. “Of Justification.”
not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:1-5)

These verses clarify that Christians are not only declared righteous but also reconciled with God and can have a present peace with Him through His Son. Paul illustrates more clearly the representative nature of Adam and Christ as the two representative “Heads” of the two groups of people – Adam as the head of sin and death, Christ as the head of grace and mercy. The doctrine of justification by faith is slowly being fleshed out in increasingly personal tones, as Paul is pointing more and more to the believer’s reconciliation and relationship with Christ. Believers have “peace with God,” “access by faith into this grace,” and “we rejoice with hope” (5:2). The Gospel indisputably claims that all that is offered to the believer is marked as undeserved, unearned, and even scandalous. Further, it is from the fount of these gracious gifts that the believer can suffer, endure, grow in character, and even hope (5:3-4). All of these truths are sealed through “the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (5:5). The Gospel is decidedly true, and the Spirit’s responsibility is to apply it in the life of the believer.

In Romans 6 and 7, Paul does not avoid discussion of the believer’s ongoing struggle with sin. Paul exhorts the Romans not to let sin reign in their bodies. This is not an exhortation to lead a sinless life, which only Christ could have done but is a command to serve only one master – Christ. In chapter 7, Paul writes about the inner conflict within all Christians, between the delight in the law and the delight in sin – a condition that makes him cry out, “what a wretched man I am!” The struggle is between slavery to God’s law and slavery to the law of sin (7:25). “We died with Christ… he died to sin…therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies” (6:8, 10, 11). Paul has prepared his readers for what is to follow.
“Therefore (ἆρα),” what has been said previously fuels Paul’s exhortation to come. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Paul knows the heart of humanity and speaks directly to those sinners who feel the condemnation of their sin, which is so clearly explained in chapter 7. Paul emphatically reasons that those who have been made righteous are not condemned because “the law of the Spirit of life has set you free” (8:2). In Romans 8, Paul reveals more about the implications of the Spirit, centered in verse 11: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Paul wants believers to know that, because of the Spirit’s indwelling presence, the Gospel can bring change in the heart and life of the believer.

If the same Spirit (πνεῦμα; breath; wind) who empowered the resurrection of Jesus Christ now dwells within the believer, God Himself is personally invested in the believer’s growth despite the struggle to cultivate spiritual orthodoxy. That is His job description. In light of this truth, as the church presses on with its mandate of educating its covenant children (that is, catechesis), it must consider the transformational aspect of this task. Catechesis is most effective when it is creedal and founded upon the true doctrine of the Gospel. By definition, catechesis must be communal and connected to the entire body of believers by involving families and community. Moreover, catechesis must be transformational, pointing upward to the power of the Spirit’s work in the disciple’s life.

The Impact of Isolation on Catechesis

The framework above of covenant children, spiritual orthodoxy, and catechesis, developed through the study of Scripture, can ostensibly be implemented in the normal
church community setting. However, when the paradigm for the normal church community setting is shifted, such as during a time of isolation, it would be helpful for the church to understand what Scripture says about how the church is to develop a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children during such times. Such an understanding must include a fundamental expression of community and what it means to belong to the church, despite circumstantial challenges to that notion, such as isolation or quarantine.

*We Belong to God and Each Other*

As discussed, covenant children belong to God and to the Church. This was the basis of Jesus’ counter-cultural moment of welcoming and blessing the little children of Judea (Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:16). To Jesus, these children were not theatrical props as part of an object lesson: they were His beloved – weak and lost, in need of life and a Savior. This point is made explicit in Matthew’s Gospel where, to stem a quarrel among His disciples who are vying for honor and greatness in Jesus’ kingdom, Jesus has a little child stand amid them. Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:3-6). Just in case the disciples missed Jesus’ point, which they were prone to do, He pointedly says, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” Children were beloved by Jesus, and the church is commanded to do the same.
Children belong to God and to the church. This is not a statement of equating children with property. On the contrary, since they are made in the image of God, children derive their very being from God. This “belonging” is in a sense of community and identity. Children of believers are members of the covenant community and therefore identify with and belong to the body of believers. This belonging is central to the heart of the covenant, which is typified in God’s promise near the end of Leviticus: “I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12). Known as the “Immanuel Principle,”95 this promise is significant because it is the “heart of the covenants.” It is the basis for every interaction between God and man – as He works out the Covenant of Grace in His created world full of sin and rebellion. Just as the tabernacle typified and revealed God’s “withness” to His people in the Old Testament, the Second Person of the Trinity came and tabernacle with His people in the God-man of Jesus Christ. God’s covenant relationship with man is seen in Jesus’ condescension and incarnation. To “belong to God” means to be united to God in Christ who became with His people, and part of His people, for both salvation and life.

The New Testament contains powerful pictures of “belonging,” beginning with the introduction of the church in Acts. The call to community and brotherly love is profound in examples such as Paul and Barnabas’ submission to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and John’s apostolic challenges to the seven church congregations in Revelation 1-3. The importance of this call is emphasized by the author of Hebrews in the command not to give up meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25), and by Paul in his many calls to unity in

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the church (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 1:10, 2 Cor. 6, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 2:11-22, 4:1-16; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 4:9-12). The New Testament ends with a picture of the entire covenant community in worship together; John’s prophesy makes it clear that community is the church’s eternal destiny. What is absent in that picture is any kind of isolation or solitude – they worship the Living God together and in concert with the angels. A deeper understanding of the Trinity can provide insight into why this image of community is the church’s destiny.

The Trinity is How We Understand Community

Marriage, while a beautiful gift from God, is not the foundation of human interaction. If it were, marriage would be a universal experience of every human being. The singleness of Jesus Christ, and the experiences of millions of single humans, preclude this possibility. On the contrary, the very being of God as a Trinitarian God is foundational to human interaction. “God Himself is, in a certain sense, ‘community’ within Himself.”96 God exists as three Persons who are eternally in communication and interaction. “God has always existed in as three co-equal, sharing, speaking, loving Persons in one ‘substance’ or reality in which each divine Person… indwells or coheres in the others.”97

As Tim Keller wrote, the Trinitarian God is in a dance among the Persons:

The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centeredness but by mutually self-giving love. When we delight and serve someone else, we enter into a dynamic orbit around him or her, we center on the interests and desires of the other. That creates a dance, particularly if there are three persons, each of whom moves around the other two. So it is, the Bible tells us. Each of the divine persons


97 Kelly, Systematic Theology, 21.
centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic pulsating dance of joy and love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this—*perichoresis*. Notice the root of our word ‘choreography’ is within it. It means literally to “dance or flow around.”

The Trinity is the very essence of God and is the basis for understanding how human beings interact with one another and love one another (Phil. 2:6-11). Ironically, love for neighbor is the impetus behind the COVID-19 quarantine. In an attempt to “flatten the curve,” Americans were encouraged to stay home and limit human interaction. This guidance was a wise and arguably necessary step to slow the coronavirus infection rate. It also poses significant challenges for the church, given humanity’s role as “image bearers” (Gen. 1:26) to the communal Triune God, necessitating that the church examine the implications of the quarantine on Christian discipleship and sanctification.

*Learning in Isolation or in Community*

The call for the church to help covenant children learn the Gospel in a creedal, communal, and transformational way persists even when they are providentially removed from the corporate body of believers, such as in the time of COVID-19. While not an ideal situation, the American church must consider how learning can continue and remain effective despite the circumstances and how it can support parents as they continue the

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work to foster the spiritual development of their children when they have lost the faith community.

Paul’s letter to the Romans can again provide insight into these issues. Paul’s main argument – salvation through the Gospel of Christ, which is received by faith – continues to build until it crescendos at the end of Romans 8. His faithful readers would immediately see the power in our adoption as children of God, God’s unconquerable love for His people, and the freedom given to God’s children by the Holy Spirit. After a brief digression about God’s relationship with Israel in chapters 9-11, Paul brings his readers back to the Gospel of justification by faith and the way it works out in the believer’s life:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

Based upon one’s identity as a child of God (“brothers”), and on the mercy of God, the reader would hear the command to offer one’s entire life as a “living sacrifice” and to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (12:2). In other words, according to the Apostle Paul, spiritual orthodoxy is cultivated through the consistent reminders of the doctrines of the Gospel, most notably the gracious mercies of God in justification by faith and the transformational work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian disciple.

Paul’s emphasis on the importance of ongoing doctrinal reminders could lead some readers, particularly those who are Christian educators, to despair. Teaching the

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100 The three chapters of Romans 9-11 is Paul’s attempt at answering the historical problem of “Has God rejected Israel?” (11:1). Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 429-30.
creedal center of the Gospel, while also relying on the work of the Spirit to do the actual transformation, could be interpreted as having significant responsibility without commensurate authority. Paul anticipates this potential interpretation and reminds his readers of the importance of having measured self-analysis (12:3) and of the communal nature of catechesis. “So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (12:5). God designed the church to work together, acknowledging that some are gifted teachers while others are gifted elsewhere. During a time of imposed isolation, inevitably, the body is not able to coordinate effectively. In normal circumstances, a teacher can teach, a server can serve, an exhorter can exhort, and a leader can lead; however, during the COVID-19 quarantine, a learner may be isolated without a gifted teacher. This situation certainly diminishes effectiveness.

Paul teaches in Romans 12 that while gospel catechesis must be creedal, communal, and transformational, these three are not of equal importance. Progress falters when a church is deficient in any of these pillars; however, while two deal with central tenets of orthodoxy, community is an issue of potency. If a congregation’s catechesis is not creedal and built upon a foundation other than the Gospel, it cannot rightly be called “orthodox,” and it may not even be Christian. Similarly, if a congregation’s catechesis is not transformational and pointing away from the power of the Holy Spirit’s quickening work in the believer’s life, it portrays a form of “moralistic therapeutic deism.” It also falls short of orthodoxy and tends in a dangerous direction. Unlike these two pillars, the communal aspect of catechesis is less an issue of orthodoxy and more of a threat to

effectiveness. Another way of saying it is that creed and transformation together ensure that the catechesis is within orthodoxy (correct belief), while community helps ensure that the catechesis is within orthopraxy (correct practice).

In normal circumstances, catechesis must exhibit all three pillars of creed, transformation, and community. However, during a time of temporary mandatory isolation, community, as it has been known, is not possible. In these times, the church must rely upon the providential care of the Triune God to cover this deficiency and prayerfully and wisely prepare for a return to in-person community.

**Conclusion: Catechesis during a Quarantine**

Cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy is the work of the Triune God and is the mission of the community of believers, the church. No matter the circumstances, believing parents, along with the entire corporate body of believers to whom they belong, have the imperative to teach the next generation. Relying upon the grace and mercy of their God, these educators bring the Gospel to the nearest mission field of covenant children. When faced with a lack of community resources, and the lack of knowledge of how to take advantage of virtual resources, parents have the imperative to take up the mantle of catechesis in the home. Thankfully, while parents have the job to preach and teach the Gospel, the Triune God is the One who brings the dead to life. He is the One who writes faith on the hearts of His people – even in unprecedented times like these.

Therefore, catechesis in a time of quarantine that is directed to cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy must be threefold. It must first be creational and based upon the very essence and doctrines of the Gospel. It must also be transformational – engaging both heart and mind, encouraging the children to lean upon the truth of the Gospel, to fear the LORD, to draw near to Him, and to acknowledge humbly the God who saves. As the
great Reformer John Calvin wrote, “It is the duty of a godly teacher, to confirm disciples in faith, to extol as much as possible the grace of Christ, so that being satisfied with that, we may seek nothing else.”102 This adage is the cornerstone of sanctification – growth in grace by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, and most pointedly, catechesis should work toward some form of community. Even in times of mandated temporary isolation, catechesis must involve the life of the corporate body of believers in some variable way, as well as the home. As David wrote, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps. 133:1). In so doing, God’s people give glory to the very communal being of the Triune God, enjoy the variable gifts of the corporeal body of the church, and work toward the cultivation of a godly faith in covenant children, while also humbly acknowledging that this godly faith is ultimately up to the Triune God Himself.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed relevant theoretical, historical, and research literature regarding the catechesis of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, especially in the face of isolation and loss of community. This literature review was limited to four areas of study. First, in the field of the history of childhood in the church, the researcher surveyed many ancient and contemporary scholars and practitioners. Kristine Garroway, O.M. Bakke, Hugh Cunningham, Jerome Berryman, and Marcia Bunge were among the more contemporary scholars. Second, in the field of spiritual development, the researcher examined the work of Urban T. Holmes, Richard Lovelace, and Stephen J. Mortley, among others. To better understand the field of spiritual development among children, the researcher also examined, among others, the work of stage development theories of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Erik Erikson. Third, to examine the role of catechesis in the history and life of the church, the researcher studied the work of such practitioners as J.I. Packer, Gary Parrett, John Westerhoff, O.C. Edwards, Jr., and such modern educational theorists as Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti, Jerome Berryman, and Annie George. Fourth and finally, the literature review turned to the scholarship regarding the impact of involuntary isolation and subsequent loss of community. For this, the researcher studied the historical documents of such scholars as Cyprian, Thomas Brooks, Ralph Venning, Theodore Beza, Martin Luther, and the modern theorists of Robert Coplan, Gerald Arbuckle, and Vivek Murthy, Nathan Smith, and Emma Barrett. By identifying themes in history and current research for each
of these areas of study, the researcher will be able to more fully understand the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine.

**The Child in the History and Life of the Church**

This project begins with an analysis of the concept of childhood and the history of children through the church. Scripture affirms that children are valuable in the eyes of God; however, the extent to which children are valuable in the eyes of the church is less clear. With minimal details, early Christian texts certainly confirm the presence of children in the worshipping community, but denote doubt about both their value to and role in the early church.\(^{103}\) Lactantius, the Christian Roman philosopher and advisor to Constantine, wrote in the early 4th century that the Hellenistic Roman world criticized the early church for having in their midst “old women, whom they despise and… our children, too.”\(^{104}\) Later church history texts provide even fewer details concerning the lives and value of children, provoking curiosity about this gap in the narrative.

One reason for the lack of information about the value and importance of children in the history of the church is confusion around the concept of childhood across cultures and centuries. Hyde, Yust, and Ota expressed this tension in their editorial introduction to a decade of thought on this subject, “constructions of childhood are indeed complex.”\(^{105}\)

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\(^{103}\) Alan Krieder, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 103.

\(^{104}\) Lactantius, *Inst. 5.19.14*.

Their insightful editorial posits that children, who were once viewed “as being passive, helpless, and incapable of making decisions for themselves,” are now “viewed as being active participants and co-constructors of meaning.”\(^{106}\) However, the following historical survey of childhood reveals that their assessment is not necessarily affirmed by other researchers of the subject. Furthermore, Julie Faith Parker makes the case that any attempt at understanding childhood reveals more about the adults in a culture than it does about the children.\(^{107}\) For example, in the United States today, a teenager over eighteen years old can fight in the U.S. military but is not legally able to buy tobacco\(^{108}\) or alcohol.\(^{109}\) In the opinion of the researcher, this seeming contradiction has less to do with concepts of maturity and childhood and more to do with the national history and social concepts of military engagement and the vices of tobacco and alcohol. Consequently, readers must be cognizant of how their own culture and bias affect how they are interpreting a text.

In the following brief historical survey, the researcher will examine how the world and the church have viewed children regarding their moral agency and their relation to the adult world. By doing so, the researcher will be able to synthesize the concept of childhood within the context of education and spiritual development. Many of

\(^{106}\) Hyde, Yust, and Ota, “Defining Childhood,” 1.


\(^{108}\) Tobacco to 21 Act, H.R. 2411, 116th Cong., 1st sess. (May 1, 2019).

the early church theologians viewed children as adults-in-training and nothing else (a “human becoming” instead of a “human being”),\textsuperscript{110} while more modern scholars such as Berryman see the opposite: a distinct human being that is to be treated completely independent from any adult.\textsuperscript{111} Related to these issues is the doctrine of Original Sin and how it relates to the moral culpability of children: whether children are inherently good or inherently evil.

Any history of children will be challenged by the relative lack of first-hand information since “Children leave relatively few direct records.”\textsuperscript{112} Children are abstract, especially in the period that predates the printing press and the vast proliferation of ideas. Conclusions about their lives must be inferred from secondary sources. The results of this historical survey will reveal more about the concept of childhood, but also the state of the scholarship of the doctrine of children as it stands today. It is the opinion of the researcher that through the history of the church, children have been viewed with ambivalence, love, confusion, and, in some cases, fear and hatred – responses that reveal more about adults and the culture than about the child. These attitudes have implications on the current research.

\textit{Childhood in the Ancient Near East}

In the Ancient Near East (ANE), evidence exposes ambivalence regarding the concept of childhood. On one hand, children were loved and cared for by parents who

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Nicola Ansell, \textit{Children, Youth, and Development}, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Peter N. Stearns, \textit{Childhood in World History}, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 4.
\end{itemize}
esteemed them and found great pleasure in them. On the other hand, childhood was simply a state of immaturity that one must bear and outgrow. In her book, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, Kristine Garroway examines cuneiforms, slave notes, adoption records, and mortuary evidence, concluding that children in this culture were both valuable and loved, but only in an anticipatory status. She notes that “They are a part of the society and household into which they are born, but their membership is not yet fully realized.” In other words, as children age, they advance along the continuum from member *in potentia* to a fully-realized member of the family and society.

However, this concept of growth was not fixed; that is, the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood were not determined by age. Instead, because “Childhood was a flexible concept,” children’s status fluctuated as they became slave or free, married or single, productive or unproductive. Margaret Y. MacDonald argues this dynamic can be seen in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, a work from the fourth century BC. In *Oeconomicus*, Socrates is in a dialogue with Critoboulus on household management, where he describes the life, work, and marriage of Ischomachus and his wife. The wife is praised for her management skills and her self-control; however, she is noticeably unnamed, and as she was only 15 when married, she is still treated like a child

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116 Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*. 
to be instructed. While gender certainly plays a role in this dynamic, MacDonald believes that the treatment of the 15-year-old wife argues that “a fluid relationship existed between childhood and adulthood with associated responsibilities.”117 This fluidity of age and role is indicative of the view in the ANE of children as probationary adults.

Childhood in the Old Testament

The research of Garroway and others118 concludes similarly with respect to children of the Old Testament: while children are loved, their value depends on the value they bring to the adults around them. Steinberg argues that biblical childhood “was not about developing one’s individuality and learning to speak one’s mind; instead, it was about learning to think like the group and to put group interests before individual ones.”119

Recent scholarship on this period of childhood studies is in Julie Faith Parker’s 2013 work Valuable and Vulnerable.120 Through a linguistic and narrative study, and building on the 1993 work of Shaye Cohen’s The Jewish Family in Antiquity,121 Parker employs a childist hermeneutic in her approach,122 which emphasizes “children’s active

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119 Steinberg, The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible, 17.

120 Parker, Valuable and Vulnerable.


role… instead of seeing them as largely passive or victimized.”\textsuperscript{123} According to Parker’s research into the Hebrew text and childist approach, children in the Old Testament are nowhere viewed as “coddled innocents” or even with an anachronistic romantic perception. “Rather, the text reveals awareness of children’s value and vulnerability as they progress through stages of development and assume cultural roles of increasing responsibility.”\textsuperscript{124} At first glance, the reader of the Old Testament might not see the value or importance of children; however, use of a childist hermeneutic provides a broader understanding.

The childist framework, therefore, may be helpful in revealing layers of the biblical text that were previously shrouded. One passage that provides such an example is 2 Kings 2:23-25. Historically, the term קְטַנִּים נְﬠָרִים (ne-arim qe-tan-nim), referring to the forty-two individuals who are torn apart by she-bears after mocking Elisha’s bald head, has been translated as young adults or teenagers. Parker suggests, however, that the use of this specific term indicates that these individuals are actually young boys and girls. She argues that translators prefer to connote young adults to mitigate readers’ potential horror over Elisha’s response.

Further, in Parker’s opinion, the adult Elisha is the main consideration and not the young children. This approach can help expose new meaning in the text, but it risks stretching the confines of hermeneutics. The author of 2 Kings, after all, wants the reader to be aware of both children and adults in this story. Linguistic study, along with a careful

\textsuperscript{123} Parker, \textit{Valuable and Vulnerable}, 17.

\textsuperscript{124} Parker, \textit{Valuable and Vulnerable}, 199.
understanding of one’s biases, can clarify the Scripture without having to shift the focus of the text. While the childist hermeneutic emphasizes children within a text, perhaps correcting an imbalance in previous interpretations, it does so at the expense of the adults and threatens to compromise the text’s original meaning.

Childhood in the New Testament

This same contradictory notion can be observed in the New Testament. Theologian Jerome Berryman, who has written extensively on a theology and pedagogy of childhood, concludes that “all four gospels are rich with ambiguity about children.”

He further explains that, whereas the “ANE perception of children is multifaceted,” for the entire New Testament period, “Children are understood as a means of grace.” Further, the fluidity of childhood in the ANE meant that young adults and adopted slaves were seen as children, at least in part. In this way, the biblical command to care for “orphans and widows” (James 1:27) had some connection to the gracious care for children, the weakest members of the community.

In her extensive writings about the Pauline and Pastoral epistles, MacDonald concurs with this conclusion, stating that “Children were more greatly valued in certain early church groups than is often recognized.” While Aristotelian codes only address

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the patriarch, Paul addresses children and slaves directly. In alignment with the predominant mores of the ANE, children were primarily viewed ambivalently or indifferently by the early church; however, their consistent presence in the early church meant that their place there was gradually becoming established. Moreover, these “Small, silent, but listening, children were absorbing the content of the Gospels, and they would deepen their understanding of the traditions throughout their lives.” As such, both the place of children as well as their spiritual education became interwoven in the early church as it gathered to worship together.

**Childhood in Early Christianity**

In the first centuries that followed the biblical period, early church fathers attempted to understand more about the biblical role and value of children. Jesus’ command to “become like little children” (Matt. 18:3) challenged dismissive historical views. According to O.M. Bakke, the Eastern Church fathers (Origen, Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria) saw children as malleable, developing, and innocent. Reflecting on Ephesians 6:1-4, Chrysostom remarks that, “When we teach our children to be good, to be gentle, to be forgiving (all these are attributes of God), to be generous, to love their fellow men, to regard this present age as nothing, we instill virtue in their souls, and reveal the image of God within them.” These views led to the early church’s

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valuation that children are like unformed wax and shapeless stone, ready to receive the biblical instruction from their parents.

According to Bakke, this view’s plausibility was reconsidered beginning in the fifth century, with the Pelagian controversy and the rise of St. Augustine’s doctrine of the total depravity of children.\textsuperscript{134} Pelagius, a British monk, motivated by practical piety and disgusted by the laxity in the church, began to teach that not only are human beings inherently good, but they also have the capacity and free will to choose good deeds and must do so to earn God’s grace.\textsuperscript{135} Augustine, along with the vast majority of Christendom at the time, judged Pelagius’ teaching as erroneous and undermining the grace of God,\textsuperscript{136} since divine grace, by its very essence, is favor that is bestowed on the undeserving. In other words, if grace is earned, it ceases to be grace. Augustine codified humanity’s utterly desperate state of inability to refrain from sin, declaring that, “Of his own will a man forsakes God, so as to be deservedly forsaken by God.”\textsuperscript{137} Born in this state of total depravity, no human could follow God apart from the effectual grace of God.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{134} Bakke, \textit{When Children Became People}, 104-109.

\textsuperscript{135} Brown, \textit{Heresies}, 200-08.

\textsuperscript{136} The ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) condemned Pelagius as a heretic.


This belief was more than theoretical for Augustine. As one of the few married church fathers with children, he observed the children in his life. One such example is seen in his *Confessions*:

The innocence of children is in the helplessness of their bodies rather than any quality in their minds. I have myself seen a small baby jealous; it was too young to speak, but it was livid with anger as it watched another infant at the breast. There is nothing unusual in this. Mothers and nurses will tell you that they have their own way of curing these fits of jealousy. But at any rate it is an odd kind of innocence when a baby cannot bear that another – in great need, since upon that one food his very life depends – should share the milk that flows in such abundance.139

For Augustine, even infants are guilty of Original Sin, and this sinfulness seeps into every aspect of their hearts, souls, mind, and strength.

Bakke, along with Stortz and others, argues that the application of the doctrine of total depravity to children had tragic consequences on the treatment of children.140 It would have been better, according to them, to follow Pelagius and conceive of children as innocent and with inherent goodness. In their view, following Augustine and treating the vicissitudes of childish behavior as morally repugnant, the church neglected the needs of the children and furthered their potential abuse.141 However, this paints a caricature of Augustine and the doctrine of Original Sin and ignores the conflicted attitudes toward children throughout history. In contrast to Chrysostom and the early church fathers, Augustine did not see children as miniature adults ready to be molded and shaped in the

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140 Martha Ellen Stortz, “‘Where or When was your Servant Innocent?’: Augustine on Childhood,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 99-102; Berryman, *Children and the Theologians*, 59-60.

image of man. “Rather, Augustine portrayed adults as grown-up children – only more complex.” Augustine’s thoughts furthered New Testament themes indicating that children were examples of grace. Whatever one thinks of an Augustinian anthropology versus a Pelagian (or semi-Pelagian) anthropology, it is clear that both strands are not inventions but continuing along a path from Jesus to their day.

**Childhood in the Middle Ages**

No discussion of the doctrine of childhood during the Middle Ages would be complete without interacting with Frenchman Philippe Ariès’ watershed 1960 historiography of children, *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime*. After exhaustive research of the art, diaries, letters, literature, education, and even the dress, toys, and games, of French nobility, Ariès’ famously concludes, “In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist.” Hugh Cunningham argues that Ariès’ controversial assessment was mistranslated into English, which resulted in the unfounded accusation that Ariès was condemning the norms of medieval families. Instead, what Ariès’ work amounted to was a treatise on the emergence of the nuclear family, uncovering the relative modernity of the notion of childhood. The distinctions between childhood and adulthood widened as the idea of childhood as a discrete phase of human existence continued to develop through the end of the Middle Ages. One significant factor in this shift was the normalization of the school education system. “Starting in the fifteenth

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century, the reality and the idea of the family were to change: a slow and profound revolution… the essential event is quite obvious: the extension of school education.”

As schools replaced apprenticeships, the children of the Middle Ages were treated with more and more specificity. In fact, Ariès found through an analysis of iconography that humankind was divided into five stages during the Middle Ages. The first three stages would be found in today’s understanding of childhood and youth: The Age of Toys – children playing; The Age of School – children learning; The Ages of Love or Courting – youth feasting, walking, and beginning families. By the seventeenth century, the concept of childhood had become firmly set, decidedly distant from the ANE’s view that “Childhood was a flexible concept.”

Despite the claim that Ariès argued for an agnostic view of childhood in the Middle Ages, the data simply do not substantiate it. Lloyd deMause contends that childhood in the medieval age was a “nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken” and that Ariès underestimated the horrible abuse and treatment that children suffered in the Middle Ages. One example described the behavior of a poor medieval mother removing her infant from his cradle to bring him into her bed, which deMause characterizes as a psychological attempt to be mothered herself. By cuddling with the infant, the mother was not caring for the child but was selfishly using the child

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145 Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 369.
as her “security blanket.” On the other hand, Shulamith Shahar maintains that children were nurtured and beloved in the Middle Ages, and Shahar criticizes deMause’s interpretation of what Shahar deems a basic nurturing action. “The weary wetnurse or mother who took the child into her bed could give them the breast without rising from bed in a cold room when both she and the infant were only half-awake. The poor also undoubtedly took their infants into their beds in order to warm them.” Whether one agrees with deMause or Shahar, the data reveals a period in which children were not ignored but considered with (dis)affection.

The writings of Thomas Aquinas further support this view. Aquinas, who is honorably titled “the Angelic Doctor,” ennobled himself among other theologians of the Medieval Period through his unparalleled ability to synthesize Augustinian and Patristic thought and Aristotelian logic. Before the Age of Enlightenment attempted to reduce reason to only that which can be understood in an agnostic and closed system, Aquinas argued that true rationality is found within God. In his great work *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274), Aquinas identified categories of human development that look strikingly similar to modern developmental stages. He divided the years of childhood and youth into three stages: *Infantia* – one to seven years old; *Pueritia* – seven years old to

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150 Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 89.


puberty; *Adolescentia* – puberty to young adulthood. Aquinas then used these three categories to apply reason to the development of children, assigning rationality as the marker of development. For example, around seven years old, the *Pueritia* stage “begins with the dawning of rational thought.”\(^{154}\) When children reach puberty, childhood ends, and they enter the *Adolescentia* stage, in which they are henceforth treated as adults “in ecclesiastical and moral matters.”\(^{155}\) Aquinas reasoned that if a person could reason in a small way, he was in the *Pueritia* stage and thus must be taught to wield his rationality. After all, once this stage was complete at the onset of puberty, the person was personally culpable of his every action and thought.

Thomas Aquinas’ dedication to rationality meant that the *Infantia* stage presented his biggest obstacle since infants are incapable of reason. Traina refers to Aquinas’ view that “young children, lacking reason, are not intentional moral agents (and)… in short, they cannot be held accountable for anything.”\(^{156}\) The tenet that children were morally innocent presented a significant quandary for Aquinas, given his adherence to Augustine’s belief in Original Sin. As a result, Aquinas’ logic found an irrationality against which he could not argue. An ambivalent attitude toward children was an impossibility for someone like Aquinas, so he resorted to apparent indifference. For Berryman, this indifference was evident in that “(w)hen all the questions of his great *Summa Theologica* are reviewed no major question was asked about children.”\(^{157}\) Traina

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\(^{154}\) Traina, “A Person in the Making,” 117.

\(^{155}\) Traina, “A Person in the Making,” 119.

\(^{156}\) Traina, “A Person in the Making,” 114.

\(^{157}\) Berryman, *Children and the Theologians*, 80.
further concludes that “(t)he deepest flaws in Aquinas’ teachings on children have much
to do with what he did not say.” In the end, for Aquinas, for whom “reason” reigned
supreme, there was little reason to write about childhood.

This indifferent attitude was common among the Western Scholastic theologians
such as Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Bonaventure. Anselm of Canterbury
mentored the *adolescentia* who came to study at the monasteries, but they did not extend
into his writings. Even the one Scholastic theologian known to have had a child, Peter
Abelard, was so scandalized by this indiscretion that he sent his wife, Héloïse, away to a
monastery and abandoned the child to obscurity.  

*Childhood during the Reformation*

This historical survey of the concept of childhood continues with arguably one of
history’s most significant inventions – the Gutenberg printing press. In 1439, with the
invention of the moveable type, Johannes Gutenberg initiated a revolution of ideas that
would spread through the world only a few years later. The first copy of the Gutenberg
Bible was printed in 1455, and “by 1520 there were more than two hundred different
editions of the Bible in existence in many languages.”  

The speed of the transmission of ideas was unprecedented. By the time Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the
church door of Wittenberg Church in 1517, the die had been cast. The Reformation had
begun and, with it, the Modern Era.

