

Chapter 1

Introduction

Naming Girls

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, 'Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them' ... When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore him a son.¹

This exploration of the faith of girls in this book opens with scripture, and begins with a girl who, unusually for one of both her age and gender, has a place in biblical theology.

Hosea and Gomer had three children. Biblical scholars have paid a great deal of critical attention to Gomer's story, and feminist study is redeeming her reputation and that of the original author, assigning the unbridled patriarchy of the final text to later redactors. The couple's two sons, Jezreel and Lo-ammi, have had the significance of their names for Israel subjected to detailed comment and analysis, but Lo-ruhamah is rarely accorded more than a passing mention on the way to her younger brother's story with which hers is closely linked. The middle child of three often struggles with identity. That Lo-ruhamah is a girl has not been noted as of any significance even in feminist exegesis, the children's birth and the sequence of their naming being accepted as a naturally and arbitrarily occurring order (boy-girl-boy).² However, Lo-ruhamah is almost alone in scripture as a named pre-pubescent girl. More usually, girls are identified by their connection with a male relative or adult figure: so sister and daughters 'belong' to Moses, Jairus and the Syro-Phoenician woman respectively, while both Naaman's wife and her slave girl are anonymous.³

I bring Lo-ruhamah to the foreground of attention as her treatment represents for me the fate of girls, from birth to puberty both in the bible and in the church:

¹ Hosea 1.6, 8. All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

² For example, Yvonne Sherwood, 'The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT) Supplement* 212 (Sheffield, 1996), pp. 116–18; Alice A. Keefe, 'Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea', *JSOT Supplement* 338 (Sheffield, 2001), pp. 190ff. Despite their focus on female imagery in Hosea, neither finds any significance in the gender of the second child in relation to the message it conveys.

³ Also in the New Testament are the servant girl Rhoda (Acts 12.13–15) and the girl who danced for Herod (Mark 6.17–29 and Matthew 14.1–12), who is probably in her early teens.

her distinctive characteristics, history and identity are fused with those of more dominant males, and so the unique part she has to play in the story goes unrecognised. She is named by her father in response to YHWH's command. The control that biblical fathers have over their daughters is absolute: even at an older age, two daughters, Leah and Rachel, submit to their father Jacob's duplicity, while for Jephthah, a vow to YHWH takes precedence over his daughter's life.⁴

Lo-ruhamah means 'not pitied' or 'not loved'. Many commentators deny that the naming of Hosea and Gomer's children has any personal reference to them as individuals, that this is merely a rhetorical device to convey a strong message to Israel. Sherwood argues strongly against such a dismissal, as it contradicts the normative connection between a name and the meaning it is intended to convey, either for the individual or for a community. The force of this is summed up by Bal who points out that names have a 'specific meaning that integrates character into (its) life' to which she adds that it 'can also imprison it there'.⁵ Happily, Lo-ruhamah is released from such imprisonment when she is re-named Ruhamah.⁶

Her names have a root connection with the Hebrew *rechem*, meaning 'womb';⁷ its negative form therefore denotes something deeper and more unnatural than the English translations suggest. It signifies a complete rejection both of the parental bonding at birth and of any loving or caring instinct, which is a denial of moral living. That not only the individual but also the nation was formed 'in the womb' becomes a theme of worship and hope in the exilic period, and YHWH's remembrance of the child she bore is proclaimed by Deutero-Isaiah to be immutable even where a human mother's may fail.⁸ The text of Hosea in its redacted form is part of this exilic and post-exilic corpus of prophetic and wisdom literature, so while there is no reason to doubt the veracity of Hosea's family history (Gomer's name has no other symbolic significance, and the name of the older son, Jezreel, is best understood in the context of pre-exilic history), Lo-ruhamah's name does carry these resonances. Israel's story is founded on call and covenant, re-call and new covenant, not once but many times. Integral to that story is Israel's wandering which draws from YHWH a mother's compassion and love, the desire to rescue. So, prior to the making of 'my people' (Ammi), and the motivation for their rescue which became the determinative act for the faith of Israel, of Jew and of Christian, was YHWH's compassion for the suffering people. That these feelings are identified with the personification of YHWH as

⁴ Genesis 29, Judges 11.

