**Help or Hindrance? Exploring the effects of Christian nurture upon the whole faith of the child**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the effects that religious nurture (particularly Christian) may have on the child, seeking to provide indicators of whether faith may be viewed as a help or a hindrance. The desire is to indicate the elements of Christian nurture that are most beneficial to the child, through adoption of a broad rather than restricted lens of Christian faith. The EYFS themes: ‘unique child’, ‘positive relationships’, ‘enabling environments’ and ‘learning and development’ were utilised as a guide for formulating the observational indicators. The five case study children all had actively Christian parents who sought to pass their faith onto their child, but each utilised different approaches of faith nurture, enabling comparison of varying styles. The analytical methodology considered 14 observable elements of the child during play-based interviews. Presentation of this data in radar diagrams facilitated a visual representation of the extent to which faith nurture was a resource for the child. When viewed alongside key attributes of the child’s experiences of faith nurture, tentative conclusions were that if openness, individuality and relational involvement are core components of Christian nurture, this will have a positive impact on the broader landscape of the child’s ongoing faith.

**Keywords:** faith, whole child, nurture, resource

**Introduction**

This paper seeks to establish whether Christian faith nurture is a help or a hindrance to the child. Faith viewed as a ‘help’ would equate to it being a resource for the individual; enabling and supporting them in independent living both within the Christian faith environment, but also within the secular context. Viewing faith as a hindrance to the child would translate to it having a negative impact upon their wholeness and happiness and ability to live independently both within the Christian faith environment and outside of it. The EYFS themes of ‘unique child’, ‘positive relationships’, ‘enabling environments’ and ‘learning and development’ were used as a guide in formulating the observational and assessment methodology (Department for Education, 2017). This observational framework was adopted during play-based interviews, which were carried out with five children in order to gain insight into the child’s spirituality, wholeness and happiness, in addition to understanding the role that the Christian faith had as part of their daily living. This was part of a wider research project exploring Christian faith transmission within the family context. The five children were selected for inclusion in this investigation since they demonstrated contrasting experiences of Christian nurture, facilitating illumination of the impact that these different modes of nurture may have upon the child.

**Christian faith nurture**

King (2013) spoke of each child’s spiritual potential, affirming the universal capacity of all human beings for a deeper dimension of wisdom, insight and experience. ‘Faith’ was interpreted by Fowler (1976, p.4) as the way in which an individual moves through life, including how they find coherence and give meaning to the various interactions they experience. Following this through to the Christian context, faith could be defined as how an individual interacts with and finds meaning in the spiritual realm, expressed through the framework of Christianity. This equates to Christian nurture being the means of channelling the child’s naturally occurring spiritual potential through the framework provided by Christian teaching and practice. In keeping with this notion, Wangerin (1986) described a child’s relationship with God as a natural experience, similar to their interaction with their bedroom. In both scenarios, the child is unable to remember the beginning of the relationship, and the language to name, contain and explain the experience arises subsequently. The role then of Christian nurture is to foster the child’s relationship with God, through Christ, and to equip children in understanding and verbalising this ongoing relationship.

Bushnell (1861) emphasised the importance of effective Christian nurture as part of a child’s early life experiences. However, methods of Christian nurture vary considerably amongst individual families and denominational groups. On one hand Bushnell (1861) proposed that Christian character could be absorbed by the foetus from its mother, suggesting a genetic style transfer. Others view family as the ‘forming centre’, namely the origin of spiritual formation through daily life and activity (for example Thompson, 1996). In contrast to this Gurian (2001) viewed the role of the family as restoration and refinement of the image of God in the child, implying that other sources are primary in faith transmission, but it is the family’s role to amend or heal those experiences and understandings. In addition to these variations in approach, Bellous and Csinos (2009) highlighted four different styles of spiritual expression. This leads to the understanding that there will be significant variance in the style of faith nurture evidenced in Christian homes in contemporary society. It is therefore intriguing to explore the impacts upon the child of these differing approaches.