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159 Berryman, *Children and the Theologians*, 91.
While the Scholastics of the Middle Ages were marred by their indifference and possible disdain for children, the Reformation brought a needed change. This change came about largely through the marriage of a monk (Martin Luther) with a nun (Katharine von Bora). The couple had six biological children of their own and was known to have a plethora of guests and students in their home at all times. Luther seemed truly to enjoy his children and called them “God’s little jesters.”160 Whereas the duties of child-rearing still fell to the woman, “in Luther’s eyes, all mothers and fathers bear responsibility for the preservation of God’s promise because their labors make it possible for children to become the mature, ardent confessors of the evangelical faith and the responsible citizens God desires.”161 For Luther, the new modern world expanded the role of the father into child-rearing while elevating the importance of children in the preservation of a larger society. Even adults without children began to have a role in the nurturing of a society’s children.162

Luther was not indifferent to children but embraced a conflicted attitude. On the one hand, he encouraged fathers to wash diapers and perform the tasks commonly understood as the wife’s responsibilities.163 On the other hand, with little agency, children were only thought of as recipients of the teaching and care from parents. This

160 Martin Luther, as quoted in Berryman, *Children and the Theologians*, 97.


162 Jane E. Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology: ‘For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for…. the Young?’” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 158.

view typified Luther’s theology that all humans are, in fact, ambivalent; that is, “simul iustus et peccator, simultaneously saint and sinner.”¹⁶⁴ This theological tension informed Luther’s view of children and child-rearing, particularly that the primary concern about children and their rearing was the preservation of the evangelical faith. According to Jane E. Strohl, Luther identified four critical duties of parents: “to provide the sacrament of baptism for infants, to form children in the true faith as they grow, to attend to their education for a worthy vocation, and to provide them with a suitable spouse in a timely fashion.”¹⁶⁵ In the mind of Luther, children were to be nurtured and encouraged in their maturation through catechesis and communal parenting.

Whereas Martin Luther’s interactions with children were well-documented, John Calvin’s were more opaque. In the writings of Calvin, one finds a great synthesizer of Luther’s ideas, Aquinas’ logic, and the modern ideas of education and child-rearing; however, they contain few details concerning Calvin’s personal life. It is known that Calvin and his wife, Idelette, had one son who died shortly after birth¹⁶⁶ and maybe some daughters who also did not survive.¹⁶⁷ These tragedies may have affected his attitudes toward children and the doctrine of childhood. Like Luther, Calvin was not indifferent to covenant children but found them primarily “a metaphor for the religious life of adult

¹⁶⁴ Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology,” 134.


¹⁶⁷ Bruce Gordon, Calvin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 88.
Christians.”168 To morally culpable adults, children, as recipients of the unearned grace of God, represent a symbol of faith. In Calvin’s theology, “(s)erious implications for children’s lives and important assumptions about their nature emerge in his radically theocentric theology of grace, especially in his understandings of providence, covenant, baptism, and human nature as created and fallen.”169 Hearkening back to the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, while many scholars find Calvin’s hold on predestination as incongruous with a positive view of children, this need not be.170 This misconception is often the result of misunderstanding the doctrine of Original Sin. Barbara Pitikin makes the point that scholars misconstrue Calvin’s statement in his On the Secret Providence of God when they strip out of context Calvin’s words, “God (hurls) into eternal death innocent babes torn from their mother’s breasts.”171 Within the context, Calvin is rhetorically arguing that his opponents are the ones who are leading innocent babes into eternal death. More relevant, according to Pitkin, was that “Calvin did indeed teach that God reprobated and damned some infants, but he also held the traditional Western view that because of Original Sin, they were not innocent and therefore were justly damned.”172 In Calvin’s view, it is important to note that God does not damn innocent newborns; instead, along with the vast majority of Western theologians since


170 Berryman, Children and the Theologians, 100-04.


Augustine, Calvin held that all humans from conception were corrupted by Original Sin and cannot be counted as innocent. In Calvin’s words, “even infants bring their condemnation with them from their mother’s womb; for although they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their unrighteousness, they have its seed included in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed of sin, and, therefore, cannot but be odious and abominable to God.”

Childhood in Pietism

By the 17th century, the Reformation had advanced to the point that it produced multiple counter-reformations, such as the Catholic Counter-Reformation and a form of Lutheran orthodoxy in Germany. Reacting against this Scholastic Lutheranism was the important theological tradition known as Pietism, led by three thinkers: Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760). While rarely seen today, Pietism produced the founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, and is arguably the predecessor of most independent Protestant churches today. This tradition arose to combat the “dead orthodoxy” of Scholastic Lutheranism and can best be summarized by Spener’s *Pia Desideria* in which he argues for small group bible studies, known as *collegia pietatis*

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(pious gatherings) in the vein of Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40,\textsuperscript{179} as well as working on orthopraxis (right behavior), and an overhaul in education.\textsuperscript{180}

The Pietistic view of children was not very different from that of the Reformers, although the Pietistic emphasis on orthopraxis culminated in more fervent care for children. For example, in the German town of Halle, Francke took Spener’s proposals for reform and established large charitable and educational facilities. It was of a massive scale that “covered about thirty-seven acres and involved three thousand students, teachers, and staff.”\textsuperscript{181} His approach to education was innovative and helped establish pedagogy as a separate academic discipline.\textsuperscript{182} And while Francke has been criticized for stating that the “will of the child must be broken,” his compassion for children and desire for their love and service of others was paramount.\textsuperscript{183}

The conflation of the doctrine of Original Sin with the harsh treatment of children was, in the view of the researcher, an unfortunate development.\textsuperscript{184} For example, Berryman argues that Calvin’s concern for the health and education of children was “despite his views of Original Sin, election, and predestination.”\textsuperscript{185} It was, according to

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\textsuperscript{179} Maschke, “Philipp Spener’s Pia Desideria,” 193.
\textsuperscript{182} Bunge, “Education and the Child,” 249.
\textsuperscript{183} Bunge, “Education and the Child,” 251.
\textsuperscript{184} Hugh Cunningham, \textit{Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500} (New York: Longman, 1995), 61-62.
\textsuperscript{185} Berryman, \textit{Children and the Theologians}, 102.
\end{flushright}
Berryman, contradictory to care for children and hold to the doctrine of Original Sin. Miller-McLemore asserts that the Reformers encouraged the head of the household “to ‘break’ and ‘beat down’ the will through weekly catechism, daily prayer and Scripture reading… and sometimes intense psychological and even physical reprimand.” In Clarissa Atkinson’s research into the Jesuit and Ursuline missionaries among the Huron people during the 1630s and 1640s, she argues that it was their adherence to Original Sin that resulted in some of the most shocking treatment to the indigenous people. As the missionaries came over to the New World, they brought with them diseases that decimated the local indigenous population: a smallpox epidemic of 1634, influenza in 1636, scarlet fever in 1637, and smallpox once again in 1639. As these diseases spread, as much as a quarter or third of the Huron population died. Moreover, in the face of hundreds of infants dying, the missionaries time and time again baptized dying Huron children without parental consent. In fact, as the epidemics grew and hundreds of children were dying, “some of the Huron came to believe that baptism caused death.” Compounding this act, the missionaries’ common response to grief-stricken parents was manipulation: encouraging Huron parents’ baptism so as to ensure that they would be


189 Atkinson, “Wonderful Affection,” 244.
reunited with their dead children in the Christian heaven.\textsuperscript{190} Atkinson believes it was the Jesuit and Ursuline insistence on Original Sin that led to such behavior,

On the contrary, in her collection of essays, \textit{The Child in Christian Thought}, Marcia Bunge draws the conclusion that “the idea of Original Sin… has fostered the more humane treatment of children.”\textsuperscript{191} The doctrine of Original Sin, according to Bunge, encouraged the proliferation of education, of the evangelistic work of catechesis, and of the care for the poor children, by “seeing them as individuals with gifts and talents that can be cultivated” and by fostering an “egalitarian framework of thought.”\textsuperscript{192} In other words, the doctrine of Original Sin enables parents to see the disobedience in their children as a corruption of God’s intended order and not part of their created form. This, in turn, encourages parents to pray for the work of God’s grace in their children’s hearts and emboldens adults to care for every child in their spheres of influence.

Luther, Calvin, and the Pietists all saw the power and majesty of children and held them up as symbols of faith, nurturing, election, and the religious life. For the Reformers, children were held in high regard allegorically but secondary in the theology. For the Pietists, who elevated behavior in theology, children were necessarily elevated. Because Pietism began as a reaction against the dead orthodoxy of Lutheranism, it naturally elevated the outward function of the Gospel. Children were not simply empty containers to receive instruction from adults but were human beings with the agency to respond with

\textsuperscript{190} Atkinson, “Wonderful Affection,” 245.


\textsuperscript{192} Bunge, “Introduction,” 16.
faith and right behavior. By the end of the seventeenth century, the biblical theme of a nuanced and ambivalent attitude toward children had advanced.

**Childhood during the Enlightenment**

With René Descartes’ philosophy and the scientific revolution exemplified by Newtonian physics, the Age of Reason came to Europe in the 18th Century. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gives us the best definition of the Enlightenment, especially when it regards Christian thought: “Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another.”

As such, the Enlightenment represented a fundamental epistemological shift in thinking from a divine authority to a human-centered authority. For Enlightenment and modernistic scholars, dogmatic presuppositions external to one’s reason were anathema as the role of scientific rationalism was elevated.

The Enlightenment also changed the way humanity viewed children. Gone was the dogma of Original Sin and the inherent sinfulness of man. Instead, children were either morally neutral or completely innocent. By removing the divine from philosophy, physics, anthropology, and even education, children exist for themselves (*ego cogito, ergo sum*; “I think, therefore I am”) and therefore, as John Locke argued, start as a “blank slate.” This was not a revolutionary concept regarding children; after all, many scholars before the Enlightenment believed children were inherently good.

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193 Immanuel Kant, “Was ist Aufklärung?,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin, Germany), December 1784.

194 René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason*, 4.

Notwithstanding, what is significant in the Enlightenment concerns the shift in the source of ascribed authority, which had a dramatic impact on the view of children. Theologians were no longer in the vanguard. Instead, scientists became the authorities. Scripture was relegated from being an authoritative voice to a source of superstition and immature belief. As such, the focus of childrearing was transferred from spiritual and emotional nurturing to scientific and rational explanations.

_Childhood Today_

This historical survey on the concept of childhood allowed the researcher to see that from the Ancient Near East to today, children have been seen in ambivalent, conflicting ways. On the one hand, they have been seen as precious and in need of nurturing and have been held up as examples of piety and faith. On the other hand, the church has understood the inherent sinfulness of man through the doctrine of Original Sin and applied it to the lives of children. Further, the scant evidence of the lives of children along with the treatment of children as proto-adults has led modern theologians to correct what they see as a deficit. Judith M. Gundry-Volf argues that children “are not ‘just’ children but representatives of Christ” and therefore must be brought forward in modern theology.196 Hermeneutically, this view is seen in the emergence of the childist theology of Julie Faith Parker, as well as in the feminist theology of Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore.

However, an orthodox evangelical Christian need not abandon the grammatical-historical hermeneutic in order to acknowledge the value and importance of children. Jerome Berryman argues that “children as a means of grace can be moved to the center of

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theology and spiritual practice.”197 Without the benefits of developmental theory and an understanding of the stages and roles of childhood and adolescence, centuries of the early church struggled to arrive at even a basic understanding of children, much less how they were made in God’s image, in need of grace, and to be nurtured in the Gospel. That is where the research turns next.

**Spiritual Development**

This project is more than understanding the concept of children through the history of the church. It also focuses on how children develop a spiritual orthodoxy during a time of isolation. As such, it entails exploration of the spiritual development of children, and how various practitioners have viewed it. The researcher thus studied and synthesized the insights from a variety of Christian spiritual traditions and secular developmental psychologists.

**Christian Spirituality**

Since the beginning of the church, leaders have strived to understand the intricate process of spiritual development. The fact is “Christian spiritual formation is complex.”198 In the apostolic age, spiritual development happened through communal bible study, sacraments, and corporate worship and praise (Acts 2:42-47). By contrast, during the first three centuries of the early church, spiritual development happened through persecution and patience since “every Christian believer had to reckon with the

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possibility of being put to death for the faith.\textsuperscript{199} Unsurprisingly, such an extended period of trial impacted the spiritual formation on the church body. Kreider has claimed that it was not just the threat of persecution, but the conviction that a life lived in the countercultural Way of Jesus, through catechesis and care for the poor, that their habitual behavior changed the world. They were being formed through patiently waiting for the coming of the King.\textsuperscript{200}

As the church grew worldwide and spread into various different communities and faith traditions, the concept of what spiritual development consists of has evolved. The Roman Catholic Church developed a tradition of Spiritual Formation entailing minister training and the spiritual disciplines of prayer, bible reading, and fasting.\textsuperscript{201} Meanwhile, by the middle of the twentieth century, the Protestant churches encountered a problem that Richard Lovelace identified as a “Sanctification Gap.”\textsuperscript{202} In comparing the protestant churches with the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s, Lovelace quipped, “the Roman Church (seemed to be) the sole possessor of a great tradition of doctors of the spiritual life, physicians of the soul who walked in the light of God’s presence. As for Protestant theology, it seems as supernatural as a Sears Roebuck Catalogue.”\textsuperscript{203} Lovelace believed that there was an unspoken conspiracy between “Liberals” on one side and

\textsuperscript{199} Brown, \textit{Heresies}, 76.

\textsuperscript{200} Krieder, \textit{Patient Ferment}, 1-4.


\textsuperscript{203} Lovelace, “The Sanctification Gap,” 364.
“Conservatives” on the other. The liberal Protestant churches focused on social concerns. In contrast, conservative fundamentalist churches focused on “side issues” like eschatological subtleties. While they fought, the average Christian stood in a chasm, longing for help in spiritual growth.204

In this Sanctification Gap, scholars like Dallas Willard and J.I. Packer provided much-needed guidance to the protestant world.205 Over the years that followed, they were joined by additional theologians and pastors like Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, Henri J. M. Nouwen, J. Oswald Sander, N.T. Wright, Jack Miller, and Francis Schaeffer who continued the work.206 In so doing, they have each highlighted different strands of Christian spirituality to which Jesus calls all believers.

**Urban T. Holmes’s “Circle of Sensibility” and Stephen J. Mortley**

To make sense of the different strands of Christian spirituality, the episcopal priest and scholar Urban T. Holmes III (1930-1981) developed a two-scaled model of Christian spirituality he called the “Circle of Sensibility.” According to Holmes, “most forms of Christian spirituality will emphasize one of the four possibilities within these

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scales.”207 The vertical scale is the speculative/affective scale. The speculative seek “illumination of the mind” in their desire to know God while the affective seek “illumination of the heart or emotions.” The horizontal scale is the apophatic/kataphatic scale and is Holmes’ attempt to identify people according to their spiritual “technique.” On the right side of this scale are those who Holmes calls “kataphatic” who engage the revealed God by attempting to connect with God through the senses. This term comes from the Greek word καταφατικός (kataphatikos), meaning “affirmation.” According to Holmes, this type of spirituality emphasizes the use of concepts, images, and symbols as a way of meditating with a God who is revealed and knowable. This style is typified by the classic sixteenth-century work The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, which “presents a highly structured symbolic-image oriented approach to spirituality that continues to the present.”208

Those on the left side of this scale, on the other hand, are “apophatic,” from the Greek word ἀποφατικός (apophatikos) meaning “negation” in their spiritual orientation. These people tend to emphasize the mystery of God, silence, and mystical union. This style is typified by the fourteenth-century devotional classic The Cloud of Unknowing.209 The Cloud “urges forgetting and unknowing in the service of a blind, silent love beyond all images, thoughts, and feelings - a love which gradually purifies, illuminates and unites


the contemplative to the Source of this love.” According to Holmes, it is possible to locate every type of Christian spirituality somewhere within the Circle of Sensibility. He further believed that every Christian either feels the tension with other aspects of spirituality they are not emphasizing, or falls victim to their quadrant’s own excesses.

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A sensitive spirituality will, however, maintain a certain tension with those other dimensions that are not emphasized… Without that tension we fall into excesses, which are defined here as encratism, rationalism, pietism, and quietism.\textsuperscript{211}

His Circle of Sensibility is now complete with his identified excesses on either end of each quadrant’s scale, which are subsequently further described in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Holmes’ Circle of Spiritual Sensitivity with Identifies Excesses

The A/H Christian pursues a spirituality of contemplation. They identify with the monastic and ascetic movements. These are the Christians who prefer to isolate from community and live outside of the world in peace and solitude. Prayer and quiet worship are the disciplines of this orientation. St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas à Kempis are the most notable examples of this variety of spirituality in church history. The excess of

\textsuperscript{211} Holmes, \textit{A History of Christian Spirituality}, 251.
this type is quietism, which includes the neglect of culture and an excessive concern for absorption with God.

The K/H Christian pursues a spirituality of personal renewal. They want to feel their religion. They are suspicious of doctrinal formalism and want to call the church away from a dead orthodoxy. The disciplines of retreat and revivalism are central to this model. Holmes locates St. Benedict and Charles Wesley in this spirituality. The excess in this model is pietism (as Holmes defines it): an emotionalism and subjectivism and excessive concern for feelings and the right experience.

The K/M Christian pursues a spirituality of theological precision where the intellect is dominant. In this model, every dimension of the faith is processed through the mind. Sermons are expected to have ample conceptual content and theological depth. In this spirituality, awareness of self is not emphasized as much as knowledge of God and his Word. The disciplines of study and formal prayer are central to this model. Augustine, Calvin, and the Puritans represent this spiritual model. Its excess, of course, is classic rationalism: an exaggerated concern for reason and right thinking, formalistic dogmatism, and propositional specificity about God and all God’s ways with us.

Finally, the A/M Christian pursues a spirituality of social action. Here, an obedience to the law and Jesus’ commands take precedence over any kind of personal devotion to the personal God. A bold striving characterizes the people of this model to apply the message and words of Scripture to right action. These are the “workers” of the kingdom who need no other compulsion than that of an innate sense of duty to God. Excesses in this type come in the form of encratism, moralism, excessive legalism, and the excessive liberalism found in mainline denominations.
The work of Stephen J. Mortley enhanced Holmes’ Circle of Sensibility in his 1995 work on spiritual formation. Using Holmes’ circle, and Jesus’ words in Mark 12:30, Mortley argues that each quadrant is typified by one of the aspects of love, as seen here in Figure 3:

In Mortley’s circle, if one believes that prayerful contemplation is necessary for the Christian life, then his spirituality will be defined by the “heart.” If one believes that engaging worship is necessary for the Christian life, then his spirituality will be defined by the “soul.” If one believes that studious Bible readings are necessary for the Christian life, then her spirituality will be defined by the “mind.” Moreover, if one believes that humble service is necessary for the Christian life, then her spirituality will be defined by

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“strength.” Stepping back, we are able to see that they are all necessary. Not one person, denomination, or tradition holds the monopoly of Christian spirituality. Each emphasizes one quadrant over the other three. Only one human being ever attained perfect balance among all four quadrants: Jesus Christ. All other humans fall somewhere off center.

An Analysis of Christian Spirituality

By using Mortley’s circle, we can evaluate all forms of spiritual development as parts of the whole. After all, Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf contended that each theological tradition has a “jewel of truth” that contributes to the Christian faith’s overall understanding.213 The contemplative tradition of the church can typify the “heart” quadrant. This includes the Catholic mystics of Bernard of Clairvaux, Theresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, or Thomas à Kempis.214 It also includes the broader tradition of contemplative spirituality found in George Fox, Brother Lawrence, Richard Foster, and Eugene Peterson.215 This type of Christian formation is found in solitude and retreat, reflective prayer, journaling, contemplation, and – the term made popular by InterVarsity – “quiet times.”216


The “soul” quadrant can be typified by the charismatic, arts- and musically-oriented, and those who find nourishment in the corporate worship of the church. The corporate worship experience and the emotive joy found in singing the hymns and spiritual songs of the church are highlighted. The creative process of the arts helps to remind these Christians in the creative process of their God. This includes the charismatic and Pentecostal movement, the work of liturgists and worship creators, and creative artists like Andrew Peterson and his Rabbit Room. This type of Christian formation is found in worship, fellowship, singing, and the arts.

The “mind” quadrant can be typified by the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes the Word and right doctrine. Sola Scriptura has been a rallying cry since the Reformation and this tradition says that spiritual formation happens as the believer is “rooted and grounded” (Eph. 3:17) in the Word of God. This includes the writings of John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, Sinclair Ferguson, Michael Horton, Tim Keller, and many others. This type of Christian formation is found in biblical study and education and emphasizes the great doctrinal truths of the faith.


The “strength” quadrant is typified by the Holiness tradition, which places great emphasis on orthopraxy. Stress is on spiritual disciplines, service, and the strenuous and active exercise of one’s pursuit of holiness. This is typified by the work of John Wesley, the Moravians, the holiness traditions, and the Wesleyan and Methodist churches. This type of Christian formation is found in service, obedience to God’s command, and justice.

If such a dynamic and nuanced view of Christian spirituality is appropriate, then any evaluation of Christian spiritual development must not only acknowledge the limitations of our spiritual traditions but also highlight opportunities for growth in the other areas. Diversity of spiritual expression and tradition is uncommon in modern evangelical churches. For example, a Christian within the “mind” Reformed tradition, who is being studied in this research, is raising covenant children to see their spirituality in terms of theological precision and cognitive precision. In that case, a well-rounded spirituality can only be gained if the current emphases are acknowledged, and opportunities are encouraged to learn from other forms. The risk of limiting his children’s development to only his tradition is a dead orthodoxy based in deep rationalism. As such, these considerations should underlay the work of a church’s ministry to children, not just that of child-rearing. Acknowledging the monergistic work of the Spirit as discussed in the previous chapter, a proposed definition for holistic Christian spiritual formation would be one in which the Christian is formed by the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s

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union with Christ and centered on the Word of God, meditative prayer, corporate worship, and humble service done in response to God’s grace.

*Faith Development through Stage Theory*

In order to apply this nuanced view of Christian spirituality to child-rearing and the faith of children, it is necessary to understand the entire development of children better. Since the turn of the 20th century, the field of stage-development theory has changed how psychologists view children and their interaction with the world. In fact, stage development theory has been a paradigm shift in the scholarship of human development. “Over the last decade, developmental systems theory has overtaken the nature vs. nurture debate as the guiding principle of human development across the lifespan.”

The following is a brief survey of a few of the leading scholars and their work in these fields.

**Jean Piaget (cognitive development) (1896-1980)**

A pioneer in cognitive development was Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget who in the 1920s influenced a generation of psychologists and educators in describing the theory of cognitive development in children. Piaget’s emphasis was on how children think and interact with their world. Piaget saw children as “little scientists,” exploring their own world in a different way of learning and thinking than adults. “Children are

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intellectual aliens in the adult world; adult thinking is foreign to them.” Arguably Piaget’s most enduring legacy is the age-stage approach to processes such as moral, linguistic, social, and faith. Where medieval and reformation thinkers saw childhood divided into three categories, Piaget saw four: sensorimotor (birth to two years old), preoperational (about two to six or seven years old), concrete operational (seven to eleven years old), and formal operational (about twelve through adulthood). As children mature, their minds and cognitive ability change.

**Lev Vygotsky (sociocultural theory) (1896-1934)**

Where Piaget saw a child as an individual scientist in his/her own laboratory, Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, a contemporary to Piaget, saw the social interaction between children as an enhancement upon the education of that child. “Social development is supported by social interaction.” One important concept that Vygotsky developed was the Zone of Proximal Development – the body of tasks that children cannot accomplish independently but for which they need “another, more competent person” Because of this, Vygotsky believed that children seek out adults in their lives for social interaction to help make sense of their world. “Individuals come to a task, problem, or conversation with their own subjective ways of making sense of it. If they

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then discuss their differing viewpoints, shared understanding may be attained... In other words, in the course of communication participants may arrive at some mutually agreed-upon, or intersubjective, understanding.”  

Vygotsky believed that there were two groups of functions held by children: “those the children already possess, and those they can perform under guidance, in groups, and in collaboration with one another but which that have not mastered independently.”  

But during a time of isolation, that collaborative nature of education that Vygotsky found instrumental is lost. Children may memorize facts, but the child’s education is stunted without the imitative activity of learning in community. Vygotsky’s work in the social component of education proves an important consideration when studying the impact of isolation on the catechesis of children.

Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development) (1927-1987)

While Piaget interacted with the cognitive ability of children and Vygotsky on the sociocultural aspect, Lawrence Kohlberg researched how children develop morally. After extensive research, Kohlberg concluded that “when children are faced with a moral decision, their thinking processes differ from the moral reasoning of most adults.”  

From this work, and inspired by Piaget, Kohlberg developed a theory of moral

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development by identifying “three levels of moral reasoning and two stages within each level.”

In the lowest level, “Preconventional Morality,” young children are self-interested and have not yet developed a sense of right and wrong. Within this level, Stage 1 “Punishment and Obedience,” young children believe they are following the fixed rules laid down by their parents, but they are acting out of self-interest. In Stage 2, “Individualism and Exchange,” children around seven or eight years old begin to rebel against the imposed morality. Adolescents begin to use “Conventional Morality” by looking around and finding some source of right and wrong that is beyond them, but they do not question the validity of these authorities. In Stage 3, adolescents value the social norms and desire to be a “good boy” or “good girl” according to these social morals. In Stage 4, young adults value and obey the laws of the land as their authority. Being a good citizen, fitting into society, and maintaining the social order are the highest goals. The final level, according to Kohlberg, is only achieved by a few adults and rarely before their mid-twenties. In this level, individuals begin to question the morality to which they have been holding. In Stage 5, the adult sees the social constructs in which he lives as complicated and nuanced. Obedience to society’s laws should not take precedence over the individual’s rights. In Stage 6, the adult is able to understand the transcendent nature of morality. Society’s external moral laws are subservient to the universal moral law that upholds a true, just society.

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To be clear, Kohlberg is not necessarily concerned with the content of the moral principle but only with determining how it is integrated into the person’s psyche. As a result, the highest principle is justice (the epitome of Stage 6). For Kohlberg, justice is that which promotes the equality of human rights and the dignity of each individual.232

**Erik Erikson (psychosocial development) (1902-1994)**

Erik Erikson synthesized the work of Piaget (cognitive development), Vygotsky (sociocultural theory), and his teacher Anna Freud (psychoanalysis), in order to create his own distinct theory of psychosocial development. In Erikson’s view, “cognitive and social development occur hand in hand and cannot be separated.”233 According to Erikson, there are eight stages of psychosocial development, as seen in Table 1 below.234

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Stage/Conflict</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Positive Outcome</th>
<th>Negative Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infancy (birth-18mo)</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Most fundamental stage in life. Infant is utterly dependent.</td>
<td>Trust: “The world is safe and dependable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Early Childhood (18mo-3y)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</td>
<td>Toddler learns to be self-sufficient or to doubt his abilities.</td>
<td>Control: “I can be autonomous and competent”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Powerful Description</th>
<th>Powerless Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>(3-5y)</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Preschooler asserts his power and control over the world.</td>
<td>“I can do things which I put my mind to.”</td>
<td>“I cannot do things I put my mind to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age</td>
<td>(5-11y)</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>Child actively and busily learns to be competent at her work.</td>
<td>“I am good as what I do.”</td>
<td>“I am bad at what I do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>(12-18y)</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role</td>
<td>Teenager develops a sense of identity, beliefs, and desires.</td>
<td>“I know who I am.”</td>
<td>“I don’t know who I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adulthood</td>
<td>(19-40y)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>Young adult seeks to build strong and enduring relationships.</td>
<td>“These people know and love the real me.”</td>
<td>“No one knows or loves the real me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood</td>
<td>(40-65y)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
<td>Adult seeks to have impact and production in his world.</td>
<td>“I know my place in the world and live accordingly.”</td>
<td>“I am unproductive and uninvolved with the world.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>(65y-death)</td>
<td>Ego Integrity vs. Despair</td>
<td>Senior reflects on life and judges the value of her time on earth.</td>
<td>“I lived a full life.”</td>
<td>“I regret the way I lived my life.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the enlightenment’s work of dividing and subdividing personhood into observable and measurable components, Erikson was approaching a more holistic view of children. As children grow and mature, it is not only their minds developing but also their bodies and souls. Inevitably what followed was a synthesis of stage development theory within the spiritual realm of faith. The leading figure in this field was James Fowler.
James Fowler (1940-2015)

Following in the cognitive development tradition of Piaget and the theological philosophy of Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Richard Niebuhr, theologian and psychologist James Fowler, took a stage-theory approach to faith in his book, *Stages of Faith*.235 Fowler attempted to understand the “developmental process of finding and making meaning as a human activity.”236 According to Fowler, faith is different from religion(s) and belief. *Religion* is confined to the expression of “cumulative traditions” from one group of people. *Belief* is holding and affirming certain ideas. However, *faith* is the trust one is to have to the transcendent.237 Faith, according to Fowler, is “a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives.”238

Fowler’s model has six or seven stages, depending on whether you count Stage 0. Stage 0, “Primal Faith or Incorporative Self” (*in utero* to 3 years) is where a child learns a pre-language of trust and loyalty. As a child grows into the next stage, Stage 1, “Intuitive-Projective faith” (age 3-7), she uses symbols to understand the transcendent. At the next stage, Stage 2, “Mythic-Literal faith” (age 6-12), she synthesizes the stories and morals she is learning into a concrete way of knowing. In this stage, “the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs, and observances that symbolize belonging to his

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or her community.” 239 The next stage, Stage 3, “Synthetic-Conventional faith” (age 12+), is where many churchgoers sit. An individual in this stage follows the faith that his trusted leaders tell him to follow, and he does not question it; his is an unexamined faith. Stage 4, “Individuative-Reflective faith” (late teen to early adult), is where a faithful adult has a “crisis of faith” and must question and challenge his faith. He may leave his faith tradition at this point, or he may find that the ideas of the faith become personally held. In the fifth stage, “Conjunctive faith” (mid-life), an individual comes to find peace in the complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence in his faith. Finally, a “Universalizing faith” (stage 6) is rarely achieved according to Fowler and is exemplified by an altruistic belief in the brotherhood of humanity. Fowler names people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as examples of people who reached a Universalizing Faith. 240

An Analysis of Stage Development Theories

The benefits to stage-development theory are numerous. 241 First and foremost, it aids in awareness of the child and one’s understanding of the particular needs of that child. As one understands his own or his child’s stage of faith development, he is better positioned to grow or help his child grow. As a Christian educator engages with children at various faith stages, she can adapt and apply the curriculum in a way that fosters their growth and change. Stage-development theory can also engender sanctification in that

239 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 149.

240 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 201.

241 For a positive analysis of Fowler’s theory, see Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, Faith Development and Fowler (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986).
one’s ability to put to death the old self and live a new life must be appropriate to one’s age and stage in life. Angela Carpenter makes the case that Calvin’s theology of sanctification actually converges with moral developmental theory in numerous ways.\(^{242}\)

In Reformed theology, the reformulation of identity is central to sanctification as a Christian grows in his unity with Christ and his relational connection to the Trinitarian God. Development theory also places a high premium on relational context, commitment, trust, and steps in growth.

Despite the benefits discussed above, faith-stage theory does have some drawbacks. The identification of stages, which has already been acknowledged as helpful, can also be a detriment in its rigidity. According to Fowler, it is impossible to simultaneously be in multiple stages; however, the inherent complexity of faith seems to warrant this possibility. Similarly, it lends to a belief that a further stage is “better” than a previous stage and more valuable. Jesus’ statement that the kingdom of God belongs to people such as little children (Matt. 19:14) seems to contradict this belief.