⁵ Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Indiana, 1987), p. 73.

⁶ Hosea 2.1, 23.

⁷ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, 1978) explores this connection, as I discuss on p. 141.

⁸ For example Psalm 139.13, Isaiah 49.5, Isaiah 49.15. Additionally, in the Genesis narratives, we read that 'When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb', Genesis 29.31.

female is significant in the prophetic literature from the exile. I suggest, therefore, that Lo-ruhamah's gender is significant to the prophetic message, that there is a holistic balance between the two acts of having compassion and people-making, first rejected then re-established. Thus, the naming of a girl here, in contrast to her sisters' anonymity elsewhere in biblical literature, becomes in feminist reading culturally symbolic, redeeming girls from oblivion to a central place within God's saving purpose for humankind.

There is a further feature of interest in this story. When she is named by her father, her mother is sidelined. That a father could imagine such unnatural rejection of his own child is truly appalling. However, Gomer silently rejects the name and its signification. As Sherwood shows, by breastfeeding her daughter for three years, the norm in those days, she 'subverts the master-text'. 'Not loved' is loved; by showing that the 'negatively depicted harlot is also a nurturing mother' the father's action is seen to be deviant. This has been commonly overlooked because 'critics usually focus on *what* rather than *how* the text means'.⁹ This story, and Gomer's part in it, often disregarded as a mere tool of patriarchy, offers evidence of a resistance to male domination similar to that which in Exodus chapters 1 and 2 has become highly celebrated by feminist scholars.

A Personal Journey

My 'discovery' of Lo-ruhamah comes at a stage in my own journey where I have become aware of the neglect of girls in studies of childhood, and it is this which has motivated my research, the fruits of which are found in this book. For many years, as a teacher, mother, ordained minister and college tutor, I have worked at local, national and international level studying children and their faith, promoting good practice in their care and nurture, and resisting their marginalisation in the church. In the course of my ministry I have experienced gender discrimination to a degree I had not encountered in the teaching profession of my earlier years. In response, my intellectual journey has taken me into feminist theology and hermeneutics in order both to take a stand in dialogue with men on a sound biblical and theological basis against values I consider to be inimical to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to become more confident in my own identity as a woman made in the image of God.

Along the way, I have become aware not only of discrimination but also of avoidance of discussion of gender on the part of many well-meaning people in the church, both men and women, as if the goal of Galatians 3.28 was to discount gender differentiation in favour of some form of androgyny. This naïve approach refuses to acknowledge the power structures operative in any society, which, as clinical psychologist Robert Kegan holds, translate 'we are really all the same' as

⁹ Sherwood, 'The Prostitute and the Prophet', pp. 147–8.

‘you are really all like me’.¹⁰ The theology and biblical understanding we live by is primarily constructed by men (overwhelmingly white, western and middle class), and we do not immediately perceive the bias built into our dominant worldview. There is still work to be done to analyse the context and standpoint of those who construct our theologies and ecclesiologies, and open our eyes, and theirs, to the partiality of their vision and to the consideration of other viewpoints. In his first book, *The Evolving Self*, Kegan somewhat idealistically proposes that we seek a ‘universal language’¹¹ that transcends gender and cultural differences. In his later work, in which he addresses his earlier lack of clarity on the importance of gender styles, taking more serious account of the research findings of Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan,¹² he recognises the power games people play, and proposes a way forward in which people would learn self-awareness which would respect all diversity.¹³ He still, however, seems to believe it possible to achieve this kind of mutuality by cognitive endeavour alone. He says:

this kind of learning cannot be accomplished through *informational* training, the acquisition of skills, but only through *transformational* education, a leading out from an established habit of mind.¹⁴

