

CHILDREN, DOOR **PERSONS** OF THE KINGDOM

Embracing children's spirituality



Carolina Baertschi-Lopez, January 2017

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolina Baertschi-Lopez was born in Geneva. For over 30 years she has been working in parish catechesis for children and in 2003 she started an intergenerational catechesis at Sainte-Marie du Peuple parish (Geneva), where she proposed simultaneous activities for different age-groups on Sundays, in an event known as « Temps fort », which can be translated as « high point ». She joined the Service for Catechesis of the Catholic church in 2011 and achieved a three-year degree in the Institut Romand de Formation aux Ministères, in Fribourg (Switzerland). Her graduation paper on the theologian child and *Godly Play*[®] led her to further develop her analysis. New research and bibliography as well as her experience as *Godly Play* narrator and trainer led to the project of this book, which is meant to be a useful tool for anyone involved in religious education or interested in child spirituality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements: Special thanks to Paul, Catherine and Nils for their friendly reviews and their precious advice

Dedication: To Antonin, Camille and to my future grand-children

Foreword by Nils Phildius

Introduction

Chapter 1: Evolution of the concept of the child

- 1.1 In Jesus' time
- 1.2 In the western society
- 1.3 In the Church throughout the centuries

Chapter 2: Child spirituality

- 2.1 Research on spirituality
- 2.2 Supporting child spirituality
- 2.3 Obstacles to spirituality
- 2.4 Spirituality and religion
- 2.5 Spirituality and faith

Chapter 3: Children open the Kingdom's doors

- 3.1 The Trinity
- 3.2 The Sabbath
- 3.3 The Creation
- 3.4 The Joy
- 3.5 The Evil, the Salvation
- 3.6 The Kingdom
- 3.7 Other situations to marvel at

Chapter 4: The theologian child

- 4.1 Theology of childhood
 - 4.1.1 A child in the midst of them
- 4.2 The theologian child

- 4.3 Implications on Christian education
 - 4.3.1 The child's place in catechesis
 - 4.3.2 The adult's position in catechesis

Chapter 5: The children of the Bible

- 5.1 Several references to children
- 5.2 Children in liturgical occasions
- 5.3 Children in the womb
- 5.4 The Lord in the presence of children
- 5.5 Children brought back to life
- 5.6 Jesus as a child
- 5.7 Children's words
 - 5.7.1 Ismael
 - 5.7.2 Isaac
 - 5.7.3 Samuel
 - 5.7.4 The little servant of Naaman
 - 5.7.5 Jeremiah
 - 5.7.6 In the Psalms
 - 5.7.7 Twelve-year-old Jesus at the Temple
 - 5.7.8 Children seated in the marketplace

Chapter 6: Jerome W. Berryman's Godly play: a catechetical concept to favour child spirituality and the theologian child

- 6.1 Presentation of the concept
 - 6.1.1 Welcoming
 - 6.1.2 Storytelling... and wondering questions
 - 6.1.3 Response time
 - 6.1.4 Feast and blessings
 - 6.1.5 Saying goodbye
 - 6.1.6 Silence

Conclusion

Bibliography

Notes

SUMMARY

This book contains a significant part of my graduation work written in 2014 for the Institut de Formation aux Ministères in Fribourg and entitled « *L'enfant théologien* » *Les paroles des enfants, en résonance à la Parole de Dieu entendue, ont-elles une valeur théologique ? Vérification dans le concept Godly Play (The theologian child: do children's words echoing God's Scripture have theological value? Investigation using the Godly play concept).*

As I was often encouraged to publish this paper and noticing the interest on the subject, I began to work on new research and discovered new authors. In the light of these new contributions as well as my experience as *Godly Play* narrator and trainer I prepared this book, intended primarily for religious educators but also for parents and for anyone interested in child spirituality.

The catechetical concept of *Godly Play*® places children in a specific environment where, after having been presented with a story from the Bible, they feel supported in their personal reactions to it. It is through this particular experience of Scripture that children can learn to express and develop their spirituality, and to become better acquainted with God, with themselves and with others.

As I was reading the first volume of the collection « *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* », and especially the chapter « Jesus' remarkable view of children », I realized how well Jesus understood children. He had the intelligence of the heart and the soul. Twenty centuries prior to the development of psychology and child spirituality, he had perceived what children were and cherished them! However, his positive view of children was not shared by his contemporaries.

The first chapter presents a brief overview of how children were considered in Jesus' time, within the Church throughout the centuries and in Western society up until nowadays.