**Impacts of faith nurture on the ‘whole child’**

The notion of paying attention to the *whole* child is often understood to indicate a sense that the focus should not be solely upon the child’s educational attainment, but also on other aspects such as their personal, social and emotional development. Many within this arena would also champion greater awareness of the child’s spiritual experiences and engagement as part of a more holistic approach. This paper utilises the concept of the whole child in a modified way, due to the context being Christian nurture. The desire here is to uncover the impact of Christian nurture on aspects that are broader than the ‘traditional’ evidence of faith formation. Faith could be evidenced in children through cognitive understanding, verbal expression and church attendance. But this paper seeks to uncover the impact of faith nurture that goes beyond these primary factors. In this sense, the term ‘whole child’ is defined as the antithesis of a narrow or partial way of viewing Christian faith in children. It is proposed that opting to view a child’s faith or spiritual engagement in this comprehensive and open way will provide a rich landscape of observational data for the researcher, which will enable a fuller examination of the impact of different approaches to Christian nurture.

The parameters of whether the impact of Christian nurture is a ‘help’ or ‘hindrance’ to the child are connected with the notion of fostering wholeness in children through spiritual development (Best, 1996). Moberg (1984) likewise asserted that a central concern of the Christian faith is to enhance the spiritual well-being of people. However, the term ‘spiritual abuse’ indicates that there is the potential for Christian nurture to become unhelpful. Indeed, observation in some cases of ‘toxic’ faith transfer, spiritual bullying and neglect demonstrate that faith nurture is not always resourceful for the child (Ward, 2011). One documented example of unhelpful spiritual nurture is Gosse (2009), who reflected upon his Victorian upbringing within the Plymouth Brethren movement:

“After my long experience, I surely have the right to protest against the untruth that evangelical religion, or any religion in a violent form, is a wholesome or valuable or desirable adjunct to human life. It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal, in the barren pursuit of which all the tender, indulgent affections, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul, are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative.” (Gosse, 2009, p.183)

This negative experience of religion highlights the potential impact that Christian nurture could have upon the child. Gosse demonstrated the holistic power of his religious upbringing, describing tenderness being replaced by harshness and ultimately a void. A useful question when considering the impact of spiritual nurture is to ask how it supports an individual in living with others, with all things and with all beings, rather than how one might live to bring benefit only to oneself (Bone and Fenton, 2015). Indeed, Godin (1984) observed that some individuals receive the Christian message in a way which prevents them from being born, or reborn into their own true nature as a man or woman in the real world. He termed this alienation, in contrast to liberation. This opposing concept of liberation mirrors ‘fullness of life’, which is evidenced by an individual being fully awake and aware, savouring, enjoying and appreciating a rich spectrum of life experiences (King, 2013, p.12). The aspiration for faith nurture to be help rather than hindrance to the child, may therefore be supported if the mode of nurture seeks to operate intrapersonally (allowing the individual to live for themselves), interpersonally (allowing them to live with their neighbours), and globally (allowing the individual to live with their world) (Worsley, 2000). This points to a multi-faceted approach being key in ensuring that a rounded and resourceful faith is fostered within the child.

The EYFS themes contribute to further understanding of how this intrapersonal, interpersonal and global faith outworking may connect with the child’s well-being (Department for Education, 2017). The ‘learning and development’ theme taken from the ‘Early Years Foundation Stage’ framework (EYFS) connects with an evaluation of the child’s knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Whilst the notion of the EYFS is to be alert to and connect with each child’s individual learning style and pathway, and this is also important within Christian nurture to support effective developing of knowledge and understanding of Christianity; this theme is not of primary concern within this paper which seeks instead to investigate the impact of nurture on aspects other than knowledge and understanding.

The remaining three EYFS principles aid a more holistic approach to exploration of the impact of Christian nurture on the child. The first principle that every child is unique and constantly learning and able to be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured, contributed to the empirical methodology by ensuring that the researcher was alert to the level of personalisation and relevance involved in the mode of Christian nurture, in addition to consideration of how adaptable and open the child was through their faith expression.