History and faith testify that humans are rarely capable of such transformation by their own efforts. Kegan’s vision of crossing a ‘consciousness threshold’ needs a spiritual foundation, as St Paul recognised.¹⁵

Even when we have taken into account the cultural differences Kegan identifies, and the divisions in the early church Paul names, there are yet further areas of power differential. One of these is generation. Children are not always treated with the respect they deserve, nor are they accorded the dignity and protection which it is their right to expect and which is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Girls are particularly vulnerable. My own experiences as a woman in the church, and my work promoting good practice in child protection and supporting survivors of abuse who are mostly female, have fuelled the concern I have for girls within churches. In my own faith story, it was as a girl and early adolescent that I had my most formative spiritual experiences, but growing within a system where faith was defined by men, I moulded these

¹⁰ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), p. 207.

¹¹ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), p. 209.

¹² Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston, 1976). Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1982).

¹³ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, p. 204.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232. Author’s italics.

¹⁵ Romans 7.14–25.

experiences to fit existing paradigms, and shaped my life-course within those patterns. I now see that overlooking, or even denying, that my encounters with God were as an embodied woman deprived me at an early stage of owning and therefore integrating an essential part of my identity with my faith journey. Although girls are living now in a time of increased awareness of gender identity, this has not greatly impacted on life and teaching within the church, and the social construction of girlhood still retains vestiges of the patriarchy of my own youth although manifest in different, perhaps more dangerously subtle, ways.

Girls in Theology

Gender is a significant factor in understanding the self during the growth process. Attention to and validation of the different experience of women has been slow to emerge, and the inclusion of girls' experience is still rare. The 30th anniversary in 2009 of the signing of the UNCRC has encouraged more writing on children in the UK. For all their valuable content, however, they noticeably lack any gender differentiation.¹⁶ The church takes little account of gender difference, or knowledge of gendered lives, especially in dealing with children. In biblical hermeneutics and in theology, girls are largely ignored, often assumed to be included in non gender-specific references to 'children', which are not neutral. There are discourses which shape the way churches regard and behave towards girls, of which those who determine policies and attitudes towards girls are largely unaware. From Aquinas' discussion of whether girls and women were 'defective', their birth a result of weak semen or the south wind,¹⁷ through Rousseau's exemption of girls from his 'negative education',¹⁸ girls have been seen as aberrant. Theological reference to and discussion of children, their education and nurture, has been based on boyhood as normative. It has for the most part been ambivalent about children, both recognising their natural innocence and believing their inherent sinfulness,

¹⁶ Examples can be found in: Richard Layard and Judy Dunn and the panel of The Good Children Enquiry, *A Good Childhood, Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (London, 2009); Anne Richards and Peter Privett (eds), *Through the Eyes of a Child: New Insights in Theology from a Child's Perspective* (London, 2009).

¹⁷ Although Nolan argues for a more constructive reading of Aquinas here, the 'popular' legacy is a negative one. Michael Nolan, 'The Defective Male: What Aquinas Really Said', *New Blackfriars*, 75.880 (1994): 156–66.

¹⁸ Rousseau's sexism is explored by John Darling and Maaïke Van De Pijpekamp in 'Rousseau on the Education, Domination and Violation of Women', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.2 (June 1994): 115–32. Both Aquinas and Rousseau had unorthodox upbringings in relation to women, which had a bearing on their respective writings.

with greater emphasis on the latter which has led to promotion of abusive child-rearing practices, perpetuated even today among fundamentalist groups.¹⁹

As 'childhood' emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a discrete period of human development, 'a cultural interpretation of physical immaturity',²⁰ and became an accepted subject of academic enquiry, more theological writing touched on childhood, although almost incidentally until the second half of the twentieth century.²¹ Biblical foundations were found in Jesus' actions and teaching: stress was placed on Jesus' blessing of children, his advocacy of them in his ministry, and his emphasis on the child as a model for discipleship. Theologians reclaimed a literal rather than metaphorical understanding of 'unless you become like children', although Jesus' meaning and the qualities signified are debated. Emphasis has also been placed on the positive attitude to children in Israelite, Jewish and Christian culture in contrast to the harsher treatment meted out in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.²² Throughout Israel's history, God's choice of children to perpetuate the covenant relationship and to 'rescue' Israel from straying, with its climax in the incarnation, has also been a focus. These children, such as Isaac, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah and Jesus, are all male.