Due to the teachings of Maria Montessori, Françoise Dolto and others, we currently consider children as persons-to-be that have the potential and the capacity to learn enclosed in themselves. Sofia Cavaletti took a step further by observing their « religious potential » in the catechetical centre she founded in Rome. Rebecca Nye has accomplished research to highlight a common form of spirituality shared by all children. The works of these women, as well as of other theologians and scientists, enable us to look into children's spirituality and try to understand it. As publications in French on this subject are relatively scarce, I decided to present a summary of my personal research in chapter two.

This is followed by the examination of the theological value of children's actions and words. Do they reveal anything about God? Is Revelation expressed by their distinct languages, verbal and non-verbal? Do children open the Kingdom doors? Yes. Careful listening and analysis of the interchanges in catechetical activities confirm that children are indeed budding theologians. Through their ponderings and the answers they find in themselves, they open the doors of a world into which we are all invited to enter with a child's soul and thus enable the access to God's Kingdom... In the third chapter, children's reactions followed by a theological comment are reported.

The fourth chapter presents the theology of childhood that has been developed through the identified features of the young ones in order to present them as models to adult Christians. These attributes clearly show the intense spiritual life of children. I also cover in this chapter what is meant by the notion of « theologian child ». Acknowledging children's own spirituality is believing that God can also be revealed by them in a very particular manner. Thus accepted as a person already in a relationship with God, children can evangelize in their own way. Children in turn teach and catechize. From this viewpoint, the child's place in catechesis changes, but above all it's the adult's position that is altered. Catechetical approaches such as the theological debate or *Godly play* emphasize how the child is no longer considered solely as someone to whom everything has to be taught.

The fifth chapter presents an analysis of biblical texts where children are represented. These texts discuss the spirituality of the child and of the theologian child, in addition to revealing the position of the

accompanying adults. Despite the fact that in the Jewish society apparently children did not seem worthy of interest, some passages in the Bible mentioning them shine as precious jewels left behind by the Holy Spirit who undoubtedly inspired its authors.

Since the Godly play approach in religious education is not well-known in the French-speaking world, the sixth chapter endeavors to present its pedagogical and theological vision, as well as how this approach supports child spirituality and the expression of the « theologian child ».

In conclusion, it is my dear hope to have opened up lines of thought that lead to a renewed catechesis where all actors engage in the evangelization process. The catechesis is thus transformed by the Good News, because everything that follows regarding child spirituality and the theologian child disrupts strongly our perception. It turns our models for Christian education upside down. Yet the Good News can be here summarized in these words spoken by Jesus: «Whoever will give honour to one such little child in my name, gives honour to me: and whoever gives honour to me, gives honour not to me, but to him who sent me.» (Mark 9,37). Embracing children, their spirituality and their intuitive theology, is embracing Jesus and God Himself.

Are you ready? The children stand at the doorway and they invite us to enter the Kingdom.