A final criticism of Fowler’s stages is its implicit bias. By divorcing faith from any religious tradition, as if Fowler can treat faith in an unbiased and neutral way, is simply impossible. His adherence to Paul Tillich’s theological framework of universalism (essentialization)\(^{243}\) distorts his understanding of faith.\(^{244}\) Kent Johnson notes that a


mature Lutheran reader, who adheres to the Reformation principle of “faith alone” with nuance and understanding (Stage 5), will, shockingly, find himself below the Unitarians (Stage 6). Nonetheless, the fact remains that one need not adhere to a Tillichian Christian existential philosophy as a base of faith as Fowler does, but one could use Fowler’s stage theory with one’s own understanding of faith.

Conclusion to Spiritual Development

Depending on your spiritual tradition or personal inclination, Christians develop spiritually in various ways, yet all through the monergistic sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his/her life. Through the help of Mortley’s Circle described above, a holistic Christian spiritual formation is one in which the Christian is formed by the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s union with Christ and centered on the Word of God, meditative prayer, corporate worship, and humble service done in response to God’s grace. In other words, it is the imperative of every Christian to endeavor in applying the Gospel in each of the four quadrants of his/her life: heart, soul, mind, and strength. Pedagogically, teachers and parents should work to apply these four aspects of Christian spirituality in their teaching of students. This is where the work of the stage development theorists above is indispensable.

While acknowledging with Peter K. Nelson that “Christian spiritual formation is complex,” the clarity that Piaget, Vygotsky, Kohlberg, Erikson, and Fowler provide do help to provide educators with an understanding on how to best develop a child

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spiritually. For example, understanding the extent to which a child can think abstractly significantly influences the selection and use of curriculum. Additionally, understanding where a child is on Kohlberg’s moral development scale substantially affects the disciplinary approach employed. Further, Fowler’s faith-stage theory can provide insight into the spiritual life of a child to discern whether she is appropriating her faith in symbolic or concrete ways. For example, a child with “Belief in God” in the “Intuitive-Projective faith” stage likely presents quite differently from a child with “Belief in God” in the “Synthetic-Conventional faith” stage. Therefore, a well-versed teacher in stage-development theory can better ascertain where a child can experience the Gospel in new ways. This is a large aid in the cultivation of a spiritual orthodoxy in children.

**Education**

Any discussion of the spiritual development of children inevitably leads to the subject of education. After all, education is the venue of engagement between adults and children in their development. The early church developed what is now called “catechesis,” and some theological traditions still hold to a catechetical form of education. Modern educational theory, on the other hand, has transformed, modified, and sometimes discarded catechesis. Following is a study of the evolution of catechesis in the church, the insights of modern educational theory, and a synthesis into a coherent theory that can promote discovery of the most effective way to educate and train up covenant children in spiritual orthodoxy.
A History of Catechesis

As Packer and Parrett wrote, “catechesis is a very biblical idea.”\(^{247}\) To most modern English-speakers, this word is foreign. Even within the Protestant church, “catechesis” is seldom used, and, when it is, it is in reference to the Roman Catholic Church,\(^ {248}\) or an antiquated book. The word itself evolved from the New Testament Greek word κατηχέω (katēcheō), which means “to teach; instruct.” Within the New Testament, a few other words are used to describe the action of teaching, the most common of which is διδάσκω (didaskō). This word is used ninety-five times as a verb (“to teach”), fifty-nine as a personal noun (“teacher”), and another thirty as a general noun (“teaching”).\(^ {249}\) Less common words include παραδίδωμι (paradidōmi), which means “to hand down” or “deliver” tradition (perhaps most significantly in Luke 1:2\(^ {250}\)), and παιδεύω (paideuō), which is used twenty-three times in the New Testament and mostly connected to the Old Testament view of education. As the origination of the study of pedagogy, παιδεύω conveys a meaning of teaching and raising up children.\(^ {251}\)

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The word at hand, κατηχέω (katēcheō), however, is rarely used in the New Testament: only eight times. Its scarcity has led some scholars to think that Paul intended to create a new meaning for this rare word: an office of Gospel-teacher. In Galatians 6:6: “Let the “one who is taught” (κατηχούμενος) the word share all good things with the “one who teaches” (κατηχοῦντι).” Many scholars have argued that this text contains the very first usage of catechesis as a technical term, thereby establishing the offices of catechist (teacher) and catechumen (learner).

Catechesis in the Early Church

A brief survey of the early church will reveal that the educational effort of the church followed two strands: a formal process called “catechesis” and a more informal spiritual formation. After the persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1), the Gospel spread quickly. The church proliferated through the emergence of small house churches and congregations around Judea, Samaria, and beyond, with gentiles’ and pagans’ coming to faith at a rapid pace. The exponential growth of the church created an opportunity that required a solution. The church needed to develop a system for preparing inquiring pagans for entrance into the community of faith. In response, the church developed the Catechumenate: a school of the Faith that would prepare new converts for a full life as part of the church.

254 Packer and Parrett, Grounded in the Gospel, 39.
Formal Catechesis in the Early Church. Even if Galatians 6:6 was not Paul’s attempt to create a special office of *catechist*, institutionalization of the term followed and, by the second and third generation of the church, the term was used in an official capacity along with the *Catechumenate*. The process of the *Catechumenate* was as follows: a new convert or interested pagan would start as an *inquirer* and would be matched with a *sponsor*, who would give the inquirer a general introduction to the Gospel and would approve or deny the inquirer’s request to become a *catechumen*. The catechumen would participate in the worship service but would be excluded from the Lord’s Supper, and they would be “hearers of the Word” as well as doers of the Word in faithful living. During this time, the sponsor and elders of the church would educate, as well as discern the life and mind of the catechumen. If the sponsor approves and the catechumen continues to desire to join the church, “the catechumen would enter a final, more intensive phase of catechesis.”

In this final phase, often during Lent, the catechumen would receive special attention, prayer, and formal catechesis that included expositions of the Apostles’ Creed and Lord’s Prayer. If he passed this phase, the catechumen would receive the sacrament of baptism and would officially be deemed a member of the church. From that moment on, he was no longer a catechumen but a *neophyte* and fully encouraged and enfolded into the life of the faith community.

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257 The catechumens might be referred to by other titles: *electi, illuminati, competentes, or photizomenoi*. Cf. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 55.

entire process would usually take about three years.\textsuperscript{259} After a neophyte had been part of the community “for some time,” they would then be counted as one of the faithful.\textsuperscript{260}

\textit{Informal Catechesis in the Early Church.} The official \textit{Catechumenate} was not the only process whereby Christians were being grounded in their faith in the early church. The educational effort of the early church also followed a more informal spiritual formation. On the one hand, “catechetical instruction was not a free-lance operation but was the responsible \textit{traditioning}, the authoritative delivery, of the faith.”\textsuperscript{261} But on the other hand, children of believers were being educated in the faith in their homes since “Teaching the young was the responsibility of parents, not the clergy or tutors.”\textsuperscript{262} Basil the Great (330-379) wrote that his grandmother, Macrina, “molded and formed us while still young in the teachings that lead to a godly life.”\textsuperscript{263} Wilkin notes that the spiritual formation of children in the early church was centered on repetition and memorization of the Gospel story in the home and family, the ethical lessons from the lives of the saints, hearing the preached word as part of community worship, and the ritual of weekly worship as a community. The spiritual formation of the children of believers was not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{260} Packer and Parrett, \textit{Grounded in the Gospel}, 143.
\end{itemize}
happening in a formal school but as a partnership between the home and corporate worship.

The emphasis for the early church catechesis, both formal and informal, was not only on raising a child to know the true doctrines but also that her heart would be drawn to God and her will repulsed by evil. Wilkin depicts that this Christian formation “was first and foremost a matter of training of the affection.”264 Similarly, Gordon Jensen claims that catechesis was designed to “shape the piety of people, the way they think and act, forming the habitus of the heart and mind.”265 This aim thus generated specific catechisms that reflected the theological and practical concerns relevant to their time and place. Jensen’s historical survey of different historical catechisms aimed to show that a catechism is only as good as its intersection with one’s faith, suggesting that blindly following a historical catechism without reference to one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength could lead to a dead orthodoxy.266 St. Bonaventure expressed the same concern, beseeching, “I entreat the reader to consider the intention of the writer more than the work… the truth more than the adornment.”267 To mitigate against this risk, a catechism should be designed as a road map for spiritual formation, not as a blueprint.


266 Jensen surveys four catechisms: Augustine’s First Catechetical Instruction (400s), Dietrich Kolde’s A Fruitful Mirror of a Christian Man (1470), Martin Luther’s Small Catechism (1529), and England’s The Kings Book (1543).

In the development of its catechism, the early church sought to contend with two different threats: persecution from outside and heterodox teaching from within. The *Catechumenate* was a protection from the former, but covenant children were still in danger of the latter. The church needed a way to ensure that the children of believers were being taught the correct and true Gospel. Since the written Scriptures had not yet been gathered together and widely disseminated, the church needed a way to clarify what the Scriptures teach. This issue resulted in the creation of the first Christian curriculum: the creeds. Leith declares that “The creed is the church’s understanding of the meaning of Scripture.”

Further, O.C. Edwards Jr. explains that “the problem of how Scriptures were to be interpreted correctly would be solved by appeal to an authoritative summary of the biblical faith, such as that which Tertullian was to call ‘the rule of faith.’”268 This Rule of Faith, or Roman symbol, dating from around AD 190, is now commonly known as the Apostles’ Creed.269 Additional creeds and catechetical texts were later developed and are found in the *Didache* and *The Epistle of Barnabas*. With the parents teaching their children the Gospel stories at home, the children’s learning experience was multifaceted. They were being taught to memorize the stories of the Bible, as well as the doctrines found in the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ prayer, and even some of Paul’s creeds (1 Cor.

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268 O.C. Edwards, Jr., “From Jesus to Apologists,” 38.

269 The earliest fragment of the Apostles’ Creed have today is from *De Singulis Libris Canoniciis Scarapsus* of Priminius dated AD 710-24. Augustine used a very similar, but slightly different creed known as the African variant.
The addition of the Apostles’ Creed meant that the covenant children were also being formed by the true doctrines of the Gospel.

**Catechesis in the Reformation Period**

The early church catechisms were written as creeds to be used as supplements to Scripture. However, as the medieval church became a custodian of the mysterious Eucharist and the Scriptures were removed from the general public, the creeds began to be used as magical incantations instead of their designed purpose. “A largely uninstructed church,” Parrett notes, “had been fertile soil for serious error in terms of doctrine, experience, and practice.” This catechetical decline gave birth to the Protestant Reformation, which then swept through Europe. In an effort to make the Scriptures accessible to the common people, its leaders began to produce and print their own catechisms.

In contrast to the early church catechisms (written as creeds) that were designed as supplements to Scripture, the Reformation catechisms (structured in question-and-answer format) were designed as explanations of Scripture. Gutenberg’s press enabled them to be disseminated quickly and widely. As Booe recounts, Luther’s *Small Catechism* cemented the Protestant Reformation in the hearts and minds of the growing

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270 Other common Scriptural creeds can be found in 1 Kings 18:39; Matt. 28:19; Mark 8:29; Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:3-4, 10:9; 1 Cor. 8:6, 12:3, 15:3-7; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16.


Protestant church. Where Luther brought revolution and reformation to the church, John Calvin built a system around his thought. As demonstrated in Calvin’s Geneva, writing and distributing catechisms was not enough to educate the members in the content of the catechisms. After John Calvin was invited back to Geneva in 1541, he began building a church and civil government around the Protestant and Reformed principles he was teaching. From that time until his death in 1564, John Calvin and his ideas oversaw the Reformed city and church of Geneva, resulting in Geneva’s civil revival and the planting of over 1200 reformed churches in France.

Calvin’s reformation of Geneva included the reformation of the educational system, building the curriculum around Calvin’s thought found in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his catechisms. He first wrote a catechism for children, the *Instruction in the Faith* in 1538, and revised it in 1545. Kingdon enumerates the four institutions Calvin’s Geneva involved in the religious education of its people: the home, a catechism school run by the church to teach the basics, the church service to “fix the basics in the minds of all,” and a consistory that oversaw the whole process.

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273 For more on the Lutheran tradition of the church’s catechesis, see Phillip E. Booe, “Cooperative Catechesis,” 66-109.


conclusion is that, while the first three proved helpful in the education of the church, the consistory devolved into a judge over public morals and arguments.

Other Reformers were also engaging with catechizing. The aforementioned *Pia Desideria*, from Phillip Spener, was a reaction against what it perceived to be a dead Lutheran orthodoxy and helped create a Pietistic return to education. Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) also wrote a catechism and confession of faith intended for his hometown of Zürich, Switzerland.278 The Protestant Reformation was, among other things, a reaction against the rigid institutionalization of the Roman Catholic Church that elevated the power of the hierarchy of the priests over the power of the individual Christian’s belief and experience. By creating catechisms, the Protestant reformers were attempting to re-center the church on the personal work of God in each Christian. By reciting and learning the Scriptures in one’s own language, by partaking of both elements of the Lord’s Supper in a spiritual or symbolic form, and by learning the creeds and summaries of the Bible, the individual Christian might see the beauty of the Gospel as a pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46).

**Catechesis since the Reformation**

The establishment of formal catechesis has fluctuated throughout church history, its pinnacle occurring during the Reformation. As Christian education subsequently devolved into mere memorization, the relational aspect between teacher and student disintegrated. A few groups and denominations still hold to a formal catechesis to educate the hearts and minds of their people, but even these have seen smaller “reformation” of

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their catechesis. For example, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod denomination continues to use Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* as the basis for their confirmation classes. However, Booe argues that the changing culture and more advanced educational theories call for “a significant revival.” Even the Roman Catholic Church updated their catechesis in 1997 with the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* developed by the Second Vatican Council. While the Presbyterian Reformed world has consistently built their catechesis around the *Westminster Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* (1647), these have been supplemented with newer catechisms over the years, such as Joseph Patterson Engles’ 1840 *Children’s Catechism* and Tim Keller’s 2012 *New City Catechism*. These amendments and supplements reveal that Christian educators within these catechetical traditions retain the primary goal of fostering spiritual growth in the children, understanding that mere memorization is insufficient to stimulate love of God and others.

In their 2010 book, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*, J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett argue for a revival of catechesis in the modern church. As they alliteratively write, “catechesis is the church’s ministry of grounding and growing God’s people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight.” They believe that the modern evangelical church should rediscover the ancient tradition of catechesis because it has lost the grounding of what a


formal catechesis can provide. Their survey of the ancient catechumenate advocates that three principles be emulated by the contemporary church: deliberate care and discipleship of members, holistic catechesis that reflects wisdom and vision of a particular place, and finding a balance in sober yet celebratory rituals. Their analysis includes a catechesis built upon the Gospel message in three facets: worship (lex orandi), learning (lex credendi), and action (lex vivendi). It would be naïve to ignore the centrality of the credendi in their system. Packer and Parrett argue that an ancient catechesis would revive the discipleship of the modern church. Yet, they are less clear about whether they would consider a revival of orandi (worship) or vivendi (action) sufficient. Nonetheless, a formal catechesis may help counteract the shallowness prevalent in modern culture.

Modern Educational Theorists

The twentieth century has seen the development of modern Christian educational theory. In the West, this shift began in eighteenth-century London with Thomas Bray’s Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge aimed at increasing Christian knowledge in Europe to combat “ignorance and immorality rather than infidelity or heterodoxy,” which later led to the establishment of the Pietistic school of Christentumsgesellschaft. In the late nineteenth century, the Hutterite Brethren’s “Bruderhof Education” played a

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similar role, emphasizing communal living as part of education.\textsuperscript{286} The new modern style of education seen in these two examples and the Sunday School movement of the late eighteenth century is built upon or reacts against the work of stage development theorists like Erikson and Fowler. It is also in response to the catechetical structure of the church over the centuries and acknowledges and celebrates the moral and spiritual agency of children.

**Sunday School Movement (1780s to today)**

Christian education in the modern era is most often structured around the Sunday School model. As Reed and Prevost write, “Sunday School is the best-known institution of Christian education among Evangelicals today. It is so much a part of Christian education that it seems almost normative.”\textsuperscript{287} Oddly, it began as a “compassion and outreach-driven parachurch endeavor” more than a Christian education program.\textsuperscript{288} Robert Raikes was an English journalist and philanthropist who desired to see reform and an increase in literacy among the poor children of Gloucester. He gathered children on Sunday mornings beginning in 1780, and “they were taught to read from the Bible, and they memorized catechisms and were taken to worship services.”\textsuperscript{289} Through Raikes’ efforts, religious education became a lay-led effort and saw the synthesis of education, moral reform, and social outreach. Through the efforts of William Fox in England and


\textsuperscript{287} Reed and Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 255.

\textsuperscript{288} Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 71.

\textsuperscript{289} Reed and Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 258.
William Elliot of Virginia, within fifty years, the Sunday School movement went from obscurity to over a million students enrolled in a Sunday School throughout the world. Today, the Sunday School movement is so ingrained in the American Protestant world that “new persons in a community are reluctant to associate with a church which does not have one.”

Sunday School is arguably the primary mode of Christian education in the American Protestant church today. Its aims and goals, however, have evolved over the years. What began as a social outreach has become a mainstay program of Christian education with varying curricula. Soon after the 1780s, Sunday School unions popped up all over the world to aid in teacher training and the development of curricula. John Elias argues that the Sunday School program led to the emergence of the modern education movement. By having a lay-led venue of education established in most churches, the content of the curricula could be changed with little notice. Evangelical

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theology, liberal Protestantism, Neoorthodoxy, Liberation theology, or any type of theology all have a place to thrive in a church’s Christian education program. Even as Packer and Parrett advocate for a revival of the catechetical model of Christian education, they do so largely using Sunday School as the preferred modality. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Sunday School model remains the dominant force in the Christian education of the church.

Horace Bushnell (1802-1876)

In his 1861 book *Christian Nurture*, Horace Bushnell argued that a conversion experience was not necessary for a Christian child, as he can be organically raised in the faith: “the child will grow up Christian and never know himself as being otherwise.” In a reaction against the revivalism of his day, Bushnell decided that true spiritual formation was a process built around the home and church rather than a dramatic decision. Bushnell was a pioneer in the scholarship around the gradual spiritual formation of

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children and believed that children can be “raised into a Christian” absent any act of the child’s will. In other words, for Bushnell, being part of the Christian community is enough to make a child a Christian, and therefore a conversion is unnecessary.

**Maria Montessori (1870-1952)**

Maria Montessori is mostly known from the school and educational model that bears her name: the *Montessori Method*. Montessori worked intimately with the poor, uneducated children in the slums of Rome, and through her work, came to the conclusion that to educate children, an educator must listen to the child and find what motivates her. Educators must not start with an adult-centered approach but must start from “the individual study of the child.” As Gianna Gobbi wrote, “Montessori was convinced that there exists within the child an internal discipline which guides him or her toward order and independence.” Therefore, the educator should strive to remove obstacles in the child’s self-guided education and must properly respect the child’s work.

In the realm of spiritual formation, Montessori believed that children had an understanding of the transcendent that adults do not. She believed that children were born innocent and open to the divine but that adults and their structures inhibit this form of knowing. She argued that any education that starts from an adult perspective was doing

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harm to the child because it was restricting the child from this “essentiality.” With respect to spiritual formation, the Montessori method encourages a child to interact harmoniously with other children and with her environment. In so doing, Montessori believed that the child was drawn closer to God.

**Sofia Cavalletti (1917-2011)**

The Roman Catholic scholar Sophia Cavalletti took the work of Maria Montessori and developed the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. Together with Gianna Gobbi, Cavalletti developed an answer to the most basic question she identified in children: “Help me come closer to God by myself.” Her answer to this question is found in three “gifts” that children have been given by God: *essentiality*, *wonder*, and *enjoyment*. *Essentiality* is an insistence by children to remain true to the core, foundational truths of God and creation. *Wonder* is the natural response by children to these foundational truths as they pursue more knowledge of God and creation. Moreover, *enjoyment* is the response to God in “the spontaneous song of ‘Alleluia.’” Through these three gifts, “all children experience God.”

Cavalletti believed that the parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10:1-18 is the best illustration of children’s experiencing God. When children interact with this parable’s message that the Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep, they are able to

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activate their *essentiality, wonder, and enjoyment* and to then become one with the love of God. This is seen, according to Cavalletti, in her introduction of the children to the Roman Catholic Mass. She considered this sacrament as an essential element of the children’s interaction with the Transcendent God. She believed that children are brought to a contemplative state that connects them with God by using the materials of a miniature altar, a green-based toy pasture, little toy sheep, and the Good Shepherd on top of the altar. Through the use of materials and ritual, Cavalletti centered her catechesis on the child’s ability to interact with God on his own.

**Jerome Berryman (1991)**

One disciple of Cavalletti is the American Episcopal priest, Jerome Berryman. Established in Texas, Berryman has pioneered a style of spiritual development called *Godly Play*. In Berryman’s method, children already existentially know deep realities, and “when the language of religion is linked to the creative process, it helps with one’s life pilgrimage.”309 Through the use of toys, materials, and environment, the educator should work to teach the language of Christianity to an already religious child. The adult teacher need not worry about content (because the child brings the content) but how the children feel in their environment. In other words, Berryman’s *Godly Play* is “about *process*, not *product.*”310

The work of Berryman (and Cavalletti and Montessori, both directly and indirectly) has influenced many researchers to this day. Especially in the realm of


310 Koch, “Fostering Spirituality,” 100.
storytelling, Berryman’s *Godly Play* provides the foundational framework for many studies. In his 2004 work, *Bible Story Project*, Howard Worsley builds on Berryman’s work through his research on the power of story among inner-city children in the UK.³¹¹ Further, Cheryl V. Minor and Barry Grant studied Hay and Nye’s theory of children’s spirituality using Berryman’s *Godly Play* curriculum in their 2014 study.³¹² Sonja M. Stewart’s scholarship also advanced Berryman’s thought into the realm of young childhood in a Christian worship community.³¹³ Finally, Elizabeth F. Caldwell³¹⁴ and Bradley Wigger³¹⁵ apply the child-centric work to a postmodern world.

**John Westerhoff (1970)**

Beginning with his 1970 book, *Values for Tomorrow’s Children: An Alternative Future for Education in the Church*, Westerhoff declared that the Sunday School model must be abolished.³¹⁶ According to Westerhoff, Christian education must move away from the schooling model and back to the community’s catechetical model. He expands

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³¹⁴ Elizabeth F. Caldwell, *Leaving Home with Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Our Youth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002).


on this idea in his influential book *Will Our Children Have Faith?* First published in 1976, it has gone on to be revised three times, as recently as 2012. Building on an ecclesiology of the power of the local church, Westerhoff discards the schooling model and argues for a “community of faith-enculturation paradigm.” In this model, children are raised in the faith by participating in the liturgy and catechesis of a community of Christians.

For Westerhoff, faith is formed by much more than facts and indoctrination – it is formed by partaking in the church community. In contrast to Horace Bushnell, who believed that Christians were implicitly nurtured in the faith, Westerhoff believes that spiritual formation must be more explicit, elevating the role of Christian educators in that process. Because Westerhoff maintains that, in this communal catechesis of the church, true faith formation is built around the Gospel story, he boldly claims that “unless the story is known, understood, owned, and lived, we and our children will not have Christian faith.”

Westerhoff’s model for catechesis called for churches to have three deliberate, systemic, and sustained processes, namely “formation, education, and instruction.” Formation happens through the nurtured participation in the community, education happens through the internal self-reflection on the story of the Gospel, and instruction happens through the quintessential acquisition of knowledge. As the believer engages with all three processes, she is catechized by the community. “Catechesis, as a pastoral activity of intentional socialization, includes every aspect of the church’s life

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intended to incorporate persons into the life of an ever-changing (reforming), tradition-bearing (catholic) community of Christian faith.”

Building on stage-development theory, Westerhoff created an analogy of faith development around the rings of a tree. Each ring is complete and whole in itself, growing with the proper environment, slowly developing one ring at a time, maintaining all the previous rings as growth takes place. The first ring is *experienced faith*, and it is the faith a child is nurtured in. As a parent or teacher cares for and nurtures the child, the adult’s faith makes an indelible impression on the child’s *experienced faith*. The second ring is *affiliative faith* and is seen as the child begins to take on and mimic the faith of the nurturing community. The third ring is *searching faith* as the individual begins to examine and reflect on the implications of their doubts. This is a critical stage to make the community’s faith one’s own. This may involve experimentation with alternative worldviews and testing the traditions of the community. Lastly, the fourth ring is *owned faith* when the individual has a conversion experience, passes through the doubts and reflections, and reorients his faith back to the community. In his 2000 revision, Westerhoff changed his analogy to a pilgrimage on three paths, where the learner is a pilgrim, and the teacher is a co-pilgrim. The first path is the *experiential way*, where the individual chooses to participate in the life of the community. The second path is the

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reflective way where the individual leans on the community in trials and in making the community’s faith one’s own. The third and final path is the integrative way where the individual finds meaning in the dissidence in the paths and realizes that “there is nothing but ‘relative truth.’”

Westerhoff is not without his critics. Like Bushnell before him, Westerhoff’s reliance on the implicit catechesis of a faith-enculturation paradigm is a discarding of the importance of a formal setting of education. Kay Llovio writes that Westerhoff’s system is built around an ideal model of community and family and ignores the importance of doctrinal truths. Her assessment highlights the fact that many children do not have a Gospel-nurturing environment, so relying on an implicit catechesis is insufficient. Furthermore, his new pilgrimage analogy reveals a bias away from the orthodox teaching of faith-enculturation, which is more clearly seen in his earlier tree ring analogy. Once one removes doctrinal content from the catechesis of the church, which is inevitable if one follows Westerhoff’s diagnosis, the ultimate level of faith becomes a relativistic faith like Westerhoff’s new integrative way. Westerhoff’s favorite quote was from the third-century bishop Tertullian: “Christians are made not born.” It is hard to imagine that Tertullian would agree that a Christian is made by believing that all truth is relative.

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324 Tertullian, Apol. 18.
**Catherine Stonehouse (1998)**

The power of the community in the development of children has been a consistent thread since Bushnell, through Westerhoff, and has been furthered by the scholarship of Catherine Stonehouse.\(^{325}\) Stonehouse remains committed to stage-development theory, but she emphasizes the nurturing work of the community. “Children for whom life is safe and happy value a time and a place to be with God, and hurting children, who desperately need healing for their spirit, find healing in that time and place.”\(^{326}\) Dawn DeVries carries this theme of community forward, but without the insistence of stage-development theory.\(^{327}\) “The needs of the individual child—for safety, nurture, and hope—can only be met through the transformation of community.”\(^{328}\) In the cases of the research of both Stonehouse and DeVries, the community has as much to learn as the child.

**Bonnie Miller-McLemore (2006)**

The work of Christian feminist Bonnie Miller-McLemore is helpful in understanding child-rearing, specifically as it applies to the post-modern world. She identifies the moments of spiritual formation that happen in the home among haggard mothers (the “ordinary awe”\(^{329}\)), and she reframes the historically anthropological discussion about children. For Miller-McLemore, a child is not inherently sinful or

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\(^{325}\) Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*.


\(^{328}\) DeVries, “Toward a Theology of Childhood,” 170.

inherently good but is, in fact, a “knowing child” that mediates between individual and corporate sin.330 Ironically, by redefining the moral agency of children, Miller-McLemore brings children back to a status of proto-adult.

Marcia Bunge (2001)

Marcia Bunge exhibits a more nuanced and insightful view on the question of children’s moral agency, warning that by encouraging and producing further scholarship in the theology of children, Bunge has helped lead the way in the spiritual development of children. Not only has her work been instrumental in seeing the theological trends of childhood in the church, but she has helped apply and analyze the different approaches to children’s ministry that are being applied to the local church.331 “Such simplistic conceptions of children both in religious communities and the broader culture tend to undermine our commitment to children and have serious consequences for children themselves.”332 To this day, Bunge’s edited work, The Child in Christian Thought, stands as the preeminent document on the intersection of a theology of children and its specific application to the Christian faith.333

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330 Miller-McLemore, Let the Children Come.


**David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006)**

Partly in response to Fowler’s stage theory, in 2006, David Hay and Rebecca Nye\(^{334}\) developed a theory of children’s spirituality. They contended that children’s spirituality evolves and that their “spiritual experiences and awareness do not depend on formal operations characteristic of adolescence or adulthood.”\(^{335}\) After conducting a three-year research project into the spirituality of young children, Hay and Nye concluded that modern education should make room for moral, ethical, and spiritual education that is not confined to religion. According to Hay and Nye, the imposition of stage theory on children stunts their spiritual well-being. Instead, educators should deliver six conditions to foster spiritual growth in children: *space*, *process*, *imagination*, *relationship*, *intimacy*, and *trust*.\(^{336}\) As educators help children become aware of their own spirituality, children’s spirituality can be nourished by daily attention to “aspects of human experience that brings spiritual awareness to light.”\(^{337}\)

**Annie George (2010)**

The importance of narrative and alternative education has played a large role in recent scholarship. In 2010, Annie George researched the use of biblical narrative in the spiritual formation of 9-11-year-old Indian children from churches in Adoor, India. Through the use of the I-Thou, I-other, I-self, and I-world schematic from Hay and Nye,  

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\(^{335}\) Minor and Grant, “Promoting Spiritual Well-Being,” 213.


she found that children spiritually develop on all four planes relationally as they engage with the Gospel story. Partly as a result of the Pentecostal subjects of her research, George added the I-evil category, given the power of the biblical stories to develop an “antagonism towards Satan.” George concluded that biblical stories enable children to “develop three dimensions of spiritually maturing faith – intellectual, internalized, and volitional.”

Karen Marie Yust (2004)

Research into the power of story, corporate worship, and intergenerational community continues by Karen Marie Yust, professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond. In her 2004 influential book, *Real Kids Real Faith*, Yust offers a practical framework to parents and educators on helping children develop spiritually as part of a community of faith. Yust argues that children should not be used as pawns to be moved up the developmental chart spiritually. Instead, children are part of the people of God and are not deficient; children have agency on their own and are to be nurtured more than taught. “Faith is a given for children -- indeed for all of us. However, faithfulness is something we cultivate as we live together as spiritual people in relationship with God.”

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Building on that scholarship, in her 2012 article *Being Faithful Together* Yust offered some recommendations on how churches can engage children in worship. Preachers should adapt their sermons to the young listener, corporate prayers should be short and simple, and songs can be crafted for the youngest singer as well. Her reasoning is simple: “children need the comfort of a shared family spiritual journey and the challenge of walking with a diverse group of congregational pilgrims in a lifelong process of faith formation.”