Secondly, the EYFS framework communicates that positive relationships are important so that the child will learn to be strong and independent. Within Christian nurture this principle may equate to the degree of genuine trust, openness and healthy vulnerability that a child has with those around them, in addition to the divine. Furthermore, the integration of child within both religious community, and secular and the degree of empathy for others that they display would concur with the EYFS principle of positive relationships being paramount for the child’s well-being and healthy development.

Thirdly, there is an emphasis in the EYFS on enabling environments, which seek to foster the child’s development most effectively. Within evaluation of Christian nurture this may lead to investigation of the child’s play encounters and experience and any spiritual experiences they report, including awe and wonder encounters. The nature of these experiences could illuminate to the researcher the resourcefulness of the faith nurture that has occurred.

**Methodology**

The five case study children were chosen due to their varied experiences of Christian nurture. It is conceded that many factors may influence a child’s faith, spirituality and character, and therefore other aspects may have contributed to observation of the child’s faith, not only parental faith nurture styles. To this end, the five case studies demonstrate significant similarities in an attempt to isolate the differences in faith nurturing style. Consequently, all of the case study children were six or seven years old, had two siblings, ‘professional’ parents who actively sought to pass on their faith and lived in suburban areas in North West England. None of the children had special educational needs, although child one, four and five were part of blended families. Children one and three attended church schools, whilst the remaining children attended mainstream schools. The parents in families one and two had not experienced a Christian upbringing themselves, although the parents in families three, four and five had.

The children were interviewed, utilising a range of play-based activities as prompts and stimuli for discussion about the child’s life and the role that the Christian faith played within their daily living. Interview topics included exploration of their family setting, their view and relationship with the divine, their ease of spiritual expression, their sense of being with others (examining trust, openness and empathy amongst other markers), their knowledge and awareness of religious beliefs and the extent to which these were personalised, accepted and integrated by the child. Not all of these characteristics were able to be demonstrated verbally and so consequently were not necessarily visible to the researcher. Awe and wonder, for example, is not necessarily verbalised, as children may not be able to articulate a moment of wonder or conceptualise a religious concept (Adams, Hyde and Woolley, 2008). With this in mind, it was critical that the mode of enquiry and the research tools utilised did not rely only upon the child’s ability to verbalise or explain their experiences and understandings. For this reason, observation within the interviews paid attention to the child’s body language and non-verbal responses to stimuli. In addition, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire to indicate their observations of their child’s character, spiritual experiences and faith expression. This was particularly helpful in gaining information about elements that were difficult to observe in an interview setting, such as awe and wonder. It is conceded that this method relied upon accuracy of parental reporting, in addition to them having the same understanding of terminology as the researcher. Nonetheless, the information contributed by parents did effectively contribute to the data collected by the interviewer. In addition, the parental questionnaires provided information of the nurturing techniques adopted within their family context.

The research needed to take note that children very quickly become aware of societal taboos, realising what is acceptable to talk about in the differing contexts that they are in (Adams, Hyde and Woolley, 2008). The interviewer therefore sought to establish with the child from the start that in the interview setting there were no taboos, and the child was free to express naturally and openly their thoughts and feelings. However, if apparent, the researcher did note the child’s awareness of and response to societal acceptance of religious or spiritual matters as this contributed to an understanding of the impact of faith nurture upon that child.

Pilot interviews with 61 children had occurred as part of the wider research project. These had led to a list of 17 observable attributes of faith, generated through the use of grounded theory analysis on the interview data. This list of attributes was remodelled for the purposes of investigating the impact of Christian nurture, in line with the EYFS principles discussed above. Figure 1 shows the 14 aspects that were observed and recorded. Awareness of the unique child was explored through evaluation of the extent to which the Christian faith had been personalised for the individual child throughout the nurturing process. In addition, consideration of how relevant the child perceived the Christian faith to be to their daily living was key, alongside assessment of their openness and adaptability to their experience in both immediate surrounding and wider society. Exploration of positive relationships was documented through observation of the child’s trust, openness and vulnerability with others, including the divine. Exploration of those they valued was important, as well as the degree of integration into religious community and secular society, and their levels of empathy of others. The extent to which their nurturing environment was considered enabling rather than a hindrance was examined through discussion with the child about their family, play, spiritual, religious and other experiences. The rationale was that each of these individual factors, when combined, would provide a fuller understanding of the whole child. It must be acknowledged that the aspects included present the effects upon the child, rather than the effects that the child has upon others. This would be an interesting future project, but was not included here.