References

- AITKEN, Anne-Marie, *Un renversement bienvenu dans l'histoire de la catéchèse*, in : BASSET, Lytta (ed.), *Une spiritualité d'enfant*, Espaces libres, Albin Michel, Paris, 2011.
- BAERTSCHI, Caroline, *L'enfant théologien : Les paroles des enfants, en résonance à la Parole de Dieu entendue, ont-elles une valeur théologique ? Vérification dans le concept du Godly Play*, travail de fin d'études, Institut Romand de Formation, Fribourg, 2014.
- BASSET, Lytta, *Une spiritualité d'enfant*, Espaces libres, Albin Michel, Paris, 2011.
- BERRYMAN, Jerome W., *La Guia completa para Jugar junto a Dios*, vol. 1, Denver, Dirk deVries, 2002.
- BERRYMAN, Jerome W., *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, vol. 1-7, Denver, Living the Good News, 2002.
- CAILLOCE, Laure, *L'enfant devient une personne*, Revue Ça m'intéresse, Prima Media, août 2012, no 378.
- CAVALLETTI, Sofia, *Le potentiel religieux de l'enfant*, Desclée De Brouwer, Langres, 2007.
- CHAMPAGNE, Elaine, *Reconnaitre la spiritualité des tout-petits*, théologies pratiques, Novalis, Montréal, Lumen Vitae, Bruxelles, 2005.
- CHAUVET, Louis-Marie, *Symbole et sacrement*, Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne, Cerf, Paris, 1987.
- CHOURAQUI, A., *La Bible*, Desclée de Brouwer, Lonrai, 2003.
- DAOU, Fadi, TABBARA, Nayla, *L'hospitalité divine - L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane*, LIT, Münster Allemagne, 2013.
- DE VAUX, R., *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 1, l'estime des enfants, Cerf, Paris, 1989.
- FOCANT, Camille, *L'évangile selon Marc*, commentaire biblique : Nouveau Testament, vol. 2, Cerf, Paris, 2004.
- GILLIERON, Bernard, *Dictionnaire Biblique*, éditions du Moulin, Aubonne, 1985.
- GOSSIN, Richard, *L'enfant théologien - Godly Play : une pédagogie de l'imaginaire*, Lumen Vitae, Namur Belgique, 2016.
- LACOSTE, Jean-Yves, *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, Quadrige, PUF, Paris, 2007³.
- LANDIER, Jean, PECRIAUX, François, PIZIVIN, Daniel, *Avec Marc, pour accompagner une lecture de l'évangile de Marc*, les éditions ouvrières, Paris, 1980.
- LEFEBVRE, Philippe, *Bandes de jeunes*, Ecritures, 26/3 (2011) 3-10.
- LEGASSE, Simon, *Jésus et l'enfant, «enfants», «petits» et «simples» dans la tradition synoptique*, J. Gabalda et C^{ie}, Paris, 1969.
- LEON-DUFOUR, Xavier, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Cerf, Paris, 1999.
- MARCHADOUR, Alain, *Les mots de la Bible*, Enfant, Bayard Centurion, Paris, 1997.
- MOLTMANN, Jürgen, *In the end - the beginning. The life of hope*, First Fortress Press edition, 2004.
- MONTESSORI, Maria, *L'enfant*, (Psychologie), Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2004.
- NYE, Rebecca, *La spiritualité de l'enfant, Comprendre et accompagner*, Empreinte-temps présent, La Béguide de Mazenc, 2005.
- OSER, Fritz ; GMÜNDER, Paul ; RIDEZ, Louis, *L'homme, son Développement Religieux*, Cerf, Paris, 1991.
- OTHMER, Kerstin, *Les enfants-théologiens*, document mis à disposition dans le cadre d'une série de formations données dans différents cantons de Suisse romande entre fin avril et début mai 2010.
- PICON, Raphaël, *Tous théologiens*, (Petite bibliothèque théologique), Van Dieren, Paris, 2001.
- POULET, Frédérique, *Apprendre à célébrer : éduquer et initier au mystère*, in : MOREL, Isabelle, MOLINARIO, Joël, DERROITE, Henri (ed.), *Les catéchètes dans la mission de l'église*, Cerf Patrimoines, Paris, 2016.
- POUSSIN, Charlotte, *Apprends-moi à faire seul, la pédagogie Montessori expliquée aux parents*, Eyrolles, Paris, 2011.
- RAHNER Karl, *Traité fondamental de la foi. Etudes sur le concept du christianisme. Oeuvres*, Vol. 26, Cerf, Paris, 2011.
- RAHNER, Karl, *Ideas for a theology of childhood*, in : Theological investigations, Vol 8, Further theology

of the spiritual life 2, translated by David Bourke, Herder and Herder, 1971.
 RIEDINGER, Sevim, *Le monde secret de l'enfant*, Carnets Nord, Paris, 2013.
 SOULAYROL, René, *La spiritualité de l'enfant, Entre l'illusion, le magique et le religieux*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2012.
 RAINOTTE, Guy, *Dieu ? La parole aux enfants*, Pédagogie pour une spiritualité en mouvement, DVD, Méromedia, Paris, nov-déc. 2010.
 TORRALBA, Francesc, *Inteligencia espiritual en los niños, una obra útil para padres y educadores*, Plataforma editorial, Barcelona, 2015⁴.
 WEBER, Hans-Ruedi, *Jésus et les enfants*, Centurion, 1980.

Toutes les citations bibliques sont tirées de *La Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* (TOB), Cerf, Paris, 2010.

La Bible de Jérusalem, Cerf, Paris, 2007.

Le MADEP-ACE et les Droits de l'Enfant, imprimerie Cattin, Bassecourt, 2009.

WEBSITES AND DOCUMENTS

APIC, *Début du Consistoire extraordinaire sur la famille au Vatican*, 20 février 2014, www.cath.ch, (consulté en avril 2014).

BENOÎT XVI, *Audience générale mercredi 23 septembre 2009*, <http://nominis.cef.fr/contenus/saint/1013/Saint-Anselme-de-Cantorbery.html>, (consulté en mars 2014).

BERRYMAN, Dr Director Jerome W. Berryman, www.rpi.se/.../023.Vita.Berryman%20-%20Long, pdf, (consulté le en février 2013).

CHESSERON, Joseph, *Le puits dans la Bible*, Reflets d'Eglise, Les chrétiens du Niortais, www.eglise-niort.net/Le-puits-dans-la-Bible, (consulté en mars 2014).