*The Goal of Christian Education*

The early church developed what is now called “catechesis,” but it has changed over the centuries. Over time and with the development of modern educational theory along with reactions to it, Christian education can linguistically be difficult to define. The researcher believes that the Christian education of children should be defined as that endeavor to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in the mind, heart, soul, and strength of covenant children. In order to achieve this goal, the church must begin with prioritizing the creedal foundation of education. Contra the Montessori system and its followers with its emphasis on child-directive education, an orthodox Christian education must have its directive set by Scripture and the Gospel – which is what defines orthodoxy. Remaining faithful to this spiritual orthodoxy must be the primary goal. However, while the Montessori system may not be helpful in determining the goal of spiritual orthodoxy, it can be very helpful in ensuring that the Christian education is within orthopraxy (correct practice).

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Once the creedal foundation of Christian education is in place, then an educator can begin to engage with the communal aspects of a dynamic catechesis. As Westerhoff and others have argued, the Christian faith is cultivated through communal enculturation, creating safe spaces, acknowledging the agency of a child, and helping to mold the inherent faith in each child toward the revealed will of God. As Hay and Nye’s research has shown, creating the six conditions of space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust can be instrumental in the communal aspect of a dynamic catechesis. However, when a covenant child is temporarily isolated from the covenant community as in a quarantine and pandemic, a central tenet of this dynamic catechesis is lost. The impact of this involuntary isolation and subsequent loss of community is the topic of the final section of this literature review.

Isolation

The communal aspect of education, human development, catechesis, and God’s interaction with humanity has been discussed at length up to this point. It has been argued that true spiritual orthodoxy must be communal. Scholars such as Vygotsky, Berryman, Westerhoff, and Stonehouse have each posited a new angle on the importance of community in a child’s education. While they each would express a different aspect of it, the consensus remains that a child must be in community with others to develop. Following is a historical survey of some of the most infamous plagues in world history, along with the insights of modern scholars on loneliness, isolation, and education in a quarantine.

A Brief History of Plagues

Before 2020, plagues lived in the realm of ancient history or possibly on the silver screen. However, with the onset of COVID-19, and the subsequent government
restrictions aimed at flattening the curve and preventing large-scale death, plagues have once again come to the forefront of humanity’s consciousness. The following is a brief survey of plagues in the Bible and world history.

**Plagues in the Bible**

Any student of the Bible knows that plagues, famines, and epidemics were regular, if not common, occurrences in the Ancient Near East. Abraham dealt with a famine in Genesis 12, and Isaac dealt with one in Genesis 26. Job contended with multiple plagues and epidemics to mixed results. In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God threatens epidemic twenty-nine times. Without a famine, Ruth would never have found Naomi or God or Boaz, and without a plague on the Philistines in the temple of Dagon in 1 Samuel 5, the Ark of the Covenant may never have made it back to the people of God. The most famous biblical example of a plague is found in Exodus, in which the people of God were freed from slavery through the divine judgment of a plague on the Egyptians. In fact, given how common plagues and epidemics were in the life of the people of God, John Goldingay was puzzled that “the rules for life in the Torah don’t cover dealing with epidemic and famine.”

It is as if God through the COVID-19 pandemic is attempting to reveal to the people of God that “as the people of God, we need not just to look for explanations of the epidemic but to reflect and repent, as Jesus says after the fall of the tower at Siloam (Luke 13:1-5).” In the Bible, the people of God knew that epidemics and plagues were just part of existence.

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Plagues in the Second and Third Centuries in Roman Empire

The Antonine Plague of 166-72 killed anywhere from two to twenty-five percent of the entire Roman population, including Marcus Aurelius himself.\(^{345}\) Scholars believe it was either smallpox or measles.\(^{346}\) Suffering was immense, as characterized by this oracle of Claros in the 160s:

Woe, Woe! A strong calamity attacks on the ground—a pervasive, unyielding plague is slaying—(with) on the one hand, a punishing sword in hand, and on the other hand, raising the lately wounded ghosts of the bitterly lamented mortals. And it distresses the entire land of the enclosed city, cutting down animals, making an end of an entire generation; oppressing with defilement, it forces mortals out.\(^{347}\)

About a century later, the Plague of Cyprian in AD 250-270 at its height reportedly killed as many as 5,000 people a day. Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, witnessed this plague and commented that “the world is collapsing” and quite possibly coming to a violent end.\(^{348}\) Christians and pagans had different answers to both of these plagues. Pagans visited oracles for discernment and help. In their worldview, a calamity such as a plague was the result of an angry god, so pagans wanted to know which god was angry so they could appease him or her. Often these causes were insufficient attention to the gods or something in society that is profaning the society. Cyprian comments that often the “pollution” was scapegoated as the presence of Christians in the society. “Many are complaining and are blaming us because wars are rising more

\(^{345}\) Krieder, Patient Ferment, 62.


frequently, because the plague, famines are raging.” Even the Epidaurian god Asclepius, “the most human-loving of the gods,” whose staff of intertwined snakes is the modern symbol of medicine, would only heal those humans who were virtuous.

Christians, on the other hand, responded differently. In a monumental sermon to the church in Carthage and beyond, Cyprian urged Christians to self-sacrifice, offer help, show patience, and show forth their virtue in Christ. After explicating the Scriptures, Cyprian exhorted his listeners: “This finally is the difference between us and the others who do not know God, that they complain and murmur in adversity, while adversity does not turn us from the truth of virtue and faith, but proves us in suffering.” What we know of Cyprian’s sermon is that he implored his listeners “to live lives marked by the habitus of patience – trusting God, living without being able to control the outcome, living unhurriedly, living without being able to control the outcome, living unhurriedly, living unconventionally, loving their enemies.” How his listeners responded is not known directly, but there is enough evidence to reveal that they responded positively to Cyprian’s charge. According to sociologist Rodney Stark, the rise of Christianity and the fall of paganism were not inevitable. He argues that the Christian response to these two plagues was the “tipping point.” As two competing worldviews that were diametrically opposed to one another, both had the power within them to flourish and grow. As the

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350 Everett Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 208.

351 Cyprian Mort. 13.

352 Krieder, Patient Ferment, 68.
pagans ran in fear and anger from the plagues, and the Christians welcomed the scared and angry pagans, paganism was defeated.\footnote{Stark, “Epidemics, Networks, and the Rise of Christianity,” 174-75.} As the plague ravaged communities and nations, the early church responded to Cyprian’s sermon through self-sacrificial efforts to help their fellow human beings and showing trust in their Sovereign Lord.

**The Black Death [1347-1350]**

The bubonic plague, traveling with the population expansion, ravaged the countryside of Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It peaked between 1347 and 1350, with estimated deaths ranging from 75 to 200 million people. Mark Galli writes that “the disease, bubonic plague, was so lethal some went to bed well and died before morning; some doctors caught the illness at the patient’s bedside and died before the patient.”\footnote{Mark Galli, “When a Third of the World Died,” *Christian History Institute* 49 (1996): 30-33. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf8254e33bb8.39186857.pdf.} This plague had colossal effects in European society, leading to the end of the Middle Ages and the rise of modernity, from the cities where bodies piled up until they overflowed the makeshift graveyards to the rural villages that returned to the wilderness.

In the face of death, families and communities turned inward to self-protection. It was during this time that the world began to use the word “quarantine.” The word comes from the Venetian word *quarantena*, or “40 days,” which is the amount of time ships were required to sit in the harbor before anyone or anything aboard could come ashore.\footnote{“How hand-washing explains economic expansion,” *The Economist*, August 1, 2020, https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2020/08/01/how-hand-washing-explains-economic-expansion.}
Meanwhile, “fathers of families were increasingly encouraged to provide effective care for their wives and children, to lavish love, and to protect them.”

By this moment in European history, the church was ingrained in medieval life. This is most poignantly and sadly demonstrated by the Inquisition under the medieval papacy of Innocent III, who propagated that the plague was a curse from God caused by heretics. In the ecclesiastical absolutism of the medieval church, a heretic was worse than a murderer, resulting in one of the worst moments of church history. As Harold O.J. Brown wrote, the Inquisition “has done more harm than any other historical institution to make the Gospel an object of derision in the world at large.” The Inquisition reveals a fact about the medieval church that is important in a discussion about the Black Death: the church’s response to a problem could be worse than the problem itself.

As the Black Death plague brought violence upon the world, the church responded with similar violence. It began with fear, as many deserted their loved ones and withheld the aid and patience that Cyprian urged a millennium earlier. In an effort to appease an angry god, reminiscent of the pagans before them, bands of flagellants and penitents processed through the countries praying, weeping, crying, and begging. The pope originally sanctioned these processions, but, when they appeared ineffectual, they devolved into outright attacks on the priests and established church. Finally, the violence turned outward, and the self-torturers turned their anger and fear on the Jews of their land. In the spring of 1348 in modern-day France, these mobs massacred thousands of

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The blatant display of anti-Semitism that lay under the surface of many Christians’ hearts and minds surfaced in evil ways when they were faced with fear and anxiety over the Black Death.

**The Continuing Plagues of the 1500s and 1600s**

The bubonic plague continued to appear in the world intermittently. While the peak was in the three horrible years of 1347-1350, a significant outbreak occurred approximately every twenty years afterward. Despite that nearly two centuries had passed since the Black Death, the people of Europe were well aware of its deadliness by the time it arrived in Geneva in the spring of 1542. One of the ministers of the city, Pierre Blanchet, “volunteered to relocate outside the city and visit the plague hospital.” When the plague returned a year later, Blanchet once again volunteered but was tragically taken by the disease. Twenty-two years passed before the plague returned again, this time killing thousands of Genevans from 1568-1571. Under the leadership of Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, the city’s pastors visited the victims within their parishes and took turns visiting the plague hospital. As Keith Fong writes, “The pastors... served courageously, sacrificially, even in the face of death.” Eight years later, Beza wrote a treatise called *Questions Regarding the Plague* in which he summarized the common Christian response to a natural disaster like a plague. Among ten points, Beza reasons that Christians ought to consider that the principal cause of a plague is God’s wrath against

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sins, and therefore one must not run from God’s wrath but run toward Christ. This
counsel was corroborated by men such as Thomas Brooks, who wrote in 1652, “sin is a
plague, yes, the worst and most infectious plague in the world,” and Ralph Venning’s

Channeling Cyprian’s sermon before him, Beza asserts that the sixth
commandment binds a Christian to not risk the lives of those around him by “rashly
(putting) in danger of deadly Infection” the lives of others by visiting or permitting the
visit of others.\footnote{Théodore Bèza, \textit{A Learned Treatise of the Plague Wherein the Two Questions, Whether the Plague Be Infectious or No, and, Whether and How Farr It May Be Shunned of Christians by Going Aside, are Resolved / Written in Latine by the Famous Theodore Beza Vezelian} (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665).} Beza’s conclusion is clear: the ministers and church leaders must “by
their Life and Doctrine stir up the People to earnest Repentance, and Love, and Charity
one towards another.”\footnote{Bèza, \textit{A Learned Treatise of Plague}, 19.} In other words, the only clear Christian response to a plague is
faith, hope, and love. Beza’s treatise is very similar to Martin Luther’s 1527 treatise
“Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague,”\footnote{Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague,” in Martin Luther, \textit{Luther’s Works}, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1999), 43:119-38.} in which Luther holds that, in the
question of whether or not to flee a pandemic, one must weigh the wisdom of the higher
calling to love God and love one’s neighbor.

One hundred years later and across the English Channel, the bubonic plague once
again struck. This time it came to the English village of Eyam. The nearest big town was
Sheffield, and while there were no cases of the plague there yet, the threat of contagion loomed large. In an act of courage and self-sacrifice, the new village priest, William Mompesson, and his Puritan predecessor who still lived in the village, Thomas Stanley, persuaded the villagers to stay there and self-isolate together so as to contain the plague. They famously drilled holes on the top of the surrounding rock mountain where the villagers would place their money, and people outside of the quarantine would bring food and replace it. Over those two years, more than a quarter of them died, Mompesson’s wife among them. By their self-sacrifice, they succeeded in containing the plague and saved countless lives in Sheffield and beyond. 364

The Russian Flu of 1889-1890

Pandemics continued to ravage the world even as scientific and medical advances began to reveal the truth in the microscopic world. Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) and his investigations promoted the world of germs and antisepsis. Unfortunately, by the time the “Russian flu” came to Copenhagen in December of 1889, the world was still years away from the now universal understanding of infection communicability through microscopic disease-causing bacteria like bacilli. While most scholars believe this plague was caused by influenza, a recent 2020 study by Danish researchers Lone Simonsen and Anders Gorm Pedersen argues that this plague was the very first coronavirus plague. 365

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The 1889-90 influenza epidemic, commonly called “The Russian epidemic,” was the largest nineteenth-century epidemic in Europe, killing about one million people worldwide.\(^{366}\) After a ship from St. Petersburg, Russia arrived in Copenhagen with the disease, by December 14, 1889, about 3,500 people in the city were infected. Through the railways, the disease raged through Denmark and surrounding nations. One month later, on Sunday, January 12, 1890, Herman Bavinck, a Dutch Reformed theologian and pastor, preached a sermon to a nearly empty congregation on John 9:45 in Kampen, Netherlands almost 700 km away from Copenhagen. In his diary for that day, he recorded, “Few people because of influenza.”\(^{367}\) When Bavinck preached his sermon that morning, only a scattered few even heard his words because of the quarantine.

How did the church respond to the 1889-1890 plague? During the drought recorded in 1 Kings 17, God provided for Elijah by ravens; however, nothing is known about the rest of the Israelites, for whom the drought continued unabated. No evidence exists to know if they responded with love or fear. Similarly, regarding the men, women, and children of the Kampen congregation in 1890, nothing is known of their response to the quarantine and pandemic.


The Spanish Flu of 1918-1919

During the global influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, fifty million people around the world died, including 675,000 in the United States. Coming home from the European battlefields of the Great War, U.S. soldiers brought the virus with them, and it began to spread from Kansas to New York beginning in March of 1918. Consistent with his governmental philosophy, President Woodrow Wilson made no official statements about the epidemic, thinking that Americans’ morale would suffer. In Richmond, Virginia, the first recorded case was among the Army Camp of Fort Lee in the middle of September. Within two weeks, there were hundreds of cases in Richmond, and the Virginia Health Commissioner did nothing to stop the spread. The citywide case number was around 10,000 infected by the first week of October, with a projected death toll of 1,500 within six weeks. At that point, a quarantine was instituted, including among churches. The quarantine seemed to help, as, by early February 1919, 1,078 patients had died, with total cases over 20,000.368

As recorded in the University of Michigan’s 2016 work, The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919: A Digital Encyclopedia, the American church responded to the pandemic in widely disparate ways.369 A Catholic priest in Cincinnati, Ohio, defied public quarantine orders and held morning mass on October 6, 1918.370 The next week on


October 13, some churches in Buffalo, New York, planned some outdoor worship services.\(^{371}\) As recorded in the Sunday edition of the *New Orleans States* newspaper, Rev. W.S. Slack, rector of St. James Church in Alexandria, Louisiana, lamented that pool halls could remain open while he was compelled to close his church services.\(^{372}\) Chris Gehrz of Bethel University compiled many more examples of these Christian church responses to the 1918-1919 flu pandemic, concluding that “while most Christians made the best of church closures, many grumbled… and a few went to jail rather than stop worshipping.”\(^{373}\) One hundred years later, Christians’ responses to the COVID-19 quarantine are largely consistent with the examples documented from 1918-1919.

The Spanish Flu had a further connection to the COVID-19 pandemic that previous plagues did not: American racism. Rev. Francis J. Grimke (1878-1928), one of the preeminent African-American pastors at the time, preached a sermon on Sunday, November 3, 1918, at his church in Washington, D.C., equating the plague on Israel in 2 Samuel 24 with the plague that had ravaged his town. His reflections included the usual reminder of the sovereignty and goodness of God, an urging to show Christian charity, and a call to repentance. However, he also preached about God’s judgment on prejudice: “During these terrible weeks, while the epidemic raged, God has been trying in a very pronouncedly conspicuously and vigorous way, to beat a little sense into the white man’s


\(^{372}\) “Dr. Slack To Hold Church Services,” *New Orleans States*, October 13, 1918, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4090flu.0006.904.

head; has been trying to show him the folly of the empty conceit of his vaunted race
superiority, by dealing with him just as he dealt with the peoples of darker hue.”374

COVID-19, like the Spanish flu and every other plague before it, shows no partiality to
its victims; no race or creed are immune from its disastrous effects.

In light of the 2020-21 nationwide reckoning after the deaths of George Floyd,
Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor,375 and the worldwide protests over police violence,
Grimke’s words seem prophetic:

“The lesson taught is clear and distinct, but will he learn it, will he lay it to heart,
will he profit by it and seek to mend his evil ways? He may, but I have grave
doubts as to whether he will or not. The probabilities are that he will still go on in
his evil ways—will still go on believing that a white skin entitles its possessor to
better treatment than a dark skin; will still go on practicing his infamous
discriminations against colored people, in departments of the general government,
and all over the country. One thing he may be sure of, however—he may continue
to live under that delusion, but there will be a rude awakening someday— it may
be when it is too late.”376

The American church of 2022 is still dealing with the repercussions of racism in
America. The Presbyterian Church in America, the denomination in which this research
is based, was born out of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1973 with a checkered past
on race. In light of this history the PCA has earnestly attempted to move forward on

374 Francis J. Grimke, “Some Reflections Growing Out of The Recent Epidemic of Influenza That
Afflicted Our City: A Discourse Delivered in the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.,
Sunday, November 3, 1918,” 9 Marks, March 27, 2020, https://www.9marks.org/article/some-reflections-

375 Kristin Johnston Largen, “The Year George Floyd Was Murdered,” Dialog: A Journal of
Outcry over Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery,” Christian Century 137, no. 12 (2020): 17; Christopher K.
Marshburn, et. al., “Racial Bias Confrontation in the United States: What (If Anything) Has Changed in the
COVID-19 Era, and Where Do We Go from Here?,” Group Processes & Intergroup Relations 24, no. 2

376 Grimke, “Some Reflections.”
racial and ethnic reconciliation. Progress is difficult and yet the PCA continues to build upon the tradition of being “reformed and always reforming.” The racial unrest and anger in America in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic seem to bear out the words of Rev. Grimke’s grim pronouncement that those who hold racial prejudice will have a “rude awakening” one day and that it “may be too late.” The researcher prays that it is not so.

Plagues are Isolating

Throughout history, the Christian church’s response to plagues, pandemics, droughts, and epidemics varies widely and is often contradictory. From the early church’s patient hospitality that saw the advancement of the kingdom to the medieval church’s fear-driven Jewish pogroms, the invisible threat of death that plagues bring exposes either the church’s faithfulness or its faithlessness.

While involuntary isolation can be prompted by many events, such as shipwreck, war, natural disaster, or becoming lost in the woods, it does not form part of humanity’s normal existence or expectations. Plagues, and the subsequent social quarantines,


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however, have happened for millennia. This brief survey of the history of plagues in the
Western world reveals that plagues are actually a normal part of life. Despite enormous
medical advancements over the past century, the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the basic
truth that humans have a high likelihood of being part of a plague and subsequent
involuntary isolation at some point in their lives. For Christians, the question is how to
respond.
Loneliness and Isolation
As Samuel T. Gladding aptly pronounces, “Isolation is a double-edged sword.” 379
It can either rejuvenate a soul, or it can crush it; it can give life, or it can destroy it. 380 The
power of solitude has been evidenced over the centuries, from Jesus going to the
mountainside alone to pray in Mark 6:46, to Cambridge professor James Duport’s advice
in 1660 to the students “to walke [sic] often in the fields, and to walke alone, because that
will put good thoughts in you, and make you retire into your self, [sic] and commune
with your owne [sic] hearts.” 381 To this day, where the term “mindfulness” has become
ubiquitous in Western society, the power of solitude to bring awareness to one’s
environment, and to possibly bring healing, is clear. 382 However, when they are
involuntary, isolation and loneliness can also be destructive. The following studies have

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Jean-Louis Quantin, “Paradoxes of Christian Solitude in the Seventeenth Century,” Journal of

James Duport, “Rules to be Observed by Young Pupils and Scholars in the University,” MS
6986 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 1660).
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helped bring awareness to the effects of isolation and loneliness on the psychology of the lonely.

**Haggard and Von der Lippe (1970)**

In 1970, American Ernest A. Haggard and Norwegian Anna von der Lippe conducted research as part of the Norwegian Institute for Social Research. In their study, they conducted interviews with children who were being reared in socially-isolated farms in Norway, with the control group of children being reared in small towns and urban settings. Among their results, they found that “isolates” were more home-centered, less verbal about personal matters, and experienced less freedom than urban children, who were better adapted to interpersonal conflicts and social interactions. While urban children learned how to deal with conflict, isolates usually resorted to “passivity, avoidance, or flight.” Similarly, because of the more hands-on rearing done in urban and small-town settings, the control group felt more connected to their mothers than the isolates who were colder to their mothers.

For example, when the returning parents were greeted by the children, a typical response from an urban child was, “I’m glad you’re back; I was lonesome while you were gone”; the typical response of an isolate was, “You must be hungry; let us go in and eat now.”

Haggard and Von der Lippe conclude with a comment that isolated children had adapted to the “monotonous and understimulating environment” of an isolated Norwegian farm. In contrast, urban children had adapted to life in an ever-changing

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environment. Their findings reveal that children learn through and from their
environment, and this environment is closely connected to the community or lack thereof.

**Robert Coplan and Julie Bowker (2014)**

The preeminent work on solitude research was published in 2014 by Robert
Coplan, Director of the Pickering Centre for Human Development, and his colleague
Julie Bowker: *The Handbook of Solitude*.385 This collection of articles contains some of
the latest scholarly research spanning 13 countries and cutting across various disciplines
and research on the subject of solitude. Understanding the ambivalence of solitude (its
positive and negative effects), Copland and Bowker present research that supports the
notion that the concept of solitude may actually be changing. With the advent of social
media and the rapid pace of technological advancement, what it means to be alone has
changed over the years. While not many years have passed since their 2014 conclusion,
the introduction to their recently published second edition points to even further research
and analysis into the internet age.

Robert Coplan has carried out additional studies of social isolation among young
children. His research in 2007 among young preschool-aged children found that children
have a quite sophisticated understanding of the fears and worries of other children as they
withdraw from social interaction.386 Along with Kenneth H. Rubin and Julie Bowker in

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385 Robert Coplan and Julie C. Bowker, *The Handbook of Solitude: Psychological Perspectives on
edition was released in April 2021.

386 Robert J. Coplan, et. al., “Understanding Solitude: Young Children’s Attitudes and Responses
2009, he also studied the concept of social withdrawal in children.387 This study demonstrated that the long-term effects of social disinterest and unsociability are largely negative. “We believe that when socially withdrawn children present themselves as wary and anxious in the peer group, not only might they become increasingly rejected, but they also may be victimized by the peer group at large.”388 According to the researchers, it is imperative that children develop the sociability tools to engage with other children and not withdraw.

**Gerald A. Arbuckle (2018)**

The Australian Roman Catholic theologian Gerald A. Arbuckle has written about the pandemic of loneliness from a structural perspective. In 2018, with the publication of *Loneliness: Insights for healing in a fragmented world*, Arbuckle contended that, while loneliness is felt by individuals, it is cultivated by societies. As cultures and institutions deepen divisions through poverty, exclusion, and marginalization, individuals find themselves alone. For Arbuckle, the difference between solitude and loneliness is an issue of desire – whereas, in solitude, one’s desire is to be alone, in loneliness, one’s desire is to connect. He asserts that the structures in the world drive many people to loneliness when their desire is to connect. Arbuckle’s advice to the lonely people in the

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world is to foster hope, discover solitude, cultivate empathy and listening, and seek connections. In so doing, he believes lonely people can overcome loneliness.

**Vivek Murthy (2020)**

The Surgeon General of the United States from 2014-17 and again beginning in 2021, Vivek Murthy, published his book *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* in April 2020, early in the COVID-19 quarantine. Murthy believes that “the greatest challenge facing us today is how to build a people-centered life and a people-centered world.” However, this is easier said than done as we face a public health crisis of loneliness, compounded by divisive public discourse, anxiety, addictions, depression. Loneliness, according to Murthy, is both the cause and result of the world’s division. According to Murthy, the answer to this pandemic is found in four key strategies: spend time with loved ones, genuinely care and focus on others, embrace solitude, and serve one another altruistically.

**Quarantine**

The subject of loneliness and isolation has been well studied, and scholars continue to expand their research. Even so, the specific experience of isolation as a result of a pandemic-related quarantine is rare, and thus the subject is largely under-researched. In this case, the isolation is not brought on by family choice, location, or psychological

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factors; a quarantine is a form of involuntary isolation that is both abrupt and unforeseen.

In the realm of involuntary isolation, the following scholars have done some research that will prove helpful to the current project.

**Philosophical Research on Quarantine: Lisa Guenther (2013)**

One arena that offers insight into involuntary isolation is that of prisons and, specifically, solitary confinement. Political philosopher Lisa Guenther opened her 2013 book, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, with the shocking claim, “There are many ways to destroy a person, but one of the simplest and most devastating is through prolonged solitary confinement.” Her work within the prison system led her to conclude that the dehumanization of prolonged solitary confinement has exacerbated the “social death” of the prisoners. To Guenther, a self-concept of personhood depends on the world and others, so “solitary confinement and the sensory deprivation that inevitably accompanies it have the power to damage us at the very level of our being.”

Guenther is an existential political philosopher and argues that “selfhood” requires sustained moments of contact with and among others. Like Sartre, Guenther maintains that one can truly only know oneself when engaging with others; however, in stark contrast to Sartre, she argues that hell is not “other people,” rather hell is detaching

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393 “Social death” refers to the condition of people not accepted as fully human by wider society. It was first coined by sociologist Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).


people from other people. Guenther’s work represents a compelling warning about involuntary isolation and its power to damage individuals in the deepest ways.

Psychological Research on Quarantine: Taylor (2019), Brooks (2020), Smith and Barrett (2020)

In October 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak spread beyond the Wuhan province of China, Steven Taylor published a remarkably prophetic book, *The Psychology of Pandemics*.396 In it, Taylor argues that a pandemic is not just a viral or medical phenomenon, but is a psychological one. “Pandemics are events in which the population’s psychological reactions to infection play an essential role in both the spreading and containment of the disease.”397 This reactive response to pandemics is seen in both the strict adherence to quarantine guidelines as well as those who wish to get back to pre-pandemic life before it is safe to do so. When remarking about the contemporary guidelines published by the CDC to limit the spread of infection, Taylor lamented the “lack of attention to mental health issues in pandemic preparedness documents. This is a remarkable omission given that vaccination nonadherence and related issues are essentially psychological problems, driven by people’s beliefs and expectations.”398 In light of the slower than expected vaccination rate in the United States, with only 53 percent of the total US population being fully vaccinated by the end of August 2021, this


oversight seems sadly prescient. Taylor wrote that nonadherence would be a major issue, along with social and civil unrest, economic hardship, and that people’s resiliency to stress would largely impact their reaction to the pandemic.

In the dawning days of the pandemic, in February 2020, Samantha Brooks of the Department of Psychological Medicine at London’s King’s College and her colleagues published a review of multiple studies on the psychological impact of quarantine. Their results called attention to the numerous adverse effects of being quarantined, including emotional disturbance, depression, stress, low mood, irritability, insomnia, and emotional exhaustion. Brooks and her colleagues identified several measures that local governments could put in place to mitigate the negative impact of quarantine, including minimizing the total length of quarantine, providing people with as much information as possible, reducing boredom, and providing essential supplies such as food and medicines. Brooks concludes that the long-term effects of the COVID-19 quarantine may be substantial and advises governments to be prepared for them.

While Brooks applied the psychological impact to governmental response, Nathan Smith and Emma Barrett have applied their research to the individual within quarantine. By analyzing the research of individuals in isolated, confined, and extreme (ICE) settings, such as polar scientists, astronauts, submariners, oil-rig workers, cavers, and expeditioners, they found common stressors to those of the current COVID-19


quarantine. “Like ICE populations, a quarantined population will likely experience periods of monotony and boredom, suffer from low mood and motivation, and need to tolerate being in close proximity to a small number of other people, while potentially separated from other friends and family for long periods of time.”⁴⁰¹ Their findings pointed to five strategies that individuals could use in involuntary isolation to fight the negative effects: establishing a routine in the new reality, staying in the present and not being too distracted by the potential threats of danger, engaging in a variety of pursuits to stave off boredom and monotony, focus on small achievements and competency to fight low mood and motivation, and being aware of personal space when living with others. Smith and Barrett acknowledge that individuals in COVID-19 quarantine in their home with children are very different from a polar explorer’s life, resulting in very different problems and advantages. Nevertheless, their five strategies may help foster creative solutions to the common adverse effects of an involuntary isolation.

*Education During Quarantine*

The aim of this literature review on isolation is to understand the impact of involuntary isolation and subsequent loss of community on the spiritual development of students. If the main avenue of engagement with students on their spiritual development is through education, then attention must be paid to online religious education.

Online Religious Education

Over the past two decades, much religious education has become available through online learning, leading researchers to study the impact of virtual learning on the religious development of students. In light of the COVID-19 quarantine, their insights can be helpful in understanding the education of isolated students.

*Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan [2004].* In 2004, when the internet was a nascent technology with unknown influence, Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas Cowan published an assortment of essays on the impact of the internet on religious development. In 2004, they wrote that the internet brought about a “quiet revolution in religious sensibilities,” which remains true today. Through a wide-ranging ecumenical survey, including Christians to Buddhists, Muslims, and even Wiccans, the editors desired to demonstrate that the “internet is both a mirror and a shadow of the offline world.” For example, in Dawson’s essay, he asks the question of whether or not an online community (what he calls an online “pseudocommunity”) can effectively develop the “we-ness” of a true community. He argues that, while an online community has the appearance of being connected with others, it proves to be insufficient (a shadow).

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Christopher Helland’s essay accurately highlights the important distinction between religion online and “online religion.”\footnote{Christopher Helland, “Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber) Heaven,” in Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet, eds. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23-36.} While the former deals with the online dissemination of information about religion, the latter deals with a religious experience that individuals have online. These are likely not mutually exclusive experiences but on a continuum. Today, as students interact with their schools and their churches in new ways during the COVID-19 quarantine, the degree to which students are receiving religion online or online religion is yet unclear.

\textit{John Gresham [2004].} In that same year, the Roman Catholic John Gresham argued that students can engage in a faithful Christian education online in what he calls a “divine pedagogy.”\footnote{John L. Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” Teaching Theology & Religion 9, no. 1 (2006): 24-28.} He was responding to David Kelsey and others who believed that this new online religious education could not be consistent with a Christian theological anthropology.\footnote{David H. Kelsey, “Spiritual Machines, Personal Bodies and God: Theological Education and Theological Anthropology,” Teaching Theology and Religion 5, no. 1 (2002): 2-9.} By contrast, Gresham asserted that true Christian spiritual formation must adapt to the student and offer a public forum commensurate to the \textit{Aeropagus}. After all, “a face-to-face classroom is not somehow inherently incarnational if the instructor adopts a detached, impersonal teaching style.”\footnote{Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy,” 26.} Gresham further warned that true Christian spiritual formation must involve the active participation of the student. Such
student involvement corresponds with Helland’s online religion instead of the passive 
reception of knowledge exemplified by religion online.