It is also important to highlight that since a child’s faith consists of a continual series of significant but fleeting moments (Cavalletti, 1983), their faith will be constantly changing in response to the experiences that they encounter. Therefore, it is suggested that any model which seeks to observe and describe the child’s faith can only claim to do so for that moment in time and place. For the purposes of this study, the children were interviewed at their home. This will undoubtedly impact upon the expression of faith and spirituality that the interviewer observed. It may be that if the interviews had been carried out in a different context, they would have yielded different results. Nevertheless, since this paper was exploring the impact of parental faith transmission, it is considered appropriate that the interviews occurred within the home and family setting.

For each indicator, a numerical value was recorded to describe the presence of that characteristic within the child. The values given ranged from 0 to 5, whereby a ‘0’ indicated zero presence of that characteristic within the child at the time of observation. A ‘5’ demonstrated the fullest and richest presence of that characteristic that the researcher may expect to see in a child of that age. Levels of ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’ and ‘4’ then provided an indication, between these extremes, of how strongly that characteristic was present in the child. If the researcher deemed that any one characteristic could not be fully assessed, that particular element would not have been included within the diagram. However, in the five case studies included, it was possible to provide a judgment of all aspects of the model.

These values were then presented within a radar diagram, to facilitate a visual understanding of the child’s broad faith. This permitted comparison of different case studies, through viewing differences within the diagrams. Discussion of these differences are presented later in the paper, alongside consideration of the faith nurturing techniques adopted by their parents.

Ethical consideration was essential due the nature of interviewing young children about matters that were personal and potentially sensitive to them. Due to the researcher being previously unknown to the child, the parent was asked to be present for the duration of the interview. However, the parent was asked not to sit in eye contact with the child and not to participate in the interview to enable the child to be free to respond freely. In addition, informed consent was obtained from both parent and child prior to the interview. Participants were assured of the data being held securely, would remain confidential and reported anonymously.

**Participant Children**

**Case study one**

The first case study was ‘Sue’, a 7-year-old girl of white British, professional parents who belong to a Pentecostal church in North West England. She had 2 brothers, one older and one younger. Sue’s mother and father both communicated to the interviewer their desire to ‘protect their daughter’s innocence rather than getting her to grow up too quickly’. They said they sought to ensure that their daughter had ‘an active faith that is growing with her, so that it is genuine and she can’t grow out of it’. They stated that they believed faith to be innate and a gift from God to a child from birth and it is the parent’s role (among others) to nurture this faith. They spoke briefly about their older son, stating that they had made mistakes in nurturing his faith, which they were learning from. (They believed that they had been too strict.) Their son, aged 15 at the time of the interview, was nevertheless regularly attending church and they perceived that he had held a personal faith throughout childhood and adolescence. There was no mention of a particular moment or decision being important in the faith of a child or adolescent.

The parents of ‘Sue’ reported that they ‘try to attend church as regularly as possible, although it is difficult when you have young children and work fulltime’. Consequently, they attended approximately twice per month. They explained that church was important to them, and they did have good friends there, but they placed a strong value on ‘quality family time’, and made conscious efforts to preserve time for that. They also explained that they sometimes felt ‘judged’ for being late to church or for not attending weekly, and they expressed desire for more understanding of family life from their church. They reported that prayer did not occur as a whole family, but was frequent between mother and daughter at different times of day, and ‘as the need arises’. The Bible was referred to frequently in discussions that came up between family members, and it was evident that faith discussions occurred in an open and honest manner. The parents explained that they were strict about their children’s behaviour but tried to be open and relaxed about faith issues, so that their children saw how faith related to their own lives and experiences, but ultimately, they were permitted to make their own choices and decisions. They were keen that faith should not feel forced, but be open and understanding. The mother reported a difficult upbringing, which had not included any religious component. Consequently, she was keen for her children have what she perceived to be a positive Christian upbringing, which was similar to the experience of ‘Sue’s’ Father.