COUTURE, Violaine, *L'effet de l'expression libre sur le développement religieux. Pour une valorisation du doute chez le préadolescent*, Mémoire de Violaine Couture, université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, <http://catechese.free.fr/>, (consulté en octobre 2016).

DEBERGE, Pierre, *Jésus et les enfants*, Diocèse d'Arras, 18 décembre 2009, arras.catholique.fr/page-18236.html, (consulté en décembre 2013).

FRERE, Ludovic, *Homélie Comme des enfants* du 23 septembre 2012. [http://www.sanctuaire-notredamedulaus.com/fr/prier/homelie-en-details?tx_homelie_pi1\[id\]=350](http://www.sanctuaire-notredamedulaus.com/fr/prier/homelie-en-details?tx_homelie_pi1[id]=350), (consulté en décembre 2012).

FROMAGET, Michel, <http://cultivetstalents.over-blog.com/corps-%C3%A2me-et-esprit-selon-michel-fromaget>, (consulté en octobre 2016).

FROMAGET, Michel, *De la distinction âme/esprit, autrement dit du ternaire humain*, article dans Unidivers, <http://www.unidivers.fr/de-la-distinction-ameesprit-autrement-dit-du-ternaire-humain/>, (consulté en octobre 2016).

FROMAGET Michel, dans une interview d'Etienne Séguier, *Corps, âme et esprit selon Michel Fromaget*, <http://cultivetstalents.over-blog.com/corps-%C3%A2me-et-esprit-selon-michel-fromaget>, (consulté en octobre 2016).

HASSENFORDER, Jean, *Découvrir la spiritualité des enfants. Un signe des temps ?* Témoins, le site de la culture chrétienne interconfessionnelle, <http://www.temoins.com/etudes/decouvrir-la-spiritualite-des-enfants.-un-signe-des-temps/toutes-les-pages.html>, (consulté en février 2014).

INTERBIBLE, *Quel sens donner aux chiffres dans la Bible ?*, www.interbible.org, (consulté en février 2014).

JEAN-PAUL II, *Lettre apostolique pour la proclamation de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face Docteur de l'Église universelle*, 1997, www.vatican.va, (consulté en février 2014).

L'Atrium du Bon Berger, *Catéchèse du Bon Berger*, 13 septembre 2011,

www.atriumdubonberger.blogspot.fr, (consulté en mars 2014).
 LELOUP, Jean-Yves, <http://www.jeanyvesleloup.eu/>, (consulté en octobre 2016).
 LELOUP, Jean-Yves, *Faire mémoire de l'Être*, <http://cequiest.over-blog.com/2015/10/jean-yves-leloup-faire-memoire-de-l-etre.html>, (consulté en octobre 2016).
 LETHEL, François-Marie, *La théologie des saints comme 'science divine'*, Revue théologique des Bernardins, 5 novembre 2011, www.revuedesbernardins.com, (consulté en février 2014).
 Pape FRANCOIS, *Discours aux catéchistes en pèlerinage à Rome à l'occasion de l'année de la foi et du Congrès international des catéchistes*, Vendredi 27 septembre 2013, www.vatican.va, (consulté en mars 2014).
 Pape FRANCOIS, *Le Pape François parle aux enfants*, Vendredi 7 juin 2013, www.jesuites.com, (consulté en mars 2014).
 PAUL VI, Constitution pastorale Gaudium et Spes, chapitre 48, §4, *Sainteté du mariage et de la famille*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_fr.html, (consulté en mars 2014).
 PESTALOZZI, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, ressourcespeda.free.fr/Divers/Pestalozzi%20fiche.doc, (consulté en octobre 2016).
 SAINT-AMBROISE, *Sermon de Saint Ambroise sur l'évangile de Luc*, Office des lectures du 21 décembre, <http://www.jardinierdedieu.com>, (consulté en février 2014).
 SAINT AUGUSTIN, *les Confessions*, http://www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/augustin/confessions/livre1.htm#_Toc509572094, (consulté en mars 2014).
 SAINT LEON LE GRAND, *Sermons : VII pour l'Épiphanie*, http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20000804_leone-magno_fr.html, (consulté en mars 2014).
 Dictionnaire français Larousse, www.larousse.fr, (consulté en mars 2014).

http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordre_des_Carmes_déchaux, (consulté en février 2014).
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jürgen_Moltmann, (consulté en décembre 2013).
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Piaget, (consulté en décembre 2013).
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rahner, (consulté en décembre 2013).
www.carnetsnord.fr/titre/le-monde-secret-de-l-enfant, (consulté en décembre 2013).
www.carmel.asso.fr/Careme-2011, (consulté en février 2014).
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7oise_Dolto, (consulté en décembre 2013).