Theologies of childhood and biblically based reflections on children have for the most part been written by men.²³ Significant among these have been Rahner, Moltmann and Jensen.²⁴ Among women theologians, there has been a reluctance to write about children. Baker notes with some incomprehension how 'white feminists frequently forget to turn an intentional eye toward feminist socialization of younger generations'.²⁵ Carter concludes that feminist theology's contribution to studies of childhood is indirect, that children are drawn into discussion through

¹⁹ For a brief overview of theological views of children, see Marcia Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, 2001), pp. 3–7.

²⁰ Angela Shier-Jones (ed.), *Children of God: Towards a Theology of Childhood* (Peterborough, 2007), p. 188.

²¹ Bunge comments: 'children ... do not play a role in the way that systematic theologians think about theological themes', 'Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today', in Donald Ratcliff (ed.), *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene, 2004), p. 43.

²² W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church* (Carlisle, 1996), pp. 3–12.

²³ For example, Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children* (Geneva, 1979); John Bradford, *Caring for the Whole Child: A Holistic Approach to Spirituality* (London, 1995); W.M.S. West, 'The Child in the Church', in W.M.S. West, *Baptists Together* (Didcot, 2000).

²⁴ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VIII (London, 1984); Jürgen Moltmann, *In The End – The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis, 2004); David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland, 2005).

²⁵ Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Cleveland, 2005), pp. 14–15. She contrasts this with womanist literature where 'young girls are pervasive', i.e. in cultural contexts where girls do not suffer marginalisation.

the writers' experiences of mothering.²⁶ Even here, gender differentiation is minimal, 'assigned to footnotes'.²⁷ From a feminist standpoint, Mercer has written on childhood, her aim being to expose the objectification of children in a consumer society, and to address the way in which many churches recreate rather than challenge 'the market's utilitarian self-interested ambivalence' towards children as 'innocents and devils'.²⁸ Since a significant feature of that consumerism is the inappropriate sexualisation of young girls through beauty competitions and the marketing of suggestive clothing, it would have been appropriate to have discussed the different external pressures to which girls are exposed. Although Jensen's theological reflection around children's vulnerability lends itself to application to girls, Moltmann alone shows awareness of their exclusion and finds a way, on a biblical foundation, to redress this.²⁹ Pastoral theology has offered a little more to promote understanding of girls, recognising the significance to girls of the menarche.³⁰

Rationale and Structure of the Book

There is, then, a discrepancy between the amount of change girls experience in this period of their lives, which is great, and the volume of qualitative research in the field, which is minimal. The transitional stage from childhood to adolescence does not fit neatly with studies of 'children' or 'young people'; change happens at an individual pace, so generalisations are difficult. It is often seen as a stage to be passed through on the way to something else. Both childhood and adolescence are subjected to intense study, but in this interim period, girls in particular suffer notable invisibility.

It was to attempt to speak into this void that I embarked on a study of girls between 11 and 13 who were already on a faith journey, another neglected area of academic study. These girls belonged in different ways to the life of local churches. It was a small-scale piece of qualitative research which makes no universal claims; it is on the basis of my analysis of what these girls shared with me, that I suggest

²⁶ Marian Carter, 'A Preferential Option for Children: The Creation of a Theology of Childhood within the Christian Tradition' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2004), pp. 279–80.

²⁷ Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, p. 15.

²⁸ Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St Louis, 2005), p. 120.

²⁹ Moltmann, *In The End*, chapter 1.