**Case study two**

The second case study was ‘Tom’, who was 7 years old. His parents were professional, non-British and regularly attended a Pentecostal church in North West England. ‘Tom’ had 2 sisters (one older, one younger). When interviewed, his mother communicated that her aim during childhood was to teach her children all about the Christian faith, and then during adolescence to start talking with them about having a personal relationship with Jesus. However, her experience was that her older daughter (aged 12) was now ‘bored with talking about Christianity and saw no relevance of it in her life’, and was consequently disengaged with church. It greatly disappointed Tom’s mother that attempts to talk about a relationship with Jesus gained no response from her daughter. Nevertheless, this notion of needing to teach children all about Christianity during the childhood years, leading subsequently to a personal decision to follow Christ in adolescence, was the guiding principle of this family’s approach to faith nurture. The mother stated that ‘children naturally question things and are open to answers’. However, she did express that she would not describe her children as having faith until they have made a decision to have a personal relationship with Jesus, which she expected would occur during adolescence.

For the parents of ‘Tom’, the church was perceived to be the dominant influence on their children’s faith. They believed that the act of attending church regularly would itself instil a degree of receptiveness to the Christian faith, and they had chosen their church due to its ‘good children’s programme’. This programme provided ‘take home sheets’, which were designed to facilitate faith discussion within the home context, although the family rarely made use of this. Within the home context, prayer took place at meal times and bedtimes, and some Bible reading occurred, although in a 1:1 context, usually at bedtime. In addition, the children occasionally participated in Bible activities on their ipad. This suggested that within this family, faith was a reasonably private matter, since neither discussion nor faith activities occurred within the whole family, but instead was either individual or individually with a parent. The only exception to this was grace at mealtimes.

The parents reported that they were ‘quite free’ in their approach to faith nurture. The mother explained that this was a consequence of both parents experiencing a very strict religious upbringing, and they consciously did not want this for their children. Nevertheless, it was apparent to the researcher that the parents placed a strong emphasis upon the Christian faith providing a framework for acceptable behaviour. This resulted in bad behaviour ‘always being linked with Jesus, and what he thought of what they had done’. There was an underlying intimation from the parents of God’s judgment being an imposing factor on their child’s upbringing and development. In addition, the parents described their main aim as to ‘get the children to know Jesus and behave in a way that Jesus would expect and enables them to be part of society’. This suggests a strong emphasis is placed upon the need for salvation, and good behaviour.

**Case study three**

The third case study was six-year-old ‘Jane’. Her parents were white British, professional and the family attended a Church of England church in North West England. ‘Jane’ had two older sisters. The parents explained that being part of the church community was very important to them, so consequently they participated in a range of church activities on a regular basis. This included weekly Sunday church attendance, parental membership of a midweek Bible study group, and each of the children attending two weekly church-based clubs or activities. The family also attended a number of faith based events and ‘camps’ throughout the year. They believed that their children had a faith, and suggested that it was ‘probably deeper that we think’.

In addition to the regular church participation described above, the family prayed at mealtimes and bedtimes, and stated that faith was talked about a lot within daily family conversation and activity. Each of the children had numerous Bibles that they had been given on significant occasions, such as Christenings, Christenings anniversaries, Birthdays, Easter and Christmas. The children appeared to value greatly their different Bibles, which seemed to have been given on conjunction with their changing abilities and general development.

The mother had a Christian upbringing, and reported that her Dad was a ‘Vicar’, so ‘we were always involved in church as kids’. In contrast, the father had not experienced a Christian upbringing but had ‘become a Christian’ a few years earlier. They explained that the family had always sought to promote a Christian ethos and Christian values, but since the Father had ‘come to faith’, the family’s participation in faith activities had ‘really taken off’, and faith was a much more visible aspect of their family life.

The parents of ‘Jane’ believed that children and members of God’s kingdom from birth, and ‘God’s hand is upon them throughout their childhood’. Later, they believed that their children would have the opportunity to own their faith. The parents explained that they would never try to force their children to have a faith, and observed that their children were all very different characters and consequently had different faiths. They believed that their role was to support each individual child in their own personalised faith.