Mark Maddix [2010]. Gresham’s argument was advanced by the work of Mark 
Maddix in the realm of spiritual formation. Again, contra David Kelsey, Maddix believes 
that genuine community can be found online. He claims that it is not a matter of if online 
community can be found, “but to what degree that potential can be realized.”409 
According to Maddix, all available media, including the internet, must be employed to 
teach, build community, and spiritually form students. Maddix’s theoretical matrix for 
online spiritual formation indicates that a mentor or spiritual director is necessary in the 
student’s spiritual formation since online spiritual formation can only occur through the 
proactive work of personal coaching.

Mental Health Research on Quarantined Students

In April 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 1.5 billion students 
were affected by school closures – amounting to about 84 percent of the world’s student 
population in some form of quarantine.410 The magnitude of this issue prompted 
researchers from around the globe to begin studying the potential educational and mental 
health impacts of the quarantine. In Bangladesh, Abid Hasan Khan and colleagues 
determined that the stress of the quarantine is having long-term effects on students’

409 Mark A. Maddix and James Riley Estep Jr., “Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education 
Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs,” Christian 

wellbeing. In Albania, Enkeleint A. Mechili and colleagues found that the mental health of quarantined students is directed related to the satisfaction felt regarding government safety measures. Contrastingly, the work of Gertrude Cosmas of Romania purported that the COVID-19 quarantine may actually be helping students learn how to cope better by building resiliency. In one of the largest geographical areas of study of this research, Henrico County has reported a “nearly 25 percent increase in the number of [students] receiving services between July and November 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.” The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantine on students’ mental health will continue to be studied for years to come.

**Conclusion: Cultivating a Spiritual Orthodoxy in Children in Isolation**

From these surveys of church history and scholarship on the topics of children, spiritual development, education, and isolation, a few conclusions can be made. First, children are image-bearers of God and must be treated as such. While historically the church has generally been indifferent toward children, modern scholarship has appropriately brought children forward in the church’s estimation. This progression not

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only benefits the child but the larger church as well. Scripture affirms that children are highly esteemed by God, and the church must follow suit.

Second, the spiritual development of God’s people is a work of the Holy Spirit, to be balanced by the Spirit and Word in its application to the heart, soul, mind, and strength. Stephen J. Mortley’s circle provides a picture of this balance among emphases of different faith traditions and how potential tensions between them may manifest within the child and the community. Whereas different traditions approach spiritual formation in multiple ways, holistic formation makes allowance for every aspect of God’s love. Furthermore, a covenant child’s spiritual development is more intricate than what stage-development theory can explain; a covenant child’s spiritual development is fostered through a community’s nuanced approach to nurturing that faith.

Third, the goal of Christian education is to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in the mind, heart, soul, and strength of covenant children. Such a goal is accomplished through not only prioritizing the creedal foundation of education in the Gospel but also establishing a community catechesis that fosters spiritual growth in children. This process entails appreciating the agency of children and engaging them where they are, as Montessori and others found. It also entails acknowledging the power of a faith community to enculturate the child holistically, as Westerhoff and others found. Finally, children’s deliberate care and discipleship are essential, as Packer and Parrett and others found.

Fourth and lastly, involuntary isolation such as the COVID-19 quarantine is a regular occurrence in the life of the church and of humanity. While it certainly disrupts a church’s ongoing catechesis, it may provide an environment for a child’s faith to be
nurtured in otherwise impossible ways. By moving a faith community online, educators are forced to engage with students in deliberate ways, culling the aspects of enculturation to only the most important. Furthermore, a quarantined child must learn to cope with potential adversities, such as monotony, boredom, low mood, motivation, and being in close proximity to a small number of other people, while also being isolated from beloved friends and family. Involuntary isolation has the potential to reveal, dampen, or nurture a child’s faith. She may abandon her family’s faith because of the loss of community, but she may also find solace in the Gospel that was otherwise invisible to her because of her frantic pace. Ultimately, a child’s spiritual development is nurtured as part of a community, with deliberate care, acknowledging the agency of the child and the power of the Gospel to transform.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODS AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Nature of the Research

This project seeks to explore the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. Using an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants, the researcher analyzed and developed overarching themes on the topic. Through the use of focus groups, selected interviews, and survey participants, the researcher was able to explore and ascertain patterns and themes common among those evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine and will develop guidelines for the wider Christian church based on these findings.

Research Method and Methodology

Using an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants, the researcher analyzed and developed overarching themes on the topic. While Creswell and Poth argue that a case study is a viable choice of qualitative research,415 this project follows the work of Robert K. Yin, who argued that case study research is its own distinctive method, independent of qualitative research.416 A case study, according to Yin, “is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’)


416 Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, 18.
in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” This research design was chosen as the best option to examine the particular case (the experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine) because of the unusual nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Greater Richmond area, March 13, 2020 was the last day of normal operating procedures in public schools. From that day onward, evangelical parents of the Greater Richmond area have been experiencing an unusual and clear phenomenon that seems unprecedented. The many participants of the case (the embedded subunit) are 101 evangelical parents within PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. This research design will enable the researcher to examine most of the subunits individually while also taking care to keep the larger case in sight. The context and target of this embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants have implications beyond the case.

**Information Sources**

The field research followed three streams of data-gathering: focus groups, selected interviews, and survey participants. The primary data includes: the transcripts and field notes from the focus group of parents in the congregation of WEPC, the transcripts and field notes of interviews with the 13 evangelical parents who attend one of the 13 PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond region, and the survey data from 53 evangelical parents in the Richmond region, covering eight PCA congregations. The

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417 Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, 15.
secondary data includes the biblical, historical, theological, and secular resources related to issues relevant to the problem of the project, as well as the site documents from the interviews and direct observations.

The first stream of data came from two focus groups of parents that represented 14 families from West End Presbyterian Church. The second stream of data came from 13 in-person interviews of parents that represented seven PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. The third and final stream of data came from 53 survey participants, evangelical parents from eight PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. In total, 101 participants were given opportunities to share information pertaining to the research question through one of the three streams. Those 101 participants represented about 60 family units in the Greater Richmond area.

**Project Overview**

This project followed a series of steps that were linear and intentional. The first step was to study the biblical, theological and historical literature related to the church’s responsibility to its covenant children, the nature of spiritual orthodoxy and its relationship to the growth of Christian disciples, the role of catechesis in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, and the impact of isolation and loss of community on this cultivation. From this literature review, the researcher determined that it is imperative to acknowledge the impediments to cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy during a time of involuntary isolation. There is much to learn from the reviewed literature on involuntary isolation and its relationship to education and the cultivation of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children. Educators and parents cannot ignore the need for deliberate engagement with quarantined children during such an anxious time as a quarantine.
The second step in the research, which occurred in February 2021, was a virtual focus group with parents in the WEPC congregation, led by the researcher, about the effects of quarantine on the spiritual development of their children. The structured dialogue script for the focus group can be seen below. This focus group was open to all parents from the WEPC congregation who have children or youth living at home with them during the quarantine. Verbal consent was given at the beginning of each focus group discussion. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

The focus group discussion allowed the researcher to understand the true issues faced by the study participants. Robert Stake defines the initial ideas brought in from the outside by the researcher as “etic issues” and the emerging ideas that the participants help to bring out as “emic issues.”\(^ {418}\) The researcher developed the script of questions for the subsequent interviews with the participants from the focus group discussion. These issues and questions were a mix of etic issues (those issues the researcher is bringing into the inquiry) and emic issues (those issues that arose from the inquiry itself). The gradual transformation of these issues and questions allowed the researcher to understand the case better.

The third step was to select and interview evangelical parents within PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area who have children at home and who did not participate in one of the virtual focus group interviews. To select the participants in early January 2021, the researcher contacted pastors and ministry directors at the 13 PCA

congregations in the Greater Richmond region seeking possible participants. Eleven ministry leaders responded and, from these responses, the researcher selected 13 participants representing seven different churches. Work was done to select parents from a wide variety of backgrounds, races, socioeconomic status, educational priorities, and church involvement. Once the participants were selected, the researcher interviewed the participants separately over the course of four months, from January to April 2021. The researcher made every effort to meet the parents in their home and place of quarantine. Understanding the fears around exposure and quarantine, the interviewees were given the option to conduct the interview virtually, but none selected that option. Each interview was at least 90 minutes long, with some stretching into two hours. Like the focus groups before them, verbal consent was given at the beginning of each interview. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Following a loose structure, the interviews began with an explanation of the research, followed by a discussion around the emic questions developed from the original focus groups to understand the phenomenon better. Variations and deviations in the conversation were welcomed to understand better the issues present within the participant’s experience and thus to understand better the phenomenon of the case. The researcher audio recorded every interview and took descriptive notes and photographs to enable better coding afterward. Participants gave their consent to being audio recorded and were given the opportunity to review the recording after the interview.

Along with these interviews, site observations and documents were collected from the participants to give further context and depth to their experience. These documents
included books, devotionals, websites, and music which were either part of their experience or noticeably missing from their experience.

The fourth step was to gather the final stream of data through a survey. The researcher developed an electronic survey using Survey Planet software. The researcher reached out to the participants who were not initially selected for in-person interviews from the 13 PCA congregations in the Richmond area asking that the survey be completed by the end of July 2021. The survey was also sent to other evangelical parents from the 13 PCA congregations who were known to the researcher. The survey was anonymous by default, but participants were able to add an email address. Of the 53 surveys, 24 were anonymous and eight PCA congregations were represented. As far as can be known, none of the survey participants were any of the participants of either the focus groups or in-person interviews.

The fifth and final step was to analyze and synthesize the data from each preceding source and develop guidelines for action based on these findings. Of course, “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins;”419 the researcher was analyzing and synthesizing through each and every step. As the interviews created, reinforced, or debunked new themes and dimensions of the phenomenon, a pattern-matching logic was used during the data gathering and analysis steps. Each interviewee’s responses were coded and compared to help understand the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine.

419 Stake, The Art of Case Study Research, 71.
Research Instruments

Focus Group Structured Dialogue Script

The purpose of the focus groups was to discern the true issues faced by the study participants. From the biblical, theological, and historical literature review, the researcher determined that it is imperative to acknowledge and understand the impediments and advantages to cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy during a time of involuntary isolation. The following discussion questions and topics were designed by the researcher to ascertain those issues faced by the participants. After an initial prologue about the definition of “spiritual orthodoxy” and a brief description of Mortley’s circle on spiritual sensitivity, most of the focus group discussion was a loosely structured dialogue around the following etic issues and questions. These were made available to the participants before the discussion to allow them a chance to prepare their thoughts and to know where the discussion was headed.

Questions about Your Child’s Emotional and Psychological State

Taking input from Smith and Barrett’s research on individuals in isolated, confined, and extreme settings, this portion of the dialogue included themes such as boredom, low mood, low motivation, and living in close proximity to others. The introductory question to this section of discussion was: “How would you describe your or your child’s emotional well-being during quarantine? How does it differ from before the quarantine?”
Questions about the Family’s Relationship with the Church

Mostly based upon the work of Westerhoff and his “community of faith-enculturation paradigm,”420 and the community role of catechesis that is found in the researcher’s study of Romans 12, the researcher designed that the following questions to ascertain the effect of the quarantine on this community catechesis. These questions included: “What changes, if any, have occurred in your church’s programs and events directed toward you and your child? How did these changes directly impact your family?” And “How would you describe your or your child’s relationships with your church during quarantine? How does it differ from before the quarantine? Has the church’s proactivity been as expected, or more or less so?” And “Describe the communication you or your child has had with other members of your faith community during this time. Have you or your child experienced a degree of isolation from other covenant children? If so, please describe.”

Questions about the Spiritual Life of the Child

This group of discussions was once again based upon the work of Mortley and his circle of spiritual sensitivity.421 The researcher desired to understand how the participants and their children were nurtured in their Christian faith, and how, if at all, the quarantine affected that faith. This discussion began with the following sets of questions: “How would you describe your top two or three priorities for the spiritual development of your

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420 Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? 32.

Questions about the Impact of Quarantine on the Spiritual Life of the Child

As the final section of questions, the researcher desired to understand how all of the preceding issues were affected by the quarantine. Taking much from the research of modern educational theorists like Berryman and Haye and Nye, the researcher framed the discussion around issues related to trust, loss of community, and the anxious loss of joy and hope. The following questions set up this discussion. “How has the quarantine benefited the spiritual development of your child, if at all?” And “How has the quarantine been a barrier to the spiritual development of your child, if at all?” And “Did you feel equipped to lead your child’s spiritual development during the quarantine?” And “How did your involvement in the spiritual development of your child change because of the quarantine?” And “How did you make-up for the disconnection and isolation from others in the church and faith community? How successful do you feel in this regard?” And lastly, “In what ways could the church have equipped them better for this role?”

Interview Script

The researcher was able to distill the needed information down to a usable script for the interviews. Each interview began with introductions and a reminder of the purpose of the research: to study the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. After that, the researcher used the following script as a roadmap to uncover the needed data methodically.
Introductory Matters

The interviews began with introductory matters designed to gather relevant data as well as develop a relational trust between the participants and the researcher. These sets of questions included the following.

1. Names (only for help in coding the research, but pseudonyms will be used in write-up of the research)
2. Church (also only for help in coding the research, but pseudonyms of the churches will be used in write-up of the research)
3. Length of attendance at your church
4. Level of involvement at the church (scale of 1-5; 1 uninvolved, 5 very involved)
5. Names and ages of kids (only for help in coding the research, but pseudonyms will be used in write-up of the research)
6. Prayer needs for the family

Stressors

The bulk of the interviews was taken up by discussions of stress. Based in the research of Smith and Barrett on quarantines and in Hay and Nye on conditions of spiritual growth, the researcher attempted to ascertain the areas and levels of stress for each of the participants.

1. Scale of 1-10 (1 don’t care, 10 care a lot), how concerned are you about COVID-19 and following government restrictions to prevent its spread?
2. What were the biggest changes to your work/home life during quarantine?
3. What were the biggest changes to your child’s school/home life during quarantine?
4. What were the biggest changes to your church life during quarantine?
5. What was the quarantine’s influence on your church participation?
6. In what areas of your life did you see the biggest struggles this past year? For your child?
7. In what areas of your life did you see the blessing of God this past year? For your child?
8. What are the spiritual goals you have for your family / children?
9. How has quarantine affected those goals?
10. (Explain Mortley’s circle) Where do you see as your family’s tendency?

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422 Smith and Barrett, “Coping with Life in Isolation.”

Survey

Following the in-person interviews, the researcher expanded the participants of the case to include anonymous survey participants. The survey questions were designed to gather the same information as the previous panels and in-person interviews. Because of the different tool, the questions were redesigned to better achieve that goal. After an initial qualifying question, the questions were coded into six sections: (1) questions 1-3 were preliminary diagnostic questions, (2) questions 5-7 dealt with areas of stress, (3) questions 8-14 were about their church communities and participation with it, (4) questions 16-17 dealt with community specifically, (5) questions 4, 15, 18-21 dealt with issues of spiritual development, and (6) questions 22-25 were summary questions on their overall assessment of parenting during a pandemic. The complete survey can be found in the Appendix.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The researcher used an embedded single-case study research method with multiple participants to explore the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. Those multiple participants came from three streams of data gathering: focus groups, selected interviews, and survey participants. The first stream of data came from two focus groups of parents that represented 14 families from West End Presbyterian Church. The second stream of data came from 13 in-person interviews of parents that represented seven PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. The third and final stream of data came from 53 survey participants of evangelical parents that represented eight PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. In total, 101 participants were given opportunities to share information pertaining to the research question through one of the three streams. Those 101 participants represented ten PCA congregations and about 60 family units in the Greater Richmond, area.

Focus Groups

On the nights of February 4th and 8th, 2021, parents from 14 households attended two Zoom discussions led by the researcher.\(^{424}\) All the West End Presbyterian Church parents were invited to attend a focus group discussion on two nights in February 2021.

\(^{424}\) The February 4th focus group included three couples of husbands and wives, one husband without his wife present, and four wives without their husbands present. The February 8th focus group included four couples of husbands and wives, and two wives without their husbands present. Between the two group discussions, there were seven couples, one husband, and six wives, representing 14 families.
through website promotion, worship bulletin announcement, social media
announcements, and some personal email invitations from the researcher. Each of the
parents is a regular attender of WEPC and is involved in the life of the church community
as a regular attender. During each of the hour and half discussions, the researcher led the
discussion through a prologue and a structured dialogue based on etic issues. All names
have been changed to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Prologue Discussion

The focus group began with a prologue led by the researcher in two sections: a
definition of “spiritual orthodoxy” and a brief description of Mortley’s circle on spiritual
sensitivity. As explained in Chapter 2, spiritual orthodoxy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ
vivified in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit. It is founded upon the revealed
nature of the Trinitarian God where God the Father unilaterally enters into a covenant
with His people based on His grace and mercy, where He sends His Son Jesus Christ to
be the Mediator and upon whose person and work is the biblical Gospel, and where the
Holy Spirit does the applying work of this Gospel in the life of the believer, bringing to
life what was once dead in sin. In short, spiritual orthodoxy is Holy-Spirit empowered
union with Christ.

Stephen Mortley’s circle of spiritual sensitivity, as explained in Chapter 3,
describes the Christian spiritual development as four tendencies that make up the whole.
Based upon one’s Christian tradition and individual personality, the Christian usually
desires to develop spiritually in one of four ways. Using Jesus’ words in Mark 12:30,
Mortley argued that each quadrant of the circle is typified by one of the aspects of love,
as seen here:
These four tendencies are explained in further detail in chapter 3. This prologue discussion enabled the focus group participants to understand their own spiritual sensitivities better, how they affect the participants’ own attempts at spiritual development, and how they affect their attempts at cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in their children. Gospel parenting during the pandemic settles down to this: *know yourself, know God, and know your child.*

**Focus Group Issues**

After the prologue discussion, the researcher led the focus groups through five sections of discussion topics: (1) your quarantine life in general, (2) your relationship with your church during quarantine, (3) your goals of parenting, (4) your child’s spiritual development, and (5) your overall experience as parents in the quarantine. The researcher
prepared the focus group discussions based upon preset ideas of which issues would arise – the etic issues. Over the course of the focus groups, a reconfiguring of issues arose – the emic issues. The issues that arose from the focus group discussions were: (a) thankfulness over the slowness of life during the quarantine, (b) conflicts arising from monotony and boredom, (c) concern over lack of motivation, and (d) fear over the loss of community. The following is a brief description of the data gathered on these four issues.

**Slowness of Life**

In both focus group discussions, there was a universal consensus in gratitude over the slowness of life during the quarantine. Kristen, the mother of two boys (12 and 14), said, “I am so thankful of this time to be with my boys during school and watch them be educated through on-screen education.” Michael, the father of a toddler (2), said, “Our prayer and hope is that the slowness of quarantine has cultivated spiritual sensibilities that otherwise they would have missed.” And Kellie, mother of three children (5, 7, 10), concurred: “Life slowed down. That clarified things a bit for us. We had the room in our schedules to actually talk to our kids about some spiritual things.”

**Monotony and Boredom**

Other than the praise and thankfulness of the slowness of life, the remainder of the comments about life during the quarantine were less positive. John, a father who is new to working at home with two children (9 and 12), said, “It’s *Groundhog Day*.425 You

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425 *Groundhog Day*, directed by Harold Ramis, featuring Bill Murray, Andie MacDowell, and Chris Elliott (Columbia Pictures, 1993), https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107048/. In the movie, the protagonist, a weatherman covering the annual festival of Groundhog Day, finds himself inexplicably living the same day over and over again.
wake up, brush your teeth, make coffee, work, yell at the kids to be quiet for a bit, work, ask the kids how their schoolwork is going, work, cook and eat dinner, say your prayers, go to bed. Rinse and repeat.” Most other parents in the group hesitantly laughed and agreed. Christi, a mother of two girls (10 and 12), furthered that sentiment, saying, “Our girls are caving – their lives came to screeching halt. While our lives continued for the most part, theirs stopped abruptly.” The idea that the parents’ lives continued at a faster pace while the children’s lives remained more isolated, was echoed by others as well. Through tears, Melissa, a mother of three (11, 14, 16), said, “My 14-year-old isn’t around friends, and that is her life right now…. Shane and I have opportunities to grow in many different ways, but our kids don’t. My kids really struggle with boredom and no motivation.” Justin, the father of two children (8 and 12), lamented that “boredom is rampant… My kids have been in more funks than before.” With shorter tempers, and children’s immaturity to handle something as devastating as a pandemic, most parents agreed that the numbers of arguments and conflicts in their house had increased over the quarantine.

**Lack of Motivation**

Other than boredom and struggles over monotony, a consensus was found on children not being motivated to do things they once wanted. Meg, the mother of two children (13 and 16), said that her children don’t want to do the sports they once did. Aimee, a mother of four (2, 4, 7, 9), said that her elementary school children are performing worse academically than before the quarantine. When discussing the spiritual lives of his children, Jim said, “it is hard to get my kids engaged with spiritual things. They aren’t around anyone other than their parents. Being with people is necessary.”
Loss of Church Community

Another issue upon which there was universal agreement was the fear of losing community, especially that of the church community. Through tears, Caroline, the mother of two (13 and 15), said, “to have to stay away from people who you know and love has been hard.” Eric, father of two (1 and 3), said, “we live rurally and we need to be in community.” In discussing the loss of church community specifically, Heather, mother of four (2, 4, 7, 9), said, “my 2-year-old has no idea what church even is.” Kellie said that “couch church” worked for a couple of weeks, but then “it just became yelling and arguing.” She said that when the church was able to gather in-person again, she was very thankful because “we were losing them.” Watching the church’s worship service online didn’t work for John and Becca’s family either. John said, “we couldn’t concentrate, so we sent our kids away during worship.”

Interviews

Introduction to the Thirteen Interviewees

The second stream of data came from 13 in-person interviews of parents that represented seven PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. The 13 participants were selected to represent evangelical parents in the Greater Richmond area who are attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. These interviews occurred in the homes of the participants and were conducted between February and April 2021. The brief descriptions below, along with the accompanying graphs, will seek to introduce the readers to these multiple participants and their lived experiences. Names and some details have been changed to maintain confidentiality of the participants.
In their late 50s, Brian and Beth have seven kids, with ages ranging from five to twenty years old. The kids’ mode of education is varied: their oldest boy is in college, their middle four are at a local Christian private school, and their youngest two are in preschool. Upon entering their large, beautiful home in an upscale neighborhood in Mechanicsville, one is greeted with a large wooden picture that proudly proclaims, “Welcome to our Bee Hive,” with all of their names stenciled on it. Despite the large number of kids, the researcher met with Brian and Beth in their living room on a Sunday afternoon and not once even glimpsed a child, although there were the tell-tale sounds of play coming from upstairs. The Booth family is a core family to Augustine Presbyterian Church, a new PCA church plant in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond, despite a twenty-minute drive between Mechanicsville and Church Hill.
The Crowells are a couple in their late-40s who live in a gentrified neighborhood in Church Hill, a northern urban section of the city of Richmond. The cherry blossoms were in full bloom, and the beauty and scent filled the air as the researcher pulled up to their beautiful brand-new home. Greeted by their two sons, Winston and Miles, the researcher was seated at a couch in their open-concept living room. Jay is a general contractor for a local construction company, while Helen is a concert violinist with a local symphony. They worship at Augustine Presbyterian Church, a new PCA church plant that has moved into an old church building in the Church Hill neighborhood. They have three children: Julia (18), Winston (14), and Miles (12). Helen homeschools the boys while Julia is a freshman at a local private college.
The Dillard family lives in a home in a rural county just outside of the City of Richmond, and they sporadically attend Lovelace Presbyterian Church. The researcher interviewed Alfred and Meredith on a warm April day while sitting on brand-new Adirondack chairs on their front porch, sandwiched between the Virginia and American flags. The house has been a labor of love for them for many years. With shades of the ship of Theseus, Alfred has replaced almost every piece of wood, mechanics, copper, and electrical system in the house. In their early 50s, both are teachers in the county and they have two daughters – one a senior and the other a freshman. In his slow drawl, and behind his thick beard, Alfred described their life during the quarantine as an “isolating lifestyle by choice.” They love their rural community, and as trucks and motorcycles drive by during the interview, Alfred would give a simple wave. Meredith, in her powerful yet demure personality, expressed her fears for her daughters and worries of the quarantine on the education system of the county and country.
“Our home is a mission,” said Andrea Forbes while swinging on her front porch swing. Her husband, Will, leaned against the railing of the porch and greeted the neighbors as they walked past. As the researcher sat down, Andrea removed the ashtray from the table, laughingly interjecting, “We don’t smoke. It’s for our neighbors.” For the Forbeses, their home certainly is a mission – a white family of nine living in an impoverished, predominantly African-American neighborhood in Petersburg, just south of Richmond. Around the corner sits an adult group home with many sex offenders residing there; if the kids are playing outside, they are commanded to come inside if one of the men comes around. On the other side of their home is a historic black church, established in 1774. In their late 40s, Will is a local firefighter, and Andrea is a homeschool mom to their five kids: Jeff (11), Allison (9), James (6), Steve (5), Joseph (3). She also homeschools Will’s 16-year-old brother, Jeremy, who lives with them. New members of Wilberforce Presbyterian Church, a PCA church in southern Richmond led
by a black pastor and striving to be a neighborhood church that looks like every tribe and nation, the Forbeses love the mission and passion of the church.

**John and Evelyn Gibbs**

The Gibbses are a biracial couple in their late-30s living in a beautiful new home in the Northside neighborhood of the city of Richmond. John is a software developer whose job has moved to completely virtual and Evelyn is a staff nurse anesthesiologist at a local hospital. They have two children, Kathy (15) and James (13), who attend two different private schools in the city. Evelyn is African-American, and John is white. The family worships with Grimke Presbyterian Church, a church that prioritizes the cross-cultural distinctive of the neighborhood and mission of the church. During the interview, the researcher and the Gibbses sat at their dining room table just inside the front door and wore masks the entire time.
Arthur and Martha Hamilton

The Hamiltons are self-proclaimed “extreme introverts” with three children: Will, an autistic boy in the fourth grade; Chris, a boy in the first grade; and Lisa, a girl in preschool. In their mid-40s, Arthur is a computer programmer who works completely virtual with a small company and Martha is an occupational therapist who works once or twice a week. They used to attend West End Presbyterian Church but moved churches about ten years earlier when they moved out to the northern suburb of Mechanicsville. They attended a nondenominational “seeker-sensitive” church down the road for about eight years but became disenchanted with it and decided to attend Blandina Presbyterian Church (BPD) because of its connection to WEPC. Having only joined BPC in January 2020, their introduction to the community was abruptly halted when the pandemic emerged. As Arthur said, “it became illegal to meet new people.” On the Sunday afternoon of the interview, the three children played outside on the trampoline while
Martha kept an eye on them through the large window from the breakfast nook where the interview took place.

**Howie and Emily Keller**

![Diagram showing the identity of Howie and Emily Keller](image)

The Kellers are a young couple, in their late 20s, who have just recently become members at Origen Presbyterian Church, a church in the Bon Air suburb of Richmond. Howie is a corporate chaplain to some large corporations in the Richmond area, and Emily is a homeschooling mother to their three children: Zack (6), Troy (5), and Stephanie (1). The interview occurred on a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon in their humble colonial-style home. It was the baby’s naptime during the interview. Emily continually excused herself to go care for the baby, while the two boys sat quietly in chairs next to their father.
Frank and Rebecca Newsome

The Newsomes are long-time members of Lovelace Presbyterian Church in their mid-50s. Frank is an elder at the church and a doctor in Adult Infectious Diseases with many hospitals in the Richmond region. Rebecca is a former nurse and current preschool teacher. They live in the beautiful Bellevue neighborhood of the city of Richmond, and their three girls attend public schools – fifth grade, seventh grade, and ninth grade. On the evening of the interview, Frank and Rebecca sat on their decorated back patio overlooking their large backyard. Frank had spent hours that morning gardening and building raised beds. Their two large dogs roamed under the tables during the two-hour interview, drawn by our company and the smell of the large pizza pie.
Joe and Celine O’Connor

Just returning from a ski vacation, the O’Connors welcomed the researcher into their living room while they ate dinner in their open concept home. The three girls: Jocelyn (10), Karen (8), and Sabrina (6), all had different reactions to the researcher. Sabrina, the youngest, sat at the end of the kitchen counter and proudly declared, “I’m the best skier.” Karen, the middle child, was very wary and hid behind her mother, while Jocelyn, the oldest, was precocious and pleasant in conversation. In their late 30s, Joe is a lawyer at a firm in downtown Richmond, and Celine serves as the part-time Children’s Ministry Director at their church, Blandina Presbyterian Church. Living in Mechanicsville, their girls attended Hanover public schools until the quarantine caused a switch to homeschool. It has been such a great year, especially for their middle child, who is severely dyslexic, who they plan to continue to homeschool.
Max and Mary Ryder

The Ryders are a couple in their mid-30s with two children: Cheryl (4) and Denise (2). Living in a neighborhood just a five-minute drive from Lovelace Presbyterian Church, the Ryders have been involved in the life of the church ever since they moved to Richmond in 2013. Max is a mechanical engineer with a large corporation in Richmond, and Mary is an ICU nurse at a local hospital. The Ryders remain very vigilant in abiding by government restrictions; the interview was delayed a few weeks for the researcher to finish his round of vaccinations before he could enter the house. On the afternoon of the interview, the researcher and participants sat on the sectional sofa in their living room, accompanied by the constant crackle of the baby monitor burping on the coffee table while the kids napped upstairs.
Simon and Carrie Stoddard

Living a relatively secluded life as a homeschool family in rural Rice, Virginia, the Stoddards live their lives as a family unit. On a beautiful day in March, the researcher drove up a long dirt farm road to the Stoddard family home. Parked out front was their 15-passenger van and across the way was a giant crop field. Upon arrival, the researcher was greeted by a happy and energetic triad of kids who had been trading turns driving a four-wheeler. Once inside, Simon and Carrie Stoddard, who are in their late 40s, and their five kids sat down with the researcher in their living room, with no one wearing a mask. The living room featured a big bay window overlooking the family farm, and a couple of kids laid on their stomachs coloring with crayons, staying close to the large tray of cookies that sat on the coffee table. Throughout the entire interview, these well-behaved kids sat and listened, giggled, and participated when prompted. Deeply committed to a new church plant in Farmville, Simon serves as an elder-in-training while also working as
a park manager a local state park. Carrie serves as the teacher to their five homeschooled children and the general manager for their small but consequential family farm.

**Sam and Molly Ventura**

The interview with Sam and Molly Ventura took place in their backyard, which they had set up with a fire pit and string lights during the quarantine. As the sun went down, Sam poked at the fire while they discussed their experience over quarantine. They are in their mid-30s and have two young girls: Jessica is in third grade, and Alyssa is in first grade. The previous year they had been enrolled in Henrico County, the largest public school system in the suburbs of Richmond. Unlike the nearby smaller counties (Hanover and Powhatan), Henrico County remained virtual for most of the 2020-21 academic calendar. The summer before, when the Venturas heard that Henrico was going virtual, they decided to try homeschooling. Molly, who works part-time as a choreographer and director of a local youth theater, became a full-time homeschool mom
overnight. As members of Lovelace Presbyterian Church, the Venturas had been involved with the work and worship of the church before the pandemic, but they remain uncomfortable sitting in the Sanctuary.