³⁰ For example, Mary Lynn Dell discusses pubertal development and body image from the perspective of pastoral and practical theology: 'She Grows in Wisdom, Stature and Favor with God: Female Development from Infancy through Menarche', in Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (ed.), *In Her Own Time, Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis, 2000), pp. 117–43.

ways of understanding their faithing and supporting its further growth that may be valid for others and transferable to other contexts, and propose ideas for a theology which recognises their place as gendered subjects and enables them to find a distinctive place and voice within the Christian community.

In the next chapter, I engage in a thorough review of the literature relevant to the study of girls of this age. This is multi-disciplinary. Despite the paucity of writing on girls in religious and theological literature, much work is being done in other fields. If any further justification were needed for such a broad exploration of childhood, more specifically girlhood, when my goal is theological, one is offered by Shier-Jones, who says the 'exploration must take full account of the interdependency ... between the childhood of the human or natural child, and that of the child of God'.³¹

The methodology needed to carry out qualitative research ethically with children, requires special care so Chapter 3 gives a detailed explanation of the processes. Handling the resulting data also requires attention to particular criteria. The primary data comes from interviews with girls, which I designed around three aims:

1. How do these girls understand themselves as girls and as Christian girls?
2. How do they understand themselves in relationship with God, and 'do' their faithing?
3. What do they need from a church community to make it a healthy environment in which their faithing can flourish?

These three questions give shape to Chapters 4, 6 and 8.

In Chapter 4, I look at girls in the 'transitional space' which is around the age of puberty as they begin to leave childhood behind, with its accompanying sense of loss, and its sometimes fearful anticipation of what lies ahead for them as they emerge into womanhood. Taking my cues from their own words, I explore the growth of identity, and the physical, social, psychological and emotional implications and effects of puberty. I conclude by offering a positive interpretation of living in a liminal place, aligned theologically with the image and experience of being a boundary dweller.

Chapter 6 takes seriously the thoughts and feelings of the girls around their religious experience, which ground my discussion of the meaning faith had for them, and their strategies for living as faithing people. As I identify themes and processes, I create a dialogue with the writings of contemporary theologians to illustrate how, without yet a commensurate vocabulary, the girls are able to wrestle with the same ideas as those of the academy, commanding respect when enough attention is paid to their discourse. The reader will not find in this dialogue a full engagement with all aspects of each theological theme, but a 'taster' from across a spectrum of views, to model a method whereby girls, and all young people, can

³¹ Shier-Jones, *Children of God*, p. 183.

be affirmed, and given the tools to continue to mine the depths of spirituality and theology to grow in faith in their peer groups and alongside older pilgrims.

Chapter 8 concludes my analysis as I turn to the 'holding environment' of the church, and suggest a way of thinking about the nurturance of girls from their current gestation to their birth as women. At the opening of each of these chapters, as at the beginning of this introduction, I offer a biblical reflection on pre-pubertal girls and young women whose narrative presence is for reasons other than their role as wives and mothers, thus drawing them out of the shadows of the story of YHWH's people. By this means, I begin to redress the male focus in theologies of childhood, which in its search for biblical authority is rooted in ungendered narrative or foregrounds boys. This breaks new ground, and offers positive images for girls of the part their fore-sisters played in YHWH's story, and may help them identify with people like themselves in the overwhelmingly androcentric narrative.

In between these chapters lie two short 'interludes', or pathways from the subject matter of one chapter to the next. They contain detailed analysis of the 'theologising'³² of two girls, Lucy and Rosie, whose thinking plumbs depths of a reflective reasoning showing both maturity and originality.

My conclusion imagines a girl-friendly church; besides suggesting other ways girls might be accompanied on their faith journey, I argue for further work to be done to affirm the theological meaning and significance of girlhood.

The purpose of this book, then, is to bring girls out of the shadows, out of anonymity, and offer to those charged with their nurture in churches resources to understand, support and mentor girls, hear them into their own speech instead of 'ventriloquising' others' words and ideas, that they may enjoy abundant living as equal partners with boys and men in the adventure of faith.