**Case study four**

Child four was ‘John’, a 7-year-old boy of white British, professional parents who belong to a Pentecostal church in North West England. He had an older brother and sister. John’s parents reported that their hope was for their son to grow up and ‘carry on with his faith, and be fulfilled in this life generally’. John’s parents reported that they had a Catholic upbringing which had felt very strict and ‘rule-bound’ and conceded that this had no doubt shaped and influenced their own parenting practices. They believed that their children needed to make their own decisions with regard to faith and stated that the child could not be ‘saved’ through his parent’s faith. However, they did also believe that God is fair and would judge in a just and gracious way, so that a child cannot be judged if they do not know about God.

The parents of ‘John’ reported that they pray together at bedtimes and mealtimes, and indeed prayer is very much part of daily life, and an essential part of problem solving situations and deliberations. Discussion about faith matters occurred frequently in daily life and was not restricted to allocated times. The mother reported that faith was seen as the identity that kept the family together, so that there is a strong understanding amongst individual family members that they are a Christian family. This was interpreted by the parents as each family member having a strong understanding of the Christian faith. Praying for others was an important and collective activity for the family. Attendance at church was very regular and communicated as compulsory by the parents, although the children enjoyed attending so this was not an issue. The family felt supported by the church, both as individuals and as a family unit. This was through informal pastoral support and provision of children’s activities.

John’s parents viewed their role as providing a strong Christian upbringing for their children, so that they knew and understood Christian teaching and practices. Participation in Christian activities within the home and faith community was frequent, compulsory and never questioned by parent or child. There was a strong sense that the parents hoped and expected the children to make personal decisions at some point to have their own faith. The children communicated a sense of obligation to do this at some stage in the future.

**Case study five**

The fifth case study was ‘Philip’, a 6-year-old boy of white British, professional parents who belong to an evangelical church in North West England. He had a younger sister and on older brother. His parents explained that whilst they sought to encourage their children to be part of the Christian faith, they would ultimately have to make their own choice to that end. Nevertheless, they stated that they sought to influence them as much as possible and earnestly pray that they would believe. Both parents had been raised in Christian homes and reported that whilst the family ethos’s were slightly different to theirs now, they do replicate most of the Christian practices that they experienced themselves when young.

Philip’s parents reported that they attend church regularly, and appreciate the children’s groups at the church. They particularly appreciated the focus that the church has on drama and musical activities as their children engage well through those media. The parents were part of regular Bible study groups and the children also attended midweek groups. The parents states that the children regularly heard the parents praying throughout the day, as part of their daily activities. At bedtime the parents took turns to pray with individual children. They reported that Philip loved reading Bible stories, and particularly appreciated the detail within stories. He would choose to read a Bible story rather than any alternative. Their constant frustration was having limited time for Christian activities as a whole family.

**Discussion of research observations**

The three radar diagrams are shown in figures 2,3,4, and 6; displaying the extent to which the indicators were visible to the researcher. Their differences and similarities will now be discussed, alongside consideration of the perceived effects on the whole child, of the differing approaches to Christian nurture.

**Case study one**

The radar diagram (figure 2) indicates a fairly full circle, with some attributes being slightly less than others: personalisation of beliefs, spiritual experiences and awe and wonder. Two characteristics: attitude to learning and empathy, were slightly higher than the others. On the whole, this diagram depicts a fairly full and effective nurturing of the whole faith of the child.

**Case study two**

Figure 3 reveals a much less rounded nurturing of the whole child. Integration into society is the attribute with the lowest value, reflecting the fact that ‘Tom’ was sad because he had no friends to play with at school. Equally, he was not well integrated into the church community. Other indicators that were lower were openness and vulnerability, which reflected the manner by which the researcher perceived the parents portrayed their own attitudes and behaviours. The ethos of the family generally appeared to be fairly closed and private. This was connected with the low values expressed for ‘Tom’s’ personalisation of beliefs and relevance of faith for him, due to faith being presented in a closed and rigid manner. This is likely to have then affected his attitude and receptivity to a relationship with the divine, which also was not very prevalent. Aspects that were more highly visible in this child were knowledge, empathy and play. This reflects the parents focus upon teaching elements of the Christian faith and associated behaviours, rather than on a relationship with the divine, indicating less focus on the unique child and positive relationships.