**Walter and Alice Warren**

Situated in the county of Hanover, just north of the city of Richmond, the Warrens live in a rural section of Mechanicsville. As the researcher drove up to their semi-secluded home at the end of a rural cul-de-sac, a quarter pipe was set up in the carport. Even though it was still daylight, the large number of trees made it seem darker. The Warren family has lived in Mechanicsville for many years – Walter is a teacher at a local high school, and Alice is a registered nurse at a large hospital in downtown Richmond. In their mid-40s, they have three children: Jason is in fourth grade, Matthew is in second grade, and Elizabeth is in preschool. The two boys attend the local public school of
Hanover County. Members of Blandina Presbyterian Church, the Warrens spoke often of their love of worship, music, and outdoor adventures.

**The Stress Points for Each of the Thirteen Sets of Parents**

The pandemic created trying times for families. Bombarded with instant changes to church life, work life, education, and the community, parents had to deal with change at a rapid pace. As parents, they also had to lead their children through these changes that they felt ill-equipped to handle. With only two exceptions, the participating families had significantly more stress during the quarantine. Some of the reasons for the stress were expected; others were not. Among these points of stress were the fear of COVID-19 infection, work changes, changes with education and school, loss of milestone events, societal upheaval, and loss of church community. The following graph illustrates the main contexts and levels of stress for the 13 sets of parents.

Figure 4. Context and Level of Stress

Three of the 13 families had a very high level of stress increased over the COVID-19 quarantine. Four of the 13 had a high level of stress increased over the
quarantine. Another four of the 13 families had an average level of stress increased over the quarantine. The remaining two families had a negligible amount of stress added. The reasons for the stress levels are myriad and will be explained below.

**No Significant Stress**

The Crowells and the Stoddards were the two families who had no significant added stress during the COVID-19 quarantine. “Not a whole lot has changed in our lives,” started Carrie Stoddard, from their secluded home near Farmville, Virginia. For the Stoddards, school continued as normal and everyday life stayed the same. The most significant adjustment for Carrie was that she used to bake her own bread all the time, but “once the whole world started doing it too, I couldn’t find any yeast.” So, she switched to sourdough.

In stark contrast to the lifestyle of the Stoddards, Jay and Helen Crowell live in an urban neighborhood of the city of Richmond, but like the Stoddards, the Crowells expressed that their home life saw no real tangible change. As each topic was discussed, from education to personal life, to the church, a consistent theme arose: the pandemic has not affected them in any real way. Because Helen homeschools their children, and with no real change in Jay’s work schedule or the families’ work at the church, the Crowells have seen no real stress added to their lives due to the pandemic. As Helen summarized, “we continue to push out and be intentional with people and talk to neighbors.” She smiled and quipped, “It seems that things for us haven’t really been affected by pandemic.”

For the Crowells and Stoddards, while their lives did change in some ways, the quarantine had such a negligible impact that the parents had difficulty articulating any
level of struggle. Although they were cognizant of the need to wear masks and follow governmental guidelines, these two families have worn masks and maintained social distancing out of a love of neighbor more than a concern for infection. Jay Crowell told his kids to “be courteous of others; if you are outside (without a mask) and someone comes near you with a mask you cross the street and maintain your distance.” When Jay described a trip to Boston a few months earlier, he saw people outside running and bicycling with masks on and he was perplexed. “You do you, I guess,” he said with a smile. When the researcher met with the Stoddard family in their farmhouse, he was offered a tray of cookies and homebrewed apple cider to go. Whenever the subject of the coronavirus was raised, it was met with dismissal by the parents. After explaining that they were not going to get the vaccine when it will be available, Simon’s summary was “COVID is real, but…,” as he trailed off with raised eyebrows.

They both also saw no real impact on the spiritual development of their children because of no significant change in the children’s day-to-day life as homeschoolers. Furthermore, they are both very involved in their respective church communities and were able to maintain a similar level of community engagement as before the quarantine. As explained below, the only added stress was the loss of a milestone event for the Crowells and increased work stress for the Stoddards.

**Stress over COVID-19 infection**

Figure 5. Stress about COVID-19 Infection

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426 At the time of the interview, the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines were still only available to certain segments of the Virginia population.
One area of concern for families is obvious – the fear of being infected with the coronavirus or spreading it. Two of the 13 families had no concern for COVID-19 infection, four had a low-level concern, two had a medium-level concern, another two had a high-level concern, and another three had a very serious concern for COVID-19 infection.

Four of the families had a low level of concern about COVID-19 infection. Whenever the subject of COVID-19 was raised with these four families (Keller, Hamilton, Forbes, and O’Connor), the responses were always touched with the themes of concern and trust – concern about being infected with the coronavirus, but trust in governmental restrictions and public health officials. There was no imminent threat of COVID infection for these families, and they believed that by following mask guidelines and social distancing restrictions, they would stay healthy. In other words, the threat of coronavirus was mitigated by these measures; therefore, they carried a small but manageable amount of stress about it.

For one of these parents, the threat of infection became a source of irony. Howie Keller’s job is as a corporate chaplain where large corporations hire him to care for the
spiritual needs of their employees. During this time of pandemic, his job became “non-stop.” He would go to his various clients around the Richmond area while anxiety and fear were skyrocketing, and he felt like his services were desperately needed. However, at the same time, he would enter some buildings and be greeted with anger: “Why are you coming in here? You are going from one company to another and you may be bringing COVID here.” He was really struggling over what the right and loving thing was to do. Howie was also coping with lifelong struggles exacerbated by the pandemic: his self-diagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and mysophobia. Before the quarantine, Howie would wash his hands all day long (upwards of twenty times a day), and mop the floors daily. Ironically, as the world was growing in their awareness of germs and viruses, Howie was having an awakening. He said that as people were sharing their anxieties and fears of germs and viruses with him, he became aware of the fact that “germs were all over me all of the time and I can’t do anything about it.” He said this was an epiphany for him; he realized that he had placed cleanliness as an idol in his life. As the world moved in one direction, Howie moved in the other.

Two of the families had a medium-level of concern for COVID-19 infection because of their roles as teachers. Walter Warren and both Alfred and Meredith Dillard are teachers at a local public school. Because of this, they had a higher level of concern about infection and contact tracing. Walter even said that he is not concerned about the disease: “we are laid back on the disease,” but because he is a teacher at Hanover Schools he has maintained strict protocols on visitors, masking, and social distancing. Similarly, the Dillards have an ambivalent attitude toward the virus. They maintain strict contact-tracing protocols for their family and abide by all regulations, but Alfred believes that
“the pandemic is handled politically, but not humanely.” He sees the added anxiety and stress on his teenage girls when they hear that, “if you don’t wear a mask, you will kill Grandma!”

Another two families have a serious concern for COVID infection. The Ventura and Booth families both exhibited behavior of a deep concern for infection while acknowledging that there were other issues more crucial. Because of fear of infection, the Venturas would not allow anyone in their home outside of their immediate family. Longtime members of Lovelace Presbyterian Church, they would enjoy the church’s outdoor worship services that occurred over the summer and fall of 2020. However, it was going to be a long time before they felt comfortable coming inside or sending their children to the outdoor Children’s Worship.

For the Booths, COVID was only one of many stressors. For Brian and Beth, COVID took on a more personal tone. At the beginning, Beth had had zero concern for the virus, but then two close relatives became infected. Her own mother “got COVID, and it was very bad.” Thankfully, she recovered with no known side effects. However, they also had an otherwise healthy 13-year-old nephew become infected with COVID, “and he still has repercussions.” These instances made Beth change her mind, and she had become much more conscious of infection. Brian, for his part, is known as “the mask guy” at their church.

The remaining three families rank very high in their concern for COVID-infection. The Ryders, Gibses, and Newsomes have all continued to treat the coronavirus as an imminent threat to their own health and the health of those in the community. One of the parents in each of these families is a medical professional who
has seen the effects of COVID and has a more experienced trust in health professionals. Mary Ryder is an ICU nurse at a local hospital and remains very vigilant in abiding by government restrictions. As one of the final interviews, the researcher was able to enter their house only because he had been vaccinated. Much of the Ryder interview discussed their struggles with extended family and neighbors who have taken a lax view of COVID. “We lean toward being conservative about COVID. Our extended family is more liberal… Christmas was a big fight.” In September, when they had a socially-distanced birthday party for their daughter, Anna, “I made sure that it was the most COVID-conscious birthday party possible.” Max Ryder said that they would not return to church until Virginia “hits some milestones.”

When the researcher visited the Gibbses in their home on March 31, 2021, he was the very first non-family member to enter their home in over a year. As they sat at the dining room table, John, Evelyn, and the researcher all wore masks the entire time. Evelyn Gibbs is a staff nurse anesthesiologist with a local hospital in Richmond. As someone who works with COVID patients on a daily basis, Evelyn struggled with the claustrophobia of wearing N95 masks all day long and the terror of bringing COVID home to her family. She began to see a counselor via Zoom and began to take antidepressants because of the fear. “COVID is worse than most diseases. And it is so isolating,” lamented Evelyn.

Frank Newsome, M.D., is an Adult Infectious Disease doctor in the Richmond region. Coupled with Rebecca’s compromised health and their daughter’s anxiety, the threat of disease looms large in the Newsome home. They have attempted to maintain a high awareness of masks and social distancing while not sequestering themselves in their
homes. For the first few months, they remained in their home, but they were venturing out by the summer of 2020. By the time of the interview, April 2021, the Newsomes were attending some functions beyond their home, but almost always outside and never without masks. The interview took place on their beautiful back patio surrounded by a luscious garden and raised beds where Frank was growing some herbs.

On the special occasion that Frank was ordained as an elder at Lovelace Presbyterian Church in June 2020, they attended that indoor service, but “everyone was terrified.” Rebecca said that “big crowds still make me anxious.” Frank has attended some church events indoors and outdoors, but he maintains a distance, wears a mask, and feels uncomfortable with the laxity that some have toward the pandemic. “At work, I wear a full mask and face shield all day long – gloved and gowned,” and then he comes to church and sees folks gathering close together without any worry or care. Their middle daughter, Kathy, has really struggled with anxiety at this time and wears a mask everywhere. She will attend some of the youth group functions, but she doesn’t like how close some girls get with one another. When the family went to Yorktown beach for vacation in the summer, the others took their masks off, but Kathy sat on the beach with a mask the entire time. Frank astutely said that the mask had become a psychological aid for Kathy. “A way for her to handle the isolation is to bring some control of it.”

**Stress over the Loss of Milestone Events**

When the quarantine first started, events began to be cancelled. Some events were easily forgotten, postponed, and rescheduled. However, some of the canceled events were so important that their loss was significant, such as graduations, recitals, games, concerts, and banquets. These milestone events loom large, especially in the minds of children. The
significance of the loss of these events also carried emotional weight. Seven of the 13 families had no stress over the loss of milestone events. One had a low-level concern, one had a medium-level concern, one had a high-level concern, and another three had a very serious concern for this loss.

Figure 6: Stress Over the Loss of Milestone Events

The Crowells, who were otherwise unaffected by the quarantine, have three teenagers who lost some events. While they acknowledged the loss and its effect on them and their kids, it did not affect them in significant ways. Their oldest, Julia, was in her senior year as a homeschooler when the pandemic emerged. She lost her senior recital and was appropriately upset at this loss. She is now thriving at a private college that meets in person. Their most affected child was their youngest, Miles, a seventh-grader. Miles loves Little League baseball, and their team had a reasonable chance of making it to the Little League World Series (LLWS). With the loss of baseball in the spring and the cancelation of the LLWS, Miles was sad. However, when asked about it by the researcher in the presence of his parents, he said, “it wasn’t a big deal. We weren’t gonna make it anyway.”
The Ryders exhibited a medium level of concern about the loss of milestone events. It wasn’t a concern that dominated the conversation, but Mary mentioned the loss of Anna’s graduation into Children’s Worship twice. An important milestone event at Lovelace Presbyterian Church occurs when she leaves the nursery at age four and enters Children’s Worship. Many families see this as a step in the spiritual development of children as they begin to make the Christian faith their own. Anna was in the nursery when the quarantine started, and whenever they enter back into worship, Anna will be in Children’s Worship, but with little fanfare.

For the Booths, on the other hand, the loss of milestone events was a cause for deep concern. Just the week before the interview, their oldest daughter, Bristol, had the public presentation of her Senior thesis delayed by two weeks because of a positive COVID case in the school. The possible loss of this milestone event caused her much distress, especially in light of the amount of loss she had already experienced: dances, sports, and trips. With her upcoming graduation party still being limited in scope and size because of the quarantine, the previous week “was rough for the family.” This loss, coupled with the loss the year before of Brayden’s graduation parties, was a high concern for the Booth family.

The loss of milestone events loomed large on three families: the Newsomes, Dillards, and Venturas. The researcher would classify these three families as exhibiting very high levels of stress over the loss of milestone events. The Dillards said that both of their teenage girls are suffering. Last Spring, as the family sat in front of their television watching the governor of Virginia declared that schools would be closed for in-person instruction for the remainder of the year, their girls broke down in sobs. “It was
heartbreaking,” said Meredith. The loss of proms, homecoming, show choir, and friends, crushed both of their girls. For their 18-year-old senior, depression crept in, along with general malaise and lack of motivation. They began to take her to a counselor and considered themselves lucky to have found one in their area who was providing regular services during quarantine.

The Venturas also have two daughters but much younger: third and first grades. The loss of milestone events did not affect the girls as much as it affected Molly. Early on in the pandemic, Molly said that she “spiraled fast and furiously.” As someone who has given her life to youth theater, she began to wonder when everything shut down if her “life’s work is over!” Through the spring of 2020, Molly was in self-diagnosed depression. However, with some creativity and hard work, she was able to direct a short play with some kids over the summer. They performed the play on someone’s driveway in the woods for an audience of only masked parents in June. Molly attributes this simple and small event with saving her.

As for Frank and Rebecca Newsome, loss and death have hung heavily on the family through this whole pandemic. Frank’s mom died early in 2020, and her funeral in Tennessee was at the end of February. It was packed with people from far and wide coming to pay their respects. Within a few weeks, “the world shut down,” and Rebecca’s mom’s health started declining rapidly. Rebecca was able to see her mom for the last time through her nursing home window on March 13, and she died on April 13 – the day after Easter. The funeral was heartbreaking for Rebecca as only ten people could gather by the graveside. In retelling this story, Rebecca hung her head and said, “so much loss, so much loss.”
Stress over Work

All of the parents had to deal with stress over changes at work to varying degrees. Some of the parents saw only minimal disruption at the beginning, while others felt they might never return to working in an office building. Educators and those in the medical field seemed to be most affected by pandemic stress. Six of the 13 families had no stress over work – the families who either appreciated the loss of commutes to their offices or whose jobs simply saw little change at all.

Figure 7: Stress Over Work

Five had a low-level concern about work, and two had a very high concern over work. The Newsome, Keller, Stoddard, Ventura, and Warren families all registered a low level of concern about the changes in their work situation. Howie Keller’s work as a corporate chaplain increased stress levels at home, as mentioned previously. Sam Ventura had a difficult time at the beginning of the quarantine to balance work and home life. As a self-proclaimed “extreme introvert,” Sam said that he had the best year of his life at first because he did not have to leave his home and interact with anyone other than his family. However, Molly interjected that at the beginning, Sam was working way too
much. Sam agreed that it took him a while to figure out work/life balance, which was stressful at the beginning, but he has been able to make improvements.

As an infectious disease doctor, Frank Newsome’s work increased in stress while also decreasing in workload. His normal practice is in general medicine, so most of his regular patient visits dropped off completely at the beginning of the pandemic. However, he began to receive phone calls and inquiries from patients, churches, and friends asking for his advice about COVID. He said that he was delighted to help, but it did increase his stress level slightly. Another participant who had a small increase in stress related to work is Walter Warren, a public school teacher in the Hanover School system. Walter has nothing but praise for the Hanover County school board; “last spring was a mess, but they did their best.” While he understands why, he admits that the new restrictions on students and teachers have been very difficult. “We now have rows of desks in the cafeteria because of social distancing guidelines. If kids thought it was prison before, they will really believe that now,” Walter chuckles.

The biggest change, and only stated challenge, for the Stoddards was the impact on Simon’s job. As the manager of a local state park, Simon became busier than ever since the preference for outdoor recreation increased due to the pandemic. With trail usage up by seventy-seven percent, the parking lots had to begin turning cars away due to overcrowding. For the first six months of the pandemic, Simon’s hours increased by about fifty percent. A few weeks before the interview, Simon found himself away from home for about 48 hours due to a suicide in the park. This tragedy also created stress for

427 This statistic was provided by Simon Stoddard. The researcher could not verify this information from another source.
Kimberley, who helped guide their kids around this delicate issue. As Kimberley said, “we do our lives together – we talk about everything!”

Only two families registered work as a major stressor in their lives, categorized as very high by the researcher: the Gibbses and Dillards. Before the pandemic, one of Evelyn Gibbs’ primary responsibilities was to intubate patients. As COVID emerged, her expertise became a round-the-clock need as she was repeatedly called into the emergency room to intubate new COVID patients. She started working twelve-hour night shifts with no vacation time and few breaks. “I wasn’t sleeping much. I couldn’t touch my patients anymore or even let them see my face because of all of the masks. It makes communication so much harder. You can’t build trust.” Evelyn said that she heard the last words of COVID patients more than once. “When you intubate a dying patient, there is a good chance that they will not be extubated. The words they say before that moment are the last words of their life.” The responsibility she felt in that role clearly weighed heavily on her as she spoke.

“I don’t know my students,” lamented Alfred Dillard, a teacher at the local high school. “I went from two percent failure rate pre-COVID, now a forty percent failure rate.” The stress of teaching and the failures of the educational system have exhausted him. Alfred believes that teaching is an “adapt or die environment” for teachers, and he doubts his own ability to adapt. Alfred has little hope in the current reality, whether students are masked and in-person or they are in a virtual school setting. With masks, in his opinion, the students just sit there in class and without interacting with one another; in online school, kids feel a sense of incompleteness all of the time. Work has doubled for
Alfred, and he does not trust that the school system will release the pressure felt by teachers.

**Stress over Education**

Changes in education during the quarantine affected most families since schools are a required and essential aspect of any society. School administrators were required to make quick decisions based on incomplete and rapidly changing information that impacted large amounts of the population. This dynamic, combined with the fact that education deals with the vulnerable population of children, and with the varying degrees of opinion about the role of government in the education of children, changes in education were a major stressor during the COVID-19 quarantine. Five of the 13 families had no stress over education, four had a low-level concern about education, two had a medium-level of concern about education, one had a high level of concern, and one had a very high level of concern about education.
The reasons that five families had no stress over education were varied. The Gibbses have two very driven children (15, 13) in highly competitive school systems. The stress of their children’s education rested on their children’s shoulders, not on the parents’. The Crowells, Kellers, and Stoddards all homeschool their children. The quarantine only inconvenienced their field trip possibilities for these families but did not really affect their education. Furthermore, the Ryders have two preschool-aged children and therefore saw very little change to their education. While the loss of in-person preschool impacted them, their stress lay in the loss of community.

Four other families had a low level of concern about education. Walter and Alice Warren admitted that one of the hardest parts of the quarantine was managing those couple months of virtual school at the end of the spring of 2020 for their fourth- and second-grade children. However, now that the boys are back in school, wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, “this year has been great!” The boys love being able to be with their friends and get out of the house. Arthur and Martha Hamilton had a similar experience in Hanover public schools, struggling with virtual school during the balance
of the 2020 school year for the fourth- and first-grade children. “It was a battle.” Early in
the quarantine, services for their autistic child, Will (10), were suddenly halted. Now that
Hanover County Schools are back to offering in-person schools, these services for Will
have resumed; it has become so much better.

For the Booths and Forbeses, the quarantine has solidified their decision to
homeschool their children. They were already dabbling in homeschooling before COVID,
but the quarantine solidified their resolve to pull out of their respective private schools
and continue homeschooling. The Booths were already homeschooling their youngest
four and had their older three either in college or private school. After some stress and
conflict with the private school this past year, they, too, are pulling out of private school.
The Forbeses were in a Montessori-style educational co-op with an older African
American woman in the neighborhood when the pandemic began. Because of the
pandemic and subsequent financial recession, the older woman had to move out of the
home she was renting. Since the older woman was the primary educator, this forced the
closure of the co-op and prompted Andrea Forbes to create her own Montessori-style
homeschool for their six children ranging from three to sixteen years old. “I felt
unprepared to homeschool, but God has provided. My kids seem to be taking to it.”
Andrea believes her children are thriving; the kids play together, worship together, and
do work together. During the interview, one child wandered out onto the porch with his
worksheets while another played on his scooter and another was gardening.

Two families registered a medium-level of stress over education: the Venturas
and the O’Connors. The Venturas indicate that it was disastrous when the lockdown
began and their third- and first-grade girls transitioned to online schooling. Sam said that
in March 2020, “Jessica loved virtual school for the first ten minutes. Minute eleven, she was done.” Unlike nearby smaller counties like Hanover and Powhatan, Henrico County remained virtual for most of the 2020-21 academic calendar. The summer before, when the Venturas heard that Henrico was going virtual, they decided to try homeschooling. Molly, who works part-time as a choreographer and director of a local youth theater, became a full-time homeschool mom overnight. While Molly enjoys the freedom provided by homeschooling, she butts heads with their third-grade student, Jessica frequently. Even more, she has maintained her other responsibilities and simply added on being a full-time teacher. For the O’Connors, the switch to homeschool has been a blessing, especially for their middle child, Karen (8), who is severely dyslexic. Celine said that Karen had had more time to learn and grow as a student by moving to homeschool. “She has learned so much more this year than she would have in public school.” The O’Connors have chosen classical education curricula for all of their girls and an Orton Gillingham approach[^428] for Karen. Celine has enjoyed the teaching, but like Molly Ventura, she has simply added a new responsibility while adding to her part-time job as the Children’s Ministry Director at her church.

The Dillards and Newsomes rank education as a high stressor. As mentioned previously, the loss of milestone events and the additional strains on Alfred Dillard as a teacher have all piled on. Their two daughters are high schoolers; the loss of in-person school, and the addition of online learning, have created an environment of high stress. The Dillards see very little positive about the learning environment of pandemic life.

They lament that the current generation of students is ill-equipped to handle difficulty, yet they face something that no generation of Americans alive has ever experienced. For the Newsomes, Rebecca believes that the Richmond City Schools have handled the pandemic terribly. “It is awful, just awful.” Their girls, who are in ninth, seventh, and fifth grades, have not failed, but she believes that the quarantine measures have seriously impacted their education and their learning. It has caused Rebecca great stress to think about what next year will look like. “I don’t know what we will do.”

**Stress over Society**

During the summer of 2020, in the first few months of the quarantine, people from all over the globe protested the murder of George Floyd in 2,000 different American cities and over sixty different countries.\(^{429}\) Combined with the ubiquity of social media and the highly polarized political landscape of the United States, the months of quarantine were filled with social unrest that is arguably even more tumultuous and tenuous than the 1960s.\(^{430}\) While eleven of the 13 families had no stated additional stress about the societal conflict during this time, two had extremely high amounts of stress about racial unrest and the government.


“There are two pandemics in this country: COVID-19 and white supremacy,” said Evelyn Gibbs. As a black woman who attends a predominantly white church in a predominantly white denomination, Evelyn passionately feels that the racial unrest of 2020 around the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor has been building for decades. “COVID is super salient because of my job and my community, but at the same time, it is secondary to racial injustice in our country.” Detailing some of the continued racism she and her kids have experienced and lamenting the storming of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, Evelyn argues that white supremacy remains strong in the United States. While the COVID vaccines have given her hope about dealing with this deadly disease, she remains hopeless about the end of racial injustice, pointing to the nearly double mortality rate for black people over white people and the nearly eighty percent approval rating that Donald Trump received from white evangelicals. John said that the pandemic has made him more politically-minded. He said

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that he has begun to write articles about racial injustice for his church, which has helped him see the work of God through the church. Both Evelyn and John see the rise in concern over race among evangelicals as a positive, but they both have grown frustrated at the slow pace of change. “For the first time, white people know what it feels like to wear a mask, to not be able to breathe, to not just be able to go anywhere. That is what our black brothers and sisters have lived with for hundreds of years… I wonder how long it will last for white people to see this.”

The only other family who characterized societal issues as a significant stressor was the Dillard family. However, where the Gibbses viewed the issue of race as another pandemic, the Dillards view the issue of race as a distraction. As a proud Libertarian, Alfred bemoans what he sees as the one-sided nature of the conversation around race. When the Confederate monuments came down in Richmond in June 2020, the Dillards went down to Monument Avenue “to listen to people… But, no one would listen to me.” Alfred said that he used to be more politically-minded, but “since this outbreak, I have seen the futility of it – I just pray for Jesus to return.”

**Stress over Losing Church Community**

Three of the 13 families had no stress about the loss of church community (Crowell, Gibbs, and Stoddard) because they never lost their church community. The Gibbses and Crowells both live and go to church in their neighborhoods. They were able to interact with neighbors and friends in a socially distant but still personal way. The Stoddards already have lived a secluded lifestyle on their farm and saw no significant change with pandemic emerged. For the other families, two of them had low-level stress,
three had medium-level stress, three had a high amount of stress, and two had a very high amount of stress.

Figure 10: Stress Over Loss of Community

Only a few months into membership at Origen Presbyterian Church, Howie and Emily Keller were confronted with a shut-down and the beginning of online small group communities. The biggest hurdle for the Keller family was learning how to interact in a new church community who all had varying beliefs about COVID prevention, masks, and politics. Watching church online was strange, but they felt it was a good step. When their small group went virtual, it was hard, but they persisted. They desired to find ways to gather in person, but they met considerable resistance. When Emily invited some women to gather at her house during the summer, she was shocked to hear that some of them did not feel comfortable coming into her home. They have continued to find it challenging to get to know folks at their new church.

On the other side, the Warrens have been longtime members and leaders at their church: Blandina Presbyterian Church (BPC). At the beginning of lockdown, the Warrens enjoyed “Zoom church” as they would sit on their back porch with their cat and worship
as a family. The children’s ministry of BPC created little Zoom groups for the individual classes, and the kids would meet virtually with their classes each Sunday afternoon. Despite some distracting conversations about the *Legend of Zelda* and other video games, the parents, teachers, and kids all seemed to enjoy these little virtual classes. Because BPC normally meets in a local public school, coming back together again for in-person worship proved difficult. By the summer of 2020, they were able to secure an outdoor location at a local county park as long as they abided by government restrictions on distance, mask-wearing, and attendance. The Warrens enjoyed this time of gathering with their church community and being outside in God’s creation. When the weather got cold near the end of 2020, BPC began to meet in a small local clubhouse. Because of room limitations, the church had to split up into two congregations. One Sunday, everyone whose last name begins with A-M can attend while the rest of the congregation signs in virtually. The next Sunday, they switch. This arrangement will continue until the weather warms up enough to return to outdoor worship together. In all of these movements, the Warrens have admitted that their kids have lost connection with their church friends, but they are hopeful as they look forward to getting back together post-pandemic.

Three families registered a medium level of stress over the loss of church community: the Venturas, Forbeses, and O’Connors. As members of Lovelace Presbyterian Church, the Venturas enjoyed the church’s outdoor worship services that occurred over the summer and fall of 2020. Nevertheless, they remain uncomfortable sitting in the sanctuary and sending their children to the outdoor Children’s Worship. When virtual church began in March 2020, broadcast over YouTube, they enjoyed it. Sam enjoys watching church online, but he acknowledges that online church is not
feeding him. “Other people exhaust me, but I know that community is needed. You can’t be a Christian by yourself.” Molly, on the other hand, is really struggling. They attended the first service a few weeks back, and Molly cried the entire time. “I miss it so much.” The loss of church and her women’s Bible study “was a huge hit.” Church provided them both weekly accountability and community.

The O’Connors have been attending Blandina Presbyterian Church for 10-12 years: Joe is an elder, and Celine is the part-time Children’s Ministry Director. Celine said that instituting Zoom children’s Sunday School is better than nothing, but not great as it is simply too easy to lose focus. Even with these negatives, Joe said, “we have missed a lot less church since we moved to ‘Zoom Church.’” As a staff member responsible for child programming, Celine feels the pressure provide avenues of instructions and community engagement even in a pandemic. She has grown a little frustrated at the number of people who will log into church online or gather for outside worship but continue to be unwilling to volunteer.

For the Forbeses, the pandemic provided a chance to reconsider their church home. When the researcher asked the Forbeses why they did not attend the historic black church across the street, Andrea responded: “The prosperity gospel is rampant around here.” Instead, for years the Forbeses attended a larger predominantly white Baptist church across the Appomattox River. However, once again, they grew disillusioned by what they viewed as the “dead religion” of many of the congregants. Will and Andrea have built their lives around their mission – reaching out to the “least of these,” moving out of their comfort zone, “moving out of our tribe and moving into a mission field.” However, this life contrasts with their routine interactions on Sundays with Christians
who wanted to “talk the talk but not walk the walk.” It has been a hard season for the Forbeses. Just before the pandemic, they met the African American pastor of Wilberforce Presbyterian Church – a PCA church in southern Richmond striving to be a multi-ethnic, multi-generational church. They loved the pastor and the mission and passion of the church. According to Will, for the first time, they found a community of believers who were “doing church the way it should be done.” Unlike their current church, the families were not split out into socio-economic classes, but everyone stayed together. They were hearing a black pastor preaching the Gospel – the story of grace and redemption that resonated with their understanding of the Bible – and they felt affirmed in their mission at home. On the very first Sunday of the quarantine in March 2020, they tuned into the livestream of Wilberforce Presbyterian Church and have not stopped viewing it each week since.

However, the Forbeses’ journey has not been without its bumps. While the quarantine has enabled the Forbeses to settle into good rhythms with homeschooling and fostered a pathway into their new church, it has also proven difficult in a few areas. One of the main reasons they love their new church is how they “do life together,” but they cannot actually be together in a quarantine. “How to build relationships with a new church when we can’t meet together? That has been the most difficult.” Before the quarantine, Will would go preach and teach at the adult group home down the street monthly, but the lockdown has abruptly ended his mission. He wondered, “If our entire lives is about reaching out, what in the world does that look like when we aren’t allowed to do that?” Another major difficulty for the Forbeses that seems unique to them is their view of the home. While most people have been isolated in their home during the
quarantine, the Forbeses view their home as open for ministry, and it has been unrelenting. Andrea flatly declared her home is “constant ministry with no respite.” To punctuate this statement, an older Black woman walked by soon after her remark, and Andrea conversed with her for a while. To help alleviate the strain of their intensified in-home ministry, they used their government stimulus check as a down payment for a plot of land in rural West Virginia. This land provides a place for them to go and camp about once a month and enjoy their “5.3 acres of quiet and relaxation.”