Defining Terms: Faith and Spirituality

Both 'faith' and 'spirituality' appear in the title to this book. Some explanation is necessary as to the meanings they hold for me, gained from literature on spirituality which in later chapters I set in dialogue with my analysis of 'girl-talk'. Both 'spirituality' and 'faith' indicate girls' activities and orientation towards life, and the words have specific connotations; I do not use them interchangeably. They signify both the wider and the narrower frames of reference within which girls describe their experiences.

³² Following Gerhard Büttner, I use this term to indicate that as girls 'do theology', their starting points, context and thought forms are different from those of adults but are no less valid: they 'develop their own schemes to structure their theological knowledge', 'How Theologizing with Children can Work', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 29.2 (2007): 138. Although the children who are the focus of Büttner's research are younger, his findings have parallels with my own.

In interviewing girls, I found that some of them were relating personal experiences of transcendence or 'excedence'³³ which did not 'fit' the language of traditional Christian faith as it will have been mediated or overtly taught by church and family. Some also brought into the interview experiences and reflections from outside the church, most notably from school assemblies and Religious Studies lessons. They offered evidence that their spiritual experience was not confined to or solely initiated by the religious tradition in which they were being nurtured, but they were open to 'revelation' which might break in unexpectedly.

Childhood spirituality is an area subjected to much research at the end of the twentieth and increasingly in the twenty-first century, and is yielding rich results in its understanding of a spirituality which is distinctive, and foundational for the transition to adulthood.³⁴ David Hay's research with Rebecca Nye has contributed significantly to an understanding of children's spirituality. In its 'mapping', they identify three themes which play a part in a spiritual life:³⁵ these are 'awareness-sensing' (the ability to 'tune in' and 'lose oneself' in an experience), 'value-sensing' (relating to conscience or moral sense), and 'mystery-sensing' (intimations of transcendence inducing wonder and awe). Hay in particular develops the work of Alister Hardy, for whom 'spirituality is not religion (but) prior to religion, a built-in, biologically structured dimension of the lives of all members of the human species'.³⁶ To Hay, 'spiritual awareness is commonly the context out of which religion grows'. His work with children leads him to respect that spiritual awareness. 'Could it be the case', he asks, 'that children's perceptions of mystery in situations where, from an adult perspective, there is a simple explanation arise from as profound an experience as those of the contemplative philosopher or the theologian?'. Following Popper, he suggests an understanding of science which sees a hypothesis as:

conjecture which may at any time be refuted, rather than a thesis to be proved. In this way children's perception of mystery develops into a mature insight into the human condition, rather than being dismissed as infantile thinking.³⁷

³³ A term used by Terry Velting, *Practical Theology: 'On Earth as it is in Heaven'* (Maryknoll, 2005). Velting means that transcendence is not an "otherworldly" realm ... rather a desire that stretches our attention to that which exceeds our lives, to a tradition that is larger than (exceeds/transcends) this historical moment, to a wisdom that is older than the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty first centuries', p. 31.

³⁴ See pp. 38–9 for further resources on childhood spirituality.

³⁵ David Hay with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, rev. edn (London and Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 65–77.

³⁶ David Hay, *Something There: The Biology of the Human Spirit* (London, 2006), pp. 48–9.

³⁷ Hay with Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, p. 72.

Spiritual awareness, however, goes beyond the subjective. Working with Hay, Nye found a ‘core category’ of children’s spirituality which she termed ‘relational consciousness’, relational indicating ‘a child’s awareness of being in relationship with something or someone which added value to their ordinary or everyday perspective’ and consciousness ‘a distinctively reflective awareness of themselves as “subject”’.³⁸

Definitions of spirituality from other fields, not specific to children, deepen our understanding.

- Seen through a *philosophical* lens, spirituality could mean: ‘our capacity for self-transcendence, a capacity demonstrated in our ability to know the truth, to relate to others lovingly, and to commit ourselves freely to persons and ideals’.³⁹ This emphasises the outward focus and moral dimension of spirituality.
- *Psychological* definitions focus more on the inner dimension: self-fulfilment through discovery of