**Case study three**

The radar diagram (figure 4) displays a reasonably ‘whole’ child. The lowest value recorded was for spiritual experiences, but all of the other values observed were level four or five. The highest attributes present were integration into society, empathy, play, happiness, adaptability, security in the present and knowledge of the Christian faith. This appears to reflect the desires of the child’s parents to nurture their child in an individual and open manner, so that they feel they can make their own decisions and choices. This suggests a style of Christian nurture that reflects all four of the EYFS principles, equating to a sensitivity to the unique child, provision of an enabling environment and positive relationships.

**Case study four**

Figure 5 shows the interview observations revealed significant gaps in the ‘whole faith’ of this child. His Christian knowledge, relevance of faith and spiritual experiences are rated at high levels, alongside the value he places on family and the divine. However, the attributes of openness, adaptability and vulnerability were presented as much lower levels. This may be due to the authoritarian sense in which his parents impose their beliefs and expectations onto his, resulting in a faith that is strong in the sense of knowledge but not so much in the sense of personalisation and adaptability. This indicates that his experience of faith nurture pays less attention to the unique child but more emphasis on learning and development.

**Case study five**

Figure 6 depicts a reasonably full circle, demonstrating a rounded and wholesome faith in the child. The elements that were slightly lower were personalisation, adaptability, play, relevance and spiritual experiences. This indicates that the parental focus may be somewhat too dictated or set in order for the child to achieve a full and flourishing faith of their own. However, this is only partial and generally indicates that the parents are attentive to the unique child, positive relationships and enabling environments.

**Conclusions**

This methodology does not seek to generalise, but rather to make tentative observations. Neither would it be appropriate to suggest that one method of Christian nurture is more beneficial for the child than another. However, these five case studies provide an example of how the effects of religious nurture upon the whole child could be observed, documented and compared.

It is evident from literature and empirical research that Christian nurture does impact the whole child, whether positively or negatively. Christian knowledge appears to be high across the variety of Christian settings included in this paper. This resonates with the fact that in all five cases, the parents were committed to intentionally passing their faith on to their child. This suggests that across different contexts, Christian knowledge is a common priority in passing on of the faith. All of the other elements varied across the different case studies, suggesting that the approach to nurture is important and critical in encouraging the wholeness of the child’s developing faith. Equally, as highlighted above this reflects a variety of spiritual expression, which influences Christian nurture methods.

It is interesting to note that awe and wonder and spiritual experiences appear to be deficient across the five case studies, suggesting that within contemporary Christian nurture, there is less focus upon experiential aspects of faith transmission, and more so on the cerebral and cognitive areas. This could be partially due to the method of interview observation, although parental information did support the interviewer’s assertions in each of the five cases.

The nurturing attitudes and approaches that are less open and more rigid appear to be detrimental to a significant portion of the whole child. Conversely, if openness and individuality is promoted within Christian nurture, this seems to result in positive impact filtering through to most aspects of the whole child. This is very much in line with the EYFS principle that seeks to foster awareness of the unique child, and also the notion of liberation and fullness of life contributing to the child’s well-being.

Considering whether faith is a help or a hindrance; this does seem to depend significantly upon the nurturing style. Where individuals appear to be less happy and equipped for onward living, this indicates that faith has not been a resource for them. Conversely, for those who speak of faith in a personal and relational manner, it seems that faith is more resourceful to the child. This resonates with the multi-faceted focus of combining an intrapersonal, interpersonal and global approach to faith nurture (Worsley, 2000). Clearly, these five case studies are just scratching the surface of this issue, and it would be fascinating to explore the narratives of others within similar upbringings and ascertain whether their experiences and ‘wholeness diagrams’ would be similar. Equally, it would be interesting to analyse children from different cultures and faith backgrounds, and to assess the impact of religious faith upon the whole child.

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