Three families registered a high level of stress over the loss of church community: the Booths, Dillards, and the Ryders. The Booth family is a core family to a new church, Augustine Presbyterian Church, that began in a northern neighborhood of Richmond. Longtime members and leaders at a Baptist church in the city, the Booths were drawn to the church plant through the preaching of the pastor of Augustine Presbyterian Church. Their old church had called a new pastor, and they felt that the preaching was too moralistic and topical. At Augustine Presbyterian Church, they heard the story of the Gospel and felt that the Bible was held in high regard. However, not everyone in the family was happy with their new church: the older two resisted the change. They had community in the youth group of their old church, and the new church had very few adolescents their age. When their oldest had a “faith crisis” this past year at college, he called upon their former pastor for help and counseling.

With the slower pace in the pandemic, the Booths have had more time for family devotions and more time to “linger.” When their church went virtual in March 2020, Brian was concerned with the loss of children’s Sunday School. As a result, with the aid of his kids, Brian began to plan, write, and record weekly “Quarantine Sunday School”
lessons and skits, which he would then post on the church’s website. Beth and Brian attribute the family’s cooperative work on these skits to their kids’ consistent spiritual health through the pandemic. The kids were teaching the Bible alongside their father, in fun and creative ways during the peak months of the quarantine. Even as the church resumed in-person services and Sunday School moved back to in-person, their five-year-old still refers to her in-person class as “Quarantine Sunday School.”

The Dillards are sporadic attenders of Lovelace Presbyterian Church. Angry and struggling with hopelessness, Alfred does not consider church a major source of community or spiritual guidance. He does not believe that attending a church worship service is necessary or even helpful during this time. “My Sundays are now about resting because every other day is so hard.” When the researcher inquired further regarding his non-attendance at church, he said that he sometimes tunes into an Irish church online because he can be done by 7 AM. In contrast to Alfred, Meredith sees a void in her community. When she attended a worship service once during the summer of 2020, she wept the whole time because she missed it so much. Since she felt the church’s contact-tracing efforts were insufficient, she has not returned. While Alfred was hopeless but confident in his opinions, Meredith was despondent and in need of hope.

The Ryders also register as a high stressor on the loss of church community. “We depend on the church to preach the Gospel to us,” said Mary. A few months into the pandemic, Mary stopped by the church to pick up a packet for one of her daughters, and as she sat in the parking lot, she broke down in tears. “It just hit me so hard that I need these people. I was so lonely.” Not just the Sunday worship was lost to the Ryders, but her regular women’s study and her children’s friends were all missing from their lives for
so long. Virtual church was fine for two weeks, but by the third week, they would send their two girls out to the playroom while Mary and Max sat on the couch to listen to church. When the researcher asked them what their girls were receiving from church, Max reluctantly responded, “nothing.”

The two families who would register as very high on the scale of stress regarding losing church community were the Newsomes and Hamiltons. Rebecca Newsome said, “quarantine broke us.” Anxiety and fears and arguments over the smallest things had created an environment that Rebecca saw as untenable. In her lowest moment of the quarantine, she admitted to an aggressive outburst toward one of her daughters. She did not provide details about the situation, but she said that the isolation and loss of community had built up to it. However, she also said that it enabled her to return to her daughter, confess her sin, and ask for her forgiveness. It resulted in a long conversation about forgiveness and conflict resolution. For the Hamiltons, Martha admitted that they simply have no friends. They had just moved to a new church and were looking to grow community there but felt that they needed to isolate themselves when the quarantine began. Arthur concluded our interview with the statement, “I have learned that you can’t do church without the larger body of believers.”

Goals of Spiritual Development for Their Children

As these 13 sets of parents dealt with the stresses of a pandemic and quarantine to varying degrees, they were attempting to guide their children spiritually. When asked about their goals for their children, a common theme emerged from many of them: that they would be able to point their children to Jesus. Each family had a different understanding of the spiritual needs of their children. However, as evangelical parents
attending a PCA church, they mostly seemed to be aligned in their ultimate goal for their children: that they know Jesus loves them.

Six families articulated their simple desire to point their children to Jesus, with little else elaborating this goal. Joe O’Connor said that his goal is for his kids “to truly have faith; to know that Jesus loves them, that Jesus died for their sins.” Emily Keller said her goal was “to point them to Christ.” The Kellers strive to achieve this through catechesis three times a day, family devotions, and a Bible curriculum in homeschool. Molly Ventura said, “our main job is to show them Jesus,” and she hopes that the morning devotions that began during quarantine will continue. Rebecca Newsome said she wants her kids “to see that all my good things in life are done because I love Jesus.”

Arthur Hamilton said that his goal in parenting is for his kids to “know God and love God.” His role is “really just to point the kids in the right direction. I realized I can point them to God, but it is up to God to do it.” Finally, Beth Booth said her goal was for her “children to fall in love with God; to have a relationship with Him.”

Another four families framed their responses around their relationship to the world. Walter Warren pointed out his desire for his kids to know that “they were created by a Creator for a purpose by God.” He wants them to have a “biblical worldview… to have something to stand on.” When pressed further on this, Walter’s response was, “as a teacher, the secular worldview is so empty.” Similarly, Mary Ryder’s goal is “to be a light in the world, to be in a home where Jesus is held high.” The Ryders’ faith is built upon an evangelistic desire to love their “lost neighbors.” Helen Crowell discussed her desire to be “attentional and intentional” in the training of her children to be witnesses to the wider world. Furthermore, Will Forbes, who has a strong conviction to live a life on
mission, said he wants his kids to know that “following Jesus is not a ‘safe’ way to go.” In Will’s words, “parenting is a privilege and a responsibility – a command to be fruitful and multiply, and to show them that God doles out grace, mission, and ministry.”

Two families described goals of spiritual development for their children that were more moralistic in nature. Simon Stoddard said, “I hope that our kids will sin less than the parents.” While acknowledging that they want their kids to have a “strong relationships with Christ throughout life,” the emphasis was on “boring testimonies and Christian spouses” and on the moral living that comes from a “Christian” lifestyle. Evelyn Gibbs’s answer was about raising kind children who would be anti-racist. She said this would happen through teaching the biblical commands to love God and others and through an intentional community of faith that was preaching antiracism.

Lastly, Alfred Dillard’s answer was the only answer that was a bit outside of the mainstream of biblical theology. While saying that he prays for “Jesus to return,” Alfred could never articulate what he truly believed was a spiritual goal for his children. He acknowledged that one of his daughters “is more in tune with the Spirit than anyone else in our family.” However, when requested to explain that statement, Alfred spoke of her uncanny ability to commune with nature as she skateboards.

**Survey Data**

The third and final stream of data came from 53 survey participants of evangelical parents that represented eight PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond area. The questions were coded into six sections: (1) questions 1-3 were preliminary diagnostic questions, (2) questions 5-7 dealt with areas of stress, (3) questions 8-14 were about their church communities and participation with it, (4) questions 16-17 dealt with community specifically, (5) questions 4, 15, 18-21 dealt with issues of spiritual development, and (6)
questions 22-25 were summary questions on their overall assessment of parenting during a pandemic.

**Preliminary Diagnostic Questions**

Question 1, which asked, “Are you a parent of a child, or children, who were quarantined with you for a period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic?” was included for the sole purpose of maintaining survey integrity and eliminating participants who do not qualify. There were 54 surveys begun, but one survey was not completed because he/she did not qualify according to question 1. Fourteen of the respondents represented seven families as they were both mother and father responding. In total, the surveys represented 53 parents from 46 families.

According to question 2, “What are the ages and genders of your children?” there were 130 children represented in these 46 families: 69 boys, 54 girls, and seven who did not have their gender disclosed, as seen in Tables 2 and 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Say</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Q2. Ages of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years old</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 years old</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11 years old</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14 years old</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years old</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+ years old</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to question 3, three families reported changing from public school to homeschool because of the COVID-19 quarantine (Table 4). The remaining families did
not report a change in their education venue, with 19 attending their local public school, eight at private school, twelve at homeschool, and four who are either in preschool or too young.

Table 4: Q3. How the children are educated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Education</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool or Younger</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change from Public to Homeschool</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Stress*

Questions 5-7 dealt with the area of stress. While Question 5 asked for an overall rating of additional stress for the family, questions 6 and 7 asked to pinpoint the area of life that added stress. According to question 5, 53 parents responded with an average ranking of additional stress of 5.17 on a scale of 0 to 10. Thirty-four (64.2%) participants rated their level of additional stress at 5 or higher. Twenty (37.7%) rated their level of additional stress at 4 or lower. According to question 6 (Figure 11), the largest area of life that added stress for the survey participants was the loss of community. On a scale of 0-5, “loss of community” ranked with a 3.47 average of additional stress. “Societal stress” came in at second with a 3.09 average score, followed by “changes in education” (2.98), “changes at work” (2.66), “loss of milestone events” (2.51), and fear of COVID-19 infection last with an average score of 2.02. It is noteworthy that the additional stress of loss of community is almost 60 percent higher than that of the fear of COVID-19.
In question 7, survey participants had an opportunity to share other areas of their lives that created an inordinate amount of stress in their families during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. Of the 53 parents who completed the survey, 21 shared further opinions about what has created stress in their lives over the COVID-19 quarantine. These responses can be divided into three categories: (1) conflict with others over the pandemic and how to deal with it, (2) specific personal and family issues, and (3) the adverse effects of the quarantine on children.

**Conflict with Others Over the Pandemic / Diversity of Opinion**

Eleven parents wrote about the stress of dealing with diverse opinions about race, masks, vaccines, etc. Dealing with extended family and friends who had different opinions was a common theme: “Differing opinions among family and friends on how to handle the pandemic,” and “Navigating friendships and figuring out what people believed about COVID and what they were comfortable with. Self-censoring around friends you thought were on the same page. Losing friendships over vaccines and BLM,” and “Extended family expectations of how we should interact with them; not feeling
respected for our decisions,” and “Division and judgement among extended family over how to handle the pandemic. Helping kids navigate their anxiety.”

Some of the respondents were upset at their church’s decisions regarding mask wearing. One believed that the church leaned too far in the direction of COVID restrictions. His answer about additional stress was over “differences amongst Christians in how to maintain unity in diverse responses to COVID measures. I felt like overwhelming preference was given to elevating where people fell in mask/vaccine positions instead of elevating our unity in Christ and our imago dei.” Another believed his/her church did the opposite: “I was surprised at the extent to which COVID-19 (sic) divided the church. Americans are (generally speaking) oblivious to the fact that COVID is a worldwide pandemic, not a means of US governmental control. Regarding mask wearing that Personal Christian conscience (not wearing a mask) played a bigger role than loving your neighbor (wearing a mask).”

Fears of the diversity of opinions about COVID restrictions rolled into participants’ worries of the health of their friends and family: “Varying degrees of seriousness of the virus. Our family has a high-risk father and we had to be overly cautious while we had neighbors and extended family members who thought the virus was a hoax.” Another respondent wrote, “Not only managing the stress for our own family but also trying to figure out how to best love our elderly parents who wanted to go about their regular lives and maybe most importantly to them, to see their grandchildren (one of their crowning joys at this stage of their life) and to effectively bar ourselves from seeing them for roughly the first three months. That was really hard. We were also
picking up prescriptions, doing shopping, etc., all on their behalf in addition to our responsibilities at home.”

Another theme in the survey responses about the stress of dealing with the diversity of opinions in the world was a lack of trust in the information we were receiving. One response was simply, “Lack of verifiable information,” while another wrote a bit more eloquently when he/she said that stress was added over “Making decisions -- what is safe to do? What’s not safe? How am I making these decisions -- out of fear or by information? Constantly questioning myself and my decisions was really hard on me. (And subsequent judging others because (sic) they weren’t making the same decisions as us...).”

**Personal and Family Struggles**

Four parents wrote about the stress of dealing with specific personal and family issues. One respondent was dealing with an international adoption when COVID-19 began. “The stress that COVID added to an already very stressful process was at times unbearable. The pandemic added so much uncertainty and months more waiting to our adoption process.” Another parent dealt with a pregnancy and a move into a new home, while yet another was dealing with a bad medical diagnosis and a loss of a parent. Lastly, one parent wrote, “I am a teacher, so the stress of different school day schedules was more stressful than I can explain.”

**Child’s Depression and Emotional Well-Being**

Six parents wrote about the stress of dealing with their children’s deteriorating mental and spiritual health during the quarantine. One parent was dealing with a three-year-old autistic son and the loss of therapy and interactions: “My 3-year-old boy is
autistic. I struggled to have him treated with ABA therapy during the quarantine. I worried constantly about him losing out on pivotal social interactions and normal experiences. When we did have a COVID exposure, his therapy was paused for weeks.” Another parent simply lamented the negative effect that the quarantine had on his/her daughter: “Lack of schedule and social outlets severely impacted my extrovert daughter with a propensity toward anxiety and depression sometimes expressed with anger and rage at her family members. Couple this with changes in her medication dosage, and it was an explosive summer. Not in a good way. This played out in family trauma, mom depression, and marital stress.”

The loss of milestone events was explained further by one parent who wrote that helping his/her teenager deal with these losses was very difficult as he argued “that life is not always fair and that being loved by God does not mean that you do not go through very hard things in life. He really felt that God stopped listening to him, and he still struggles with it as younger students now have opportunities he has missed. He does not like God’s plan for him right now, and it is hard for him to understand that God loves us and shapes us, and brings us closer to Him – even if we do not have what we have worked for or feel like everyone else had a chance to do.” The paradox of living in close proximity to others in the middle of a quarantine was acutely felt by one parent who wrote, “One of the highest levels of stress was just everyone being cooped up in the house and around each other all the time. No escape.”

*Church Communities*

Questions 8-14 of the survey were designed to understand one’s involvement with their church community and how it may or may not have changed during the quarantine. According to question 8, “What church do you attend?” there were seven PCA
congregations represented in the survey (Table 5). Of those seven, the overwhelming majority came from West End Presbyterian Church with 38 responses. The remaining 15 responses came from six other PCA congregations: Dalmatian (1), Wilberforce (3), Eternity (2), Blandina (2), Westminster (6), and Origen (1).

Table 5: Q8. What church do you attend?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCA Congregation</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilberforce</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blandina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEPC</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, 100 percent of the surveys answered question 9 about one’s participation with church with the statement “I attended a service frequently (almost weekly).” Nevertheless, when it came to one’s level of community engagement with one’s church, it became less unanimous (Figure 12). Twenty-six parents described their church community as a “primary center of community,” while another 16 characterized it as they “know some people at church at a deep level.” Another eleven described their church community as either knowing only some people “at a surface level” (10) or “very few people at church” (1).

Figure 12: Q9. Church Community Engagement
Before the quarantine, most parents were fairly highly engaged with their church communities. However, as the quarantine began and community was lost, the picture changed. Question 12 (Figure 13) asked if the parent remained engaged with one’s church community during the COVID-19 quarantine, which revealed a different picture. Of the 53 parents, only 25 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, I remained engaged with my church community.” Seventeen participants said that they somewhat agreed and somewhat disagreed with the statement, while eleven disagreed or strongly disagreed.

![Figure 13: Q12. Remaining Engaged with Church Community](image)

For those eleven who described their church community as either knowing only some people “at a surface level” (10) or knowing “very few people at church” (1), they had a significantly higher level of loss of community than the other groups. Figure 14 depicts the percentage of each of the groups. For those who considered their church as a primary center of community, they were more likely to somewhat agree/disagree (30.77%), agree (30.77%), or strongly agree (30.77%) with remaining engaged with their church community. None of these parents responded: “strongly disagree.” Those who know some people at a deep level were more likely to either respond somewhat agree/disagree (31.25%) or agree (31.25%). For those parents, there is a small but present
percentage of disagreement. Those who know people at a surface level or know very few people were more likely to respond that they disagree with the ability to stay engaged with their church community.

Figure 14: Q12. Percentage of Continued Engagement Through the Quarantine

Questions 11, 13, and 14 were designed to understand the church’s offerings of programs and events during the quarantine and its effect on their families. Question 11 asked the parents’ views of how their church’s programs changed during the quarantine (Table 6). Most of the churches were rated as having “some change” (69.8%), while another ten (18.8%) rated their church has having a lot of change, five (9.4%) rated their church as having little change, and one respondent rated his/her church as having “no change.”

Table 6: Q11. Change in your church’s offerings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCA Congregation</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Little Change</th>
<th>Some Change</th>
<th>A lot of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilberforce</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blandina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions 13 and 14 asked directly whether or not their church provided enough programming for their spiritual development (Table 7) or for their children (Table 8). While parents were willing to give higher grades to their churches for offerings for themselves, they were much more critical of offerings to children. For four of the seven churches, the grading dropped one grade between offerings for the parent and offerings for children. Both Dalmatian and Wilberforce had an average grading as an “agree” for the parental offerings but only a “somewhat agree/disagree” for children’s offerings. Origen dropped in its average grading from “disagree” for the parental offerings down to a “strongly disagree” for children’s offerings. Moreover, WEPC’s average grading dropped much lower when comparing the offerings: from eight “strongly agree,” 25 “agree,” and five “somewhat agree/disagree” for parental offerings, the same parents rated children’s offerings at one “strongly agree,” 15 “agree,” 17 “somewhat agree/disagree,” four “disagree,” and one “strongly disagree.”

Table 7: Q13. Effectiveness of your church’s offerings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did your church offer enough opportunities for you?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree/Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilberforce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blandina</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEPC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Q14. Effectiveness of your church’s offerings for your children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did your church offer enough opportunities for your child(ren)?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree/Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilberforce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blandina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community in General

Questions 16 and 17 of the survey were crafted to understand where the participants engaged with community during the pandemic. Question 16 was about the parents’ community contexts, and question 17 was for the children’s community contexts. As seen in Figure 15 below, 13 of the 53 participants (24.5%) were “very involved” with extended family, while none of the participants said that they were “very involved” with their church family. The figure below also reveals that the highest-rated score for every community group, except extended family, was “somewhat involved.” For the most part, friends, neighbors, and church community were relegated to the “somewhat involved” category while the extended family was able to be very involved during the pandemic. In other words, the survey results show that the parents were “somewhat involved” with friends, neighbors, and church friends, with a higher likelihood of being involved with their extended family.
Similarly, Figure 16 below shows that 13 participants (24.5%) rated extended family as also “very involved” for the children. The discrepancy between extended family and the other community contexts is even more striking with the children than the parents. There is no statistical significance about the community children had with neighbors as seen in the relatively static ratings of seven “not involved,” eleven “barely involved,” ten “somewhat not involved,” eleven “somewhat involved,” six “involved,” and eight “very involved.” However, school friends and friends from church took a striking decline in engagement. School friends received the highest rating at “barely involved,” (26.4%) and second highest at “not involved” (22.6%). Church friends did even worse with the highest rating being “not involved” (32.1%) and second highest at “barely involved” (28.3%). In other words, the survey results show that the parents believed that their children had no community with church friends, barely any community with school friends, a high involvement with extended family, and varying relationships with neighbors.
Spiritual Development

Question 19 revealed that 100 percent of respondents believe that the spiritual development of their child(ren) is an important priority in their lives; 15 agreed while the other 38 strongly agreed. While there was consensus on the priority that is the spiritual development of their children, it was less clear in the responses who bears the responsibility for achieving it. Question 20 asked about the relationship between the church and parents regarding the responsibility of the spiritual development of children. As seen in Table 9 below, three participants believe that parents bear all the responsibility with little to no help from the larger church community. On the other end, no one believed that the church held all of the responsibility, but two respondents did place the majority of the responsibility on the church. The remaining 48 respondents were evenly split between a mutual responsibility between church and parent (21 respondents) and parents’ bearing the majority of the responsibility with aid and support from the church (27 respondents).
Questions 4 and 15 of the survey were crafted to understand how equipped the parents felt in handling and leading their children’s spiritual and emotional lives during the pandemic. The results were quite mixed, as seen in Figure 17 below. While few participants “strongly” disagreed (10%) or agreed (10%) with a statement that they felt prepared, the participants were effectively split into thirds: 33 percent disagreed, 31 percent somewhat agreed or disagreed, and 53 percent agreed. In other words, the participants were evenly split among those who felt prepared and equipped to handle the spiritual needs of their children, those who were ambivalent, and those who did not feel prepared and equipped.

Question 18 was created to ascertain the spiritual sensitivity for the participants, in line with Mortley’s Circle. As seen in Figure 18, 21 participants responded that “service in my community and/or church” was the most important aspect to their spiritual
growth. Furthermore, 19 respondents wrote that “Bible reading” was the least important to their spiritual growth. Meanwhile, there is no statistical significance in the varied responses about “private prayer” and “corporate worship;” both aspects had an evenly distributed response. In other words, the participants seemed evenly split between the two affective spiritual sensitivities (“prayer” and “worship”), but almost 4/5 of the respondents lean to the negative, or “apophatic,” side of the scale in spiritual sensitivities. In short, for most of the participants, Christian service is more important than the study of Scripture.

Figure 18: Q18. How You Grow Spiritually

Lastly, question 21 was designed to understand how parents are helping their children pursue their spiritual development. If it is an important priority in their life, and if they have at least some responsibilities in it, it is important to see how they are following through on their responsibility. Figure 19 reveals that prayer tops the charts, with ninety-eight percent of respondents saying they pray with their children. Behind prayer, 93 percent say they bring their children to their church’s corporate worship services, 83 percent teach them the doctrines of the faith at home, 74 percent bring them
to their church’s children’s ministry programs, 72 percent read the Bible to them, and only 57 percent of respondents encourage their children to serve the church.

Figure 19: Q21. How I Help My Children Grow Spiritually

All participants were invited to write in any other avenues of spiritual development they take for their children that were not included in the choices above. Ten parents took it upon themselves to write in some clarifying thoughts. Three parents made mention of a family devotional time. One wrote “mealtime devotionals,” while another wrote, “singing worship songs to my children,” and a third concurred with the statement, “listen to Christian music together.” Another parent made mention of Christian schools and camps. Finally, two other participants made mention of the power of personal testimony. “I try to model for them my own daily time with the Lord,” while another wrote, “sharing my faith with them personally.”

Overall Assessment of Parenting during a Pandemic

The final section of the survey, questions 22-25, was designed to understand the participants’ overall assessment of their parenting during the pandemic and the influence that the loss of community had on their children’s spiritual development. Question 22 (Figure 20) asked participants to identify the main hindrances to their family’s spiritual
life during the quarantine. Thirty-nine participants chose “loss of community” as a hindrance, 30 chose “changes in routine,” 21 chose “boredom and monotony,” 17 chose “low motivation,” 17 also chose “threat of disease,” and 14 chose “close proximity to siblings and parents for a prolonged period of time.” Beyond these choices, participants were given the opportunity to write in their own hindrances to spiritual development.

Five participants identified the loss of church gatherings and children’s ministry programs as hindrances to spiritual development. Representative responses were, “YouTube church didn’t work for us,” or “we aren’t good at teaching so we didn’t pick up the ball when church-going stopped,” or “loss of an in-person children’s program which actually reached my child; he couldn’t connect with the zoom children’s sessions, and we gave up.” Similarly, another three participants identified division in the church, especially regarding mask mandates. Moreover, another three identified personal troubles such as medical conditions and children’s emotional and psychological issues.

Conversely, Question 23 (Figure 21) asked participants to identify the main blessings to their family’s spiritual life during the quarantine. Forty-eight identified “more family time” as a blessing to their spiritual life, 38 chose “slower pace,” 23 chose
“changes in education/work/relationships,” and 17 chose “spiritual growth.”

Interestingly, although given a chance to write in other blessings to their family’s spiritual development, only six took the time to do that. The answers were further explanations of their previous choice, such as “Dad working at home, more family time. This was good, but also posed challenges,” or “ability to regroup and refocus and reorient on what is important; God’s provision and sufficiency,” and “opportunity to examine our time/focuses and change them.”

Figure 21: Q23. Blessings to Spiritual Growth

Questions 24 and 25 asked the participants to rate and describe the influence that the quarantine had on their family’s spirituality. As seen on Figure 22, 26 participants said that their family “did grow spiritually during the quarantine,” while another seven said that their family “was greatly blessed by the quarantine.” Another ten said that their family survived the quarantine with “no change spiritually,” while another ten either “did not grow during the quarantine” (5) or were “hurt spiritually” (5). Overall, 62 percent had a generally positive view of the quarantine, while 38 percent had a negative or neutral view of the quarantine on their family’s spiritual life.
When describing it further, most of the responses acknowledged the detrimental effect of loss of community on their children while also retaining hope that this was only temporary. One parent wrote, “I think they felt at times very alone and isolated from the positive influences in their lives. I could see some signs of withdrawing and depression setting in with two of our kids. Although so grateful for the option of virtual church (when that was the only option), the teens weren’t engaged with it.” Another parent wrote, “In general, the children were very isolated from other children and could not see other children worshipping, praying, or seeking the Lord.” In contrast, another wrote, “I think the loss of community has caused the same issue for the kids that it has caused for adults. They are not encountering anyone who is different from them or who thinks about things differently than they do. Re-entering society will be challenging, and we are avoiding that process until our kiddos are both vaccinated.”

Some of the parents identified the changes to routine and programming as having a detrimental effect on their children. “We had missed regular routines like Youth Group and the big event The Edge\textsuperscript{432} and now that things are happening again it feels so good to

\textsuperscript{432} The Edge is an annual junior high youth conference hosted by Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.
get back to it. But we also don’t want to overextend ourselves as we had really been enjoying the slow pace that quarantine brought.” Another wrote, “The enrichment from Sunday school and Wednesday night program stopped and that was a large part of the teaching and fellowship the kids get. I think that shift in focus has an impact.” Another said, “They did not have the ability to attend church events in the same way as in the past so they have lost some valuable instruction, but also they didn’t as many opportunities to build relationships with teachers at church over the last 18 months.” While another simply wrote, “church community = routines that encourage spiritual development.”

But not all responses were negative. A few parents wrote that the loss of community had minimal effect because of mitigating factors. “My children forgot and/or grew apart from their church friends. I really want them to develop friendships with those who share their faith so that they will have them as they grow up. My children were blessed because we ended up putting them in a private Christian school so they grew further in their faith because of the pandemic. We would have never gone there had it not been for covid and it was truly a huge blessing!” And another wrote, “I haven’t noticed any real negative effects on my kids from not being in community with other kids. I see this as a huge mercy from God. Perhaps this is because we have 4 kids, or perhaps this is because we tend to not have a full schedule anyway. Whatever the reason, I was constantly grateful that the kids didn’t struggle with loneliness as a result of staying home.”
CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This project sought to explore and understand the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. The researcher sought to connect insights from these experiences with biblical, theological, and historical research and to develop principles that will help parents, the local church, and the wider evangelical world. The researcher reviewed the relevant biblical, theological, and historical research relating to the Christian education of a spiritual orthodoxy in covenant children, especially in the face of isolation and loss of community. From this research, the researcher was able to conduct a new embedded single-case study research study with multiple participants from three streams of data. Lastly, the researcher synthesized these results to understand and describe the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. From this synthesis, the researcher was able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the research design, as well as derive some insights and principles that will aid parents, the local church, and the wider evangelical church.

Findings and Principles Derived from the Study

The findings of the researcher were structured around three subjects: the parents’ relationships with their respective church communities during the quarantine; the experience of parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy during the quarantine;
and the emotional and psychological experience of parenting in a quarantine. In each of these subjects, the researcher derived some findings and one principle from each subject. Those three principles, described below are: Christian education without the church community is incomplete; Christian education without a clear goal or aim is barren; and children are best served with intimate environments with little stress and lots of faith.

Church Community during a Quarantine

The first area of findings is about the church community. As clergy and church leaders managed the quarantine in a variety of ways, there were major implications for their member families. While the quarantine revealed weaknesses in many churches’ ability to engage their members online, it also revealed a lack of confidence in parents’ ability to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children. As the quarantine wore on and these weaknesses took shape in the church community, it exposed an already difficult relationship between the church and some of its member families.

Finding One: Churches were Ill-Prepared for an Online Religion During the Quarantine

When the COVID-19 quarantine began in early 2020, all of the churches represented in the field research had little to no experience with cultivating an online religion. As opposed to a “religion online,” which is the virtual dissemination of information about religion, an “online religion” is the cultivation of a religious experience that individuals have online.433 Every church represented had been posting their sermons online for many years previously, as well as maintaining active websites

and social media. But while this information was being circulated online, these church leaders had not been working to create a virtual church experience. So when the quarantine began, clergy with relatively little technological expertise or theological commitments to an online religion made valiant efforts to quickly adapt weekly worship services to platforms like YouTube, Livestream, and Zoom. Without the luxury of time to consider the impacts of these changes, these churches unintentionally created “pseudocommunities” that did not effectively develop the “we-ness” of a true community.434

Most of the evangelical parents who made up the particular case of the field research experienced this loss of church community to some degree in the quarantine. Furthermore, most of the surveyed parents believed that their children had very little involvement with their friends from church during the quarantine. The experience of these evangelical parents was often one of isolation. Without an understanding of how to have an online religion, they struggled when the entirety of their “church experience” converted from in-person to online gatherings almost overnight.

While there are churches in the world today with a strong virtual experience that have arguably achieved quality online community, none of the churches represented in this research can be described as such. What this research found was that church staff worked quickly to cancel most in-person programming and move their worship services to a virtual platform. The result was church through a window. These churches intended to provide opportunities for quarantined families to view worship through a clear

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434 Dawson, “Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community,” 77.
windowpane of a livestream, or to experience limited virtual community through computer screens. However, most commonly, the experience of the parents in this research was a church community through a “dirty windowpane;” they were able to see what was happening in their church community, but they felt even more distant because they were not present in-person. Instead of fostering a community, these churches unintentionally exacerbated the loss of community by showing the quarantined families what they were missing. This is not to say that “virtual church” is inherently bad; in fact, given the new understanding of the risk of future pandemics, churches’ ability to conduct worship services online is almost a necessity.435 Since these churches were ill-prepared for the COVID-19 quarantine and the discipleship that a loss of community would have on its members, the issue of preparedness – having a philosophy of “virtual church” – becomes paramount.

**Finding Two: Parents’ Relationship with Church Became More Transactional and Political**

Clergy and church staff were not the only parties who struggled to understand how to deal with the spiritual discipleship during a quarantine. Parents, too, shifted in how they understood their relationship to the church and the church community. For most of the parents studied, the relationship to their church became more transactional and political. Even if their relationship prior to the quarantine was healthy and strong, the quarantine forced a transactional and programmatic relationship based upon one’s view of the COVID-19 pandemic. If a parent believed that the COVID-19 pandemic was

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“blown out of proportion” or “not that bad” and largely refused to wear masks, but worshipped at a church that emphasized the veracity of COVID-19 health and safety guidance and provided all virtual programs, he had a more negative view of the church. If that same parent worshipped at a church who began meeting in-person almost immediately and downplayed the seriousness of the virus, he had a more positive view. If another parent believed that the COVID-19 pandemic is deadly serious and worthy of masking, his relationship with his church would be in inverse proportion to the other. This finding is supported from the fact that the most critical statements by parents in the survey were reserved for churches which did not provide programming for children during the pandemic. Even in the face of basic uncertainty about quarantine protocols and the wise response of churches, those critical responses saw the programs as the litmus test of their relationship with the church. If the church’s decision about its resources conflicted with the parents’ view of the situation, there was criticism that led to disillusionment for these parents.

**Finding Three: Proximity was the Most Important Factor for Community During the Quarantine**

While most of the parents studied had a loss of church community to one degree or another, there were a handful of interviewees who did not lose community. The common thread in these families who did not lose church community was proximity to their church. Those families who live in the same neighborhood as their church, and whose church desires to be a neighborhood church, saw almost no loss of community. When the quarantine initially shut everything down, it forced people to isolate at homes and in neighborhoods. The mission of these neighborhood churches was boosted as neighbors saw each other walking the roads of the neighborhoods. Even when worship
services were completely virtual, the church communities still saw each other as they walked their dogs together.

But those families who live farther from their churches, and who worship with a “regional church,” saw a large loss of church community. Prior to the quarantine, churches in the suburbs have thrived for years because of automobile travel. This has promulgated thousands of regional churches in the United Stated that have thrived by pulling members from a large geographic region. While this model works well when community can be fostered through travel and programs, the COVID-19 quarantine reveals this model’s weaknesses, and the advantages of local church ministry.

**Principle A: Christian Education Without the Church Community is Incomplete**

Understanding the three findings above, a simple principle can be derived: that a catechesis without the church community is, at best, incomplete. Inevitably, losing the church community will have a detrimental effect on the spiritual development and Christian education of covenant children. This is not insurmountable, but it is real and must be navigated. As alluded to above, all the churches involved in this research did not have a real virtual education plan before the pandemic. The quarantine forced churches and children’s ministries to adapt to the new virtual educational environment in rapid speed. This meant that the educational programs available to the quarantined at-home students were at best *adequate but incomplete*. The collaborative nature of education that Leo Vygotsky found instrumental is lost during a quarantine.436 Children may memorize

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facts, but without the imitative activity of learning in community the child’s education is stunted.

Beyond the education itself is the loss of the enculturation of the faith community that happens in a quarantine. Each church has its people and culture. As Paul reminds us in Romans 12:5, we are individual members of one body of Christ. Without that community of people, a Christian education would be less than effective and incomplete. But the loss of enculturation is more than the loss of effectiveness. As Westerhoff argued, Christian formation happens through the nurtured participation in the community. Children are raised in the faith by participating in the liturgy and catechesis of a community of Christians. When children lose the church culture, they lose an aspect of their educational environment that enables them to learn. Spiritual catechesis requires some form of enculturation, and by moving the faith community online educators were forced to cull almost every aspect of enculturation. This loss of community was palpably felt by the studied families. Children’s engagement with “virtual church” through a screen was regularly abandoned by the families, and the most common lament of parents was their worry over the impact the quarantine would have on their children’s spiritual formation. Their experience bears out the Scriptural truth that catechesis must be communal.

_Catechesis of a Spiritual Orthodoxy During a Quarantine_

Another subject of findings was the experience of parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy during the quarantine. While the topic above dealt with the church

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438 Deut. 32; Ps. 78.
leadership and its decisions and its impact on the relationship between its programs and its member families, the researcher was also interested in what was happening in the homes. As parents dealt with the responsibility to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during a pandemic, the experience of the COVID-19 quarantine brought some findings to light.

Finding Four: Evangelical Parents were Ill-Equipped for Dynamic Catechesis

Every single participant in the field research (100%) said that the spiritual development of their children is a priority. How they achieve this goal, by contrast, is less than unanimous. When the COVID-19 quarantine began, most of the parents found that their normal avenues of spiritual development for their children halted. This included church attendance, youth group activities, Sunday Schools, and weeknight programs. A few of the participants responded with an increased effort in taking an active role in their children’s spiritual lives. They began spiritual disciplines that heretofore were not priorities, such as morning devotionals with their children, or verse memorization. Seemingly to counteract the loss of the church community and its worship and programs, they decided to increase their efforts on spiritual disciplines.

While some parents increased their efforts, the vast majority of participating parents resigned themselves to doing nothing new during the pandemic. The researcher found that this retreat from spiritual catechesis by most parents was brought on by one or more of three reasons: a lack of confidence and vision, exhaustion, or ignorance. The issue of a lack of confidence and vision will be examined in Finding Five, and the issue of exhaustion will be examined in Finding Seven. As for the issue of ignorance, the
researcher found that many of the parents were simply ill-equipped to spiritually catechize at home in isolation.

The researcher has found that a dynamic catechesis, following Mortley’s circle of spiritual sensitivity, is a parent encouraging prayerful contemplation, engaging in corporate worship, Bible reading, and humble service. During the times of a quarantine these aspects of catechesis may look different but are still possible. In isolation, a parent can encourage his or her children to apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ in loving God and others with your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Prayerful contemplation and Bible reading can both be taught, modeled, and encouraged by parents in any environment, including a quarantine. Corporate worship, albeit virtual, can also be taught, modelled, and encouraged. And humble service may have to be modified to a more virtual or familial setting. Unfortunately, the researcher found that most of these aspects of the Christian life were not encouraged by the participating parents in their children.

Many of the participating parents did not have the inclination or the knowledge to spiritually catechize. This had been delegated to the church long before. While the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and contemplative prayer were encouraged, corporate worship was almost universally lost. Virtual worship became, for most, an adults-only experience. If children were present in the living room for the first Sunday of virtual worship with their parents, by the second week they were no longer engaged. For many, their children even lost interest in online church after the first ten minutes. The parents were not equipped to know how to engage their children in a virtual worship

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439 Mortley, “Foundations For Spiritual Formation in Adults.”
experience. Subsequently, it was a common experience for the participating parents to watch the virtual worship service while their children were in other rooms.

Another example of the detrimental effect of the delegation of catechesis to the local church was on spiritual conversation. It is not enough to command a child to have spiritual disciplines. They must be taught, modelled, and encouraged. This requires some level of educational prowess. Many of the participating parents, though, were not experienced in the ways of talking with their children about spiritual matters. Before the pandemic, the participating parents’ understanding of spiritual catechesis was to encourage spiritual disciplines at home, and to bring them to the “experts” at the church. With the loss of the church community in the quarantine, the parents were not knowledgeable enough on spiritual conversation to know how to teach, model, and encourage it. Without interpersonal conversations on spiritual matters by knowledgeable adult teachers, the children were left with an imbalanced view of the Christian life.

**Finding Five: Evangelical Parents Lack Confidence and a Vision for Catechesis**

It was clear to the researcher that, for the most part, the parents of the research lacked clarity of mission. While the parents could mostly articulate evangelical prayers for their children (for example, desiring that they know Jesus, or pointing them to the authority of the Bible), there was not consensus on what was most important. For example, of the 53 survey respondents, the highest-rated spiritual discipline for children was “service,” while the lowest-rated spiritual discipline was “Bible reading.” For the survey participants, it was more important to humbly serve than to study Scripture. In the face of false teaching both inside and outside of the church, this imbalance is alarming to the researcher. From the research of a Scriptural view of orthodoxy, the researcher
believes that the Christian is formed by the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s union with Christ, and centered on the Word of God, meditative prayer, corporate worship, and humble service done in response to God’s grace. If this is out of balance, then one’s faith formation is out of balance. In other words, while humble service done in the response to God’s grace is important, teaching the content of the faith is imperative. After all, catechesis must be creedal.

Furthermore, while all of the parents said that the spiritual development of their children was a priority, they didn’t all act as if that was true. From the focus groups to the interviewees to the survey responses, time and time again, some of the parents would articulate that their children were getting no spiritual formation. The children would not watch “virtual church,” and the parents did not have a regular time of connecting with their children about Bible reading or prayer. There was simply no active catechesis happening with these children. The reasons for this are myriad but might be led by two: the parents lacked confidence; and the parents were exhausted by the stress of the pandemic. As for the latter reason, we will discuss that in Finding Seven below. As for the former reason, the researcher believes that either the parents were overwhelmed at the task, or they simply did not know what to do. Many of the parents were overwhelmed at the task of a spiritual catechesis because they felt unqualified. They lacked confidence because they had never previously had to teach the faith. The pre-pandemic structure of American evangelical church culture was to rely on the church for teaching the doctrines of the faith. Among the many other new roles of a quarantined parent, they were forced to lead a child spiritually – a role he or she felt utterly unprepared to fulfill.
Principle B: Christian Education Without a Clear Goal or Aim is Barren

Psalm 78 makes it clear that the responsibility to teach covenant children the doctrines of the faith is shared between parents and the church community. Despite statements to the contrary, many parents involved in this research had been relying on the worship and programs of the local church to carry most of this burden. When those were lost in the COVID-19 quarantine, these parents became disoriented. Concepts and ideas were available, but they struggled to find a clear path forward for how to catechize their children. The larger church community must learn from the COVID-19 quarantine that the creedal foundation of Christian education must be shared by parent and church leaders alike.

The church must prioritize the creedal foundation of Christian education in the Gospel and must disciple its people to be able to share that faith with others. While the participating parents were correct to focus their teaching on the person and work of Jesus, more work must be done to firmly set in the minds of parents what a true spiritual orthodoxy is and how to teach it. Beyond the communal nature of spiritual orthodoxy, as described above, a true spiritual orthodoxy must first and foremost be creedal. The historic creeds of the church clarify the Gospel in Scripture, and aid in the cultivation of the faith development. They prove that private judgment alone is not good enough but must be weighed against the collective wisdom of God’s people. Evangelical parents need to be reminded of these true and foundational documents and given opportunities to teach them. Secondly, true spiritual orthodoxy is transformational – engaging both heart and mind, encouraging the children to lean upon the truth of the Gospel, to fear the LORD, to draw near to Him, and to humbly acknowledge the God who saves. The Holy Spirit is shepherding His people into full and abiding and unbroken communion with
God, including the covenant children of His church. Evangelical parents need to be taught how to look for fruit of the Spirit in their children, how to encourage real vivifying heart change they see in their children, and how to be confident in their own faith. Both the lack of confidence and the transactional relationship developed over the course of the quarantine need to be challenged by a reminder of the confidence found in Christ. Many parents feel unqualified because they have an unrealistic view of what a spiritual catechesis is. The researcher believes that it would be advisable to encourage parents to see spiritual catechesis as a roadmap instead of a blueprint. Instead of blindly following a curriculum and forcing a child to be molded according to a universal blueprint, a parent must see their child as the unique child he/she is.

To achieve this, the researcher believes that Mortley’s circle of spiritual sensitivity can be helpful as a roadmap of dynamic catechesis for covenant children. Churches and denominations could help parents and teachers understand their own spiritual sensitivity, and evaluate curricula based on the four quadrants of the circle. As parents and teachers appraise their own spiritual sensitivities, they may begin to see how they are catechizing their covenant children. If a parent sees that she prioritizes humble service and downplays corporate worship, she can begin to readjust her spiritual formation. If a teacher sees that his curriculum emphasizes doctrinal truth but almost completely ignores meditative prayer, he may begin to rebalance through additional prayer. If a church realizes that their Adult Education classes are of less importance than their corporate worship, they can begin to promote the study of the Word of God. If a denomination places a higher premium on social action and community service than it does on personal contemplative devotion, the leadership can begin to intentional shift to a
more balanced spiritual formation. These strategies will have a trickle-down effect on evangelical parents who are catechizing their children. If parents can see the importance of having a balanced spirituality, not as a static blueprint but as a dynamic roadmap of the Christian faith, she will be more confident in her ability to point her child along the way. Especially in a time of involuntary isolation, when parents are left as the sole spiritual mentor of their children, this confidence is of vital importance.

Emotional and Psychological Experience of a Quarantine

Lastly, the quarantine brought some issues to light in the emotional and psychological states of parents and their children. The researcher structured the 13 interviewed sets of parents around their sources and levels of stress because stress was their only obviously universal experience. New and previously unknown areas of stress appeared for all parents. The everyday experience of parents and children changed overnight, and even when the new experiences were seemingly positive (for example, more family time), the relentlessness of the quarantine caused even these positive experiences to create new stress.

Finding Six: The Slower Pace of the Quarantined Life was a Respite for Most

While the loss of community was a detriment to a spiritual catechesis, it had an opposite effect as well. By removing programs and events and by more fathers and mothers working from home, almost every family found relief in a slower pace. The constant refrain of “more family time” was heard from most of the participants. They were able to identify and see the blessing of slowing down and removing events. This positive relief was so palpable that more than half of the survey participants believed that the COVID-19 quarantine had an overall positive effect on the spiritual life of their
family. Despite clear and present stressors, these parents believed that the slower pace and additional family time was so beneficial that it outweighed the negative of a loss of community.

In light of these observations, a few conclusions can be made. First, the stress of the pre-pandemic schedule was so hard on some parents that the negative effects of a quarantine were outweighed by the slower quarantine life. Some of this is inevitable in the regional suburbs of a city where community is so spread out that the automobile is needed to drive children and adults from one activity to another. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 quarantine, evangelical parents would do well to examine the effects of their busy lives on the spiritual life of their children. Secondly, the slowed pace forced more time between parent and child. This additional time enabled some of these parents to have deliberate care of their children. In the hectic pace of the lives of many of these parents, the personal and individual care needed to disciple children had been dimmed. The quarantine had opened the calendar enough for parent and child to connect in new and old ways.

Finding Seven: The Psychological and Emotional Toll on Children and Parents was Unmistakable

The parents were, on the main, exhausted. The psychological and emotional toll of the pandemic on children and parents is immeasurable. In the best of times and under normal circumstances, parenting is an exceedingly difficult task. The effects of the pandemic should not be underestimated. As Steven Taylor wrote in 2019, a pandemic is a
psychological event, and the COVID-19 quarantine bears that out.\textsuperscript{440} Most participants were dealing with some psychological or emotional fallout during this quarantine, either in themselves or in their children. The research reveals that the psychological and emotional health of many of the children suffered. And even though most of the parents saw the strain on their children’s mental and emotional health, they felt ill-equipped or impotent to help. All five of Smith and Barrett’s most common experiences of people in involuntary isolation were found to be true in many of the participants. Many of the participants experienced periods of monotony, periods of boredom, suffering from low mood and low motivation, and the need to tolerate being in close proximity to a small number of other people while potentially separated from other friends and family for long periods of time.\textsuperscript{441} As the researcher spoke with the interviewees and the focus group participants, these effects had glaring repercussions in the children.

The psychological and emotional impact of the quarantine on the children cannot be overstated. Finding Four above already deals with the issue of the effects of the toll of the pandemic on the spiritual catechesis of children. Along with that, there are more issues that this quarantine revealed. That must be a subject of research in years to come to help these children and parents learn how to deal with this involuntary isolation and the COVID restrictions. However, the impact on parents was clear as well. As stated above, the exhaustion and anxiety from the pandemic was one of the sources for the lack of catechesis in the home. A form of triage had to be done in most homes to ascertain what

\textsuperscript{440} Taylor, \textit{The Psychology of Pandemics}, 2.

\textsuperscript{441} Smith and Barrett, “Coping with Life in Isolation.”
was the most urgent and what could be postponed. Sadly, the spiritual catechesis of children was a common task that was triaged for more pressing matters.

**Principle C: Children are Best Served by Intimate Environments Nurtured by Parents with Little Stress and Lots of Faith**

As Hay and Nye write, educators should deliver six conditions to foster spiritual growth in children: space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust. When writing about intimacy, Nye describes this as “a feeling that it is safe to take risks, come closer and delve deeply.” Further explored in Jerome Berryman’s *Godly Play*, the environment of learning is as important in education as the content. Sadly, the feeling of intimacy, safety, and security is commonly destroyed in a pandemic. The threat of danger is everywhere, and children do not often have the skills to deal with these real and imagined threats. For the most part, the parents as part of the field research worked at protecting their children from the threats of danger in the pandemic. This was evident in many of the parents’ attempts at preventing losses of milestone events for their children and attempts at making life “as normal as possible” for their children. The researcher was also able to discern that the parents who had higher than normal stress and anxiety had children who were faring less than ideally. In other words, the parents who did not deal with their stress and anxiety in healthy ways had children who did not deal with their stress and anxiety in healthy ways.

During the plagues of the third century, Cyprian preached a monumental sermon in which he said, “This finally is the difference between us and the others who do not

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442 Nye, *Children’s Spirituality*, 53.
know God, that they complain and murmur in adversity, while adversity does not turn us from the truth of virtue and faith, but proves us in suffering." As the pagans responded to the pandemic of their time with fear and anger, Cyprian urged the Christians to respond with self-sacrifice, offer help, show patience, and show forth their virtue in Christ. These words need to be spoken again to the evangelical church— to respond to this pandemic with faith in the Sovereign Lord, self-sacrificial love and care for our weakest neighbors, and a holy patience in His work. This is the type of environment that would best foster spiritual growth for covenant children.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study**

**Strengths of the Project Design**

This project sought to explore the lived experience of evangelical parents attempting to cultivate a spiritual orthodoxy in their children during the COVID-19 quarantine. The chosen research method was an embedded single-case study with multiple participants. The case was “the experience,” while the multiple participants of the case were the one hundred one participants representing about sixty family units in the Greater Richmond area. These one hundred one participants were engaged in one of the three data-gathering streams: focus groups, selected interviews, and survey participants. A strength of the chosen research method and design was the variety of the three streams of data-gathering. To understand the case, it is best to look at the experience from as many different angles as possible. By studying these participants from survey data, virtual focus groups, and in-person interviews in the participants’ homes, the

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researcher was able to analyze the experience from different positions. This cross-analysis enabled the researcher to get a better sense of the case.

A second strength of the project design were the in-home interviews. A research study about an experience must be conducted in the place and setting of that experience. A quarantine is, by definition, a geographic experience – limited to the place and setting of that quarantine. The COVID-19 pandemic in the United States of America was mostly an experience of families being quarantined in their homes. This research would have been weaker without the researcher’s seeing, smelling, and experiencing the place of the quarantine for the 13 in-person participants. Furthermore, the personal nature of an interview enables the researcher, and subsequently the readers of the research paper, to enter into the experience of those participants.

**Weaknesses of the Project Design**

The personal nature of the interviews is both a strength and a weakness. While they enable the researcher to understand the individual experience of the participants, the interview is a solitary moment in the life of an individual. For various reasons, the interviewee may be trying to impress the researcher with his answers or are subject to the fleeting emotions of the interviewee at the time of the interview. The three sets of parents with very high levels of stress may have been in a momentary stressful time. While the researcher attempted to understand the total experience of the quarantine, the provisional nature of emotions inevitably played a role in the interviews.

A second weakness of the research design was the scope. The research was purposefully limited to the 13 PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond region. In so doing, the types of churches studied were similar in theology and practice. While this was helpful in restraining the research to a manageable scope, it had an unintended
consequence of studying an experience that may not be universal. For example, the experience with virtual media was similar among the studied churches: none of the studied churches had a large online presence before the pandemic. The results of study are biased toward parents who were more ignorant in cultivating a spiritual orthodoxy in their children through online avenues. Parents from churches who already had a philosophy of a “virtual discipleship” may have a different experience.

Another aspect of a weakness in scope is that most of the data came from parents of one church: West End Presbyterian Church (WEPC). One hundred percent of the virtual focus groups and over seventy-one percent of the survey participants were from WEPC. In all, fifty-seven of the one hundred one participants (56.4%) were from this one church. Being the home church of the researcher, WEPC parents knew and trusted the researcher and were more willing to participate in the research project. Nevertheless, the research would have been enhanced by a larger pool of participants from the other twelve PCA congregations in the Greater Richmond region.

A third weakness is that the survey should have been conducted before the in-person interviews. This would have enabled the researcher to better shape his discussion questions as well as further ensured that interviewed participants did not fill out the survey. While the researcher worked diligently to only send the surveys to individuals who were not interviewed previously, because of the anonymous nature of the surveys, it was possible for one of the previous participants to complete the survey. Furthermore, just as the virtual focus groups helped to shape the topics and discussion questions, and to draw out the “emic issues” of the experience, the survey data would have worked similarly. For example, the topics of social and racial unrest did not emerge in the focus
groups and the researcher did not ask about those issues unless they arose by the
interviewee – but that was a topic that emerged in the surveys by several participants. If
the surveys had been conducted before the in-person interviews, the researcher would
have considered that an emic issue and asked about it deliberately.

**Conclusion: Secondary Influence of Suffering**

At the beginning of Chapter Two, the researcher asked about Shadrach, Meshach,
and Abednego, “What gave these young Israelite boys, living in the Diaspora because of
God’s judgment on Israel and Judah, such strong faith in their God?” These boys, along
with the young Israelite girl in 2 Kings 5, and Queen Esther, are adolescents who showed
a strong faith despite their isolating circumstances. Perhaps the answer to this question
can help us begin to recreate this for our own children.

Ultimately, Esther, Shadrach, and all the other adolescents are heroes of the faith
because of the sovereign work of the Trinitarian God. We have been saved by grace
through faith, which is a “gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”
(Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus is called the “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). And
this faith enables us to be “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of
our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-
14). The quantity, quality, veracity, and velocity of our faith are not created by ourselves,
but they are the work of the One True God.

Nonetheless, we would be wise to look at the secondary influence of suffering on
these biblical heroes. Living in exile, in a hostile and fallen world, while also attempting
to remain faithful to a true spiritual orthodoxy, was a universal experience for these
children. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood before an angry Nebuchadnezzar,
or as Queen Esther stood before an angry Haman, they could stand firm in the true faith because God had used their suffering to shape them. As the Apostle Paul would write years later, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom. 5:3-4). When one suffers for the Gospel, the Holy Spirit will use that suffering to produce fruit.

The children of the COVID-19 pandemic have received less than desirable discipleship from their churches and their parents during the quarantine. This is nothing new to humanity, as we have seen in the history of plagues above; involuntary isolation such as the COVID-19 quarantine is a regular occurrence in the life of the church and of humanity. Regardless, many of these children have suffered from a church community that did not know how to engage with them virtually, from parents that lacked confidence and preparation in their spiritual guidance, and from the emotional and psychological toll of a pandemic. Some of these issues will have a long-lasting impact on these children, church communities, and parents. These issues should be further studied as the world emerges from the COVID-19 quarantine. These issues notwithstanding, we can rejoice in our sufferings because in faith we can hope, “and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5).
CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION

The researcher has been called by God to point people to Jesus and the power of His Gospel. This is an impossible task without the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. Over the course of the two years to complete this project, this truth has been firmly established in the researcher’s mind. With the uncertainty of a pandemic, this project makes clear that if God is not real, and if the Gospel is not true, then a spiritual catechesis is at best a fragile endeavor. Because God is real, the Gospel is true, and Jesus is truly in control, the researcher can trust in His good plan to redeem something even as dangerous and disruptive as COVID-19 and the quarantine.

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing quarantine changed this research project. In March 2020, the researcher was in the midst of writing the second chapter of a different dissertation, which focused on the importance of a dynamic catechesis in children’s ministries. When most aspects of public life abruptly ceased with the quarantine, the researcher faced the dilemma of either continuing to research a static phenomenon that was indefinitely paused (children’s programs in a church) or shifting the project focus and largely having to begin again. The researcher chose the latter, and while the resulting elongation of the project timeline was disappointing, the experience of having to significantly adjust a plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been ubiquitously shared across all of humanity since the pandemic’s onset.

The project was helpful to the researcher as he was able to analyze the experiences of his congregants and family members from the viewpoint of an objective
observer. When family members were suffering from monotony and boredom, or when congregants were handling the quarantine with great psychological anguish, the researcher was able to point them to some strategies to aid in their distress. Through the analysis of biblical and theological sources, the researcher could see the pandemic through the lens of a loving God working in a broken world. Through the literature of centuries of research, the researcher could also see the proliferation of pandemics, and how the church has responded before. The COVID-19 quarantine is a monumental and devastating reality through which God will lead His people and creation.

Furthermore, the process challenged the researcher in his limitations. It is not hyperbole to say that this was the hardest academic exercise he had ever completed. In the middle of a pandemic and its related stressors, the researcher felt the pressure to quit often. But as the researcher hit his limitations, the Holy Spirit counseled his heart and mind to lean on Him and His power. This process was at times grueling, but overall was valuable to the researcher and to subsequent research into the impact of a quarantine on the spiritual catechesis of covenant children.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While worldwide pandemics are still quite rare, the seriousness of the threat they pose to Christian education and enculturation renders them deserving of further study. Most aspects of the Christian faith have been studied, but very few of them have been studied in the face of global involuntary isolation. This project raised a few questions that warrant further study, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 quarantine. This research project was a cross-sectional study seeking to explore the lived experience of evangelical parents during the COVID-19 quarantine; however, after the quarantine is over, what the long-term impacts of this experience will be is yet unknown. A
longitudinal study – following a group of people over the course of many months or years – would be provide important information about these long-term impacts.\textsuperscript{444}

One of the longitudinal studies that this research raises is the overall spiritual lives of the children. As has been shown, the loss of community and the weak catechesis that occurred at home are less than ideal. But do those factors have long-lasting effects on these children? Will these 18-24 months of quarantine have enduring effects, or will they be short-lived? It is possible, and even hopeful, that the negative effects of the quarantine will be ephemeral, while the more positive effects will last. Only time will tell.

Another longitudinal study that this research raises is the relationship between parents and church communities. Over the course of the quarantine, this relationship became more transactional and political. Will this last? Will there be a large-scale realignment of church communities and denominations based on more political grounds? Or will parents and families emerge from the quarantine with a strong desire to “get back to normal?” These are the questions facing many church leaders as they consider “reopening” after the pandemic.

Further, as many churches and clergy deal with communities that were discipled to worship from home via livestream, there are large questions about what to do in the long-term. As of this writing in January 2022, the researcher’s church, West End Presbyterian Church, is still livestreaming its worship services on YouTube. Over the past few months, on average of 60-70 screens are still watching WEPC’s worship service live, while the number of people worshipping in the Sanctuary are near pre-pandemic

\textsuperscript{444} Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, \textit{Practical Research: Planning and Design}, 11th ed. (Greeley, CO: University of Northern Colorado, 2016).
levels. Some churches that were not livestreaming before the pandemic are deciding to continue to livestream in perpetuity. Others, including WEPC, will eventually stop. When that happens, how will its families respond? When the quarantine is over, will a significant number of Christians decide to continue worshipping from home, and never return to in-person worship? More importantly, what will the impacts be on these at-home Christians’ discipleship? How will the community of the congregations, and the enculturation of children in the church community be changed as a result? A variety of questions hover over the church community as it emerges from the quarantine.
APPENDIX: SURVEY
APPENDIX: SURVEY

“The Life of Evangelical Parents during the COVID-19 Quarantine”

Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey regarding the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine had on you and your child’s spiritual development.

If you have any questions, please contact Rev. Joe Brown at joe@wepc.org.

Q1 Are you a parent of a child, or children, who were quarantined with you for a period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic?
   • Yes
   • No

Q2 What are the ages and genders of your children? *
   
   Example: “7, boy” or “19, girl”
   
   • Child #1
   • Child #2
   • Child #3
   • Child #4
   • Child #5
   • Child #6
   • Child #7 (and beyond, if needed)

Q3 How are your child(ren) educated? *
   • Public School
   • Private School
   • Homeschool
• Other ___________________________________________________________________

Q4 I felt prepared to handle the spiritual and emotional needs of my child(ren) during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *
• Strongly Disagree
• Disagree
• Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
• Agree
• Strongly Agree

Q5 Please rate the LEVEL OF STRESS that your family had added to your lives over the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *

0 is no additional stress, 10 is an inordinately large amount of stress.

Q6 Using the scale below, please indicate the level of stress that was created in your family by each area during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *

No stress     High Stress
0 1 2 3 4 5
COVID-19 infection
Loss of Milestone Events
Changes at Work
Loss of Community
Societal Stress (i.e. race,
government, etc)
Changes with Education

Q7 Was there something that was NOT listed on the previous question that created an inordinate amount of stress in your family during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine? If so, please briefly describe it below. If not, you can skip and go to the next question.

Q8 What church do you attend? *

Q9 Using the scale below, please rate your frequency of attendance at your church BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic. *

• I attended a service infrequently (less than a month)
• I attended a service sometimes (once or twice a month)
• I attended a service frequently (almost weekly)

Q10 What statement below best describes your level of community engagement with your church BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic? *

• I know very few people at my church
• I know some people at church at a surface level
• I know some people at church at a deep level
• I consider my church one of the primary centers of my community
Q11 Please rate the level of CHANGE that happened in your church’s offerings because of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *

- No change (things stayed the same)
- Very Little Change (A few things were shut down, but only for a very short time. We are now mostly back to normal)
- Some Change (Programs and services were cancelled and changed for quite a while. Things are opening back up now and on track to be back to normal soon)
- A lot of Change (Most everything stopped. Things are opening up again, but very slowly)

Q12 During the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, I remained engaged with my church community. *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q13 During the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, my church offered enough opportunities for me to remain engaged and grow spiritually. *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q14 During the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, my church offered resources to help my child(ren) remain engaged and grow spiritually. *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q15 During the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, I felt equipped to lead my child(ren) spiritually. *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q16 Using the scale below, please indicate the LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT that YOU had with your communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *
During COVID-19, I engaged…

- with my extended family: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with my friends: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with my neighbors: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with my church family: 0 1 2 3 4 5

Q17 Using the scale below, please indicate the LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT that YOUR CHILD(REN) had with his/her/their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine.

None High

During COVID-19, my child engaged…

- with extended family: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with friends at school: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with friends from church: 0 1 2 3 4 5
- with friends in neighborhood: 0 1 2 3 4 5

Q18 Using the scale below, please RANK the four statements below in order of importance for you.

I seek to grow in my Christian life through…

- private prayer
- service in my community and/or church
- corporate worship
- Bible reading

Q19 The spiritual development of my child(ren) is an important priority in my life.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree and Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q20 Please describe your involvement in the spiritual development of your child(ren).

- Not Involved
- I delegated that responsibility to the church
- I mostly delegated that to the church, but occasionally engage with my child(ren) about spiritual matters
- It is a mutual responsibility between me and the church
- I am responsible for the spiritual life of my child(ren), and the church helps
- It is my responsibility completely, with little to no help from the church

Q21 The ways that I pursue the spiritual development of my child(ren) include the following.

- I pray with and for them
- I bring them to my church’s children’s ministry programs
• I bring them to my church’s corporate worship service
• I read the Bible to and with them
• I encourage them to serve the church
• I teach them the doctrines and beliefs of my faith at home
• Other: ________________________

Q22 Please describe the biggest HINDRANCES to your family’s spiritual life during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *
• Loss of community
• Low motivation
• Boredom and monotony
• Close proximity to siblings and parents for a prolonged period of time
• Changes in routine
• Threat of disease
• Other: ________________________

Q23 Please describe the biggest BLESSINGS to your family’s spiritual life during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. *
• More family time
• Slower pace
• Spiritual growth
• Changes in education/work/relationships
• Other: ________________________

Q24 In the whole, how was your family influenced spiritually by the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine? *
• Our family was HURT spiritually by the quarantine
• Our family did NOT grow spiritually during the quarantine
• Our family survived the quarantine with NO CHANGE spiritually
• Our family DID GROW spiritually during the quarantine
• Our family was GREATLY BLESSED by the quarantine

Q25 In your own words, how would you describe the influence of the loss of community on your child(ren)’s spiritual development? *

Thank you for taking this survey! All information submitted remains confidential. If any identifying markers were accidentally shared about you or your child(ren), that information will be kept confidential and will not be shared in the results. If you have any questions, please contact Rev. Joe Brown at joe@wepc.org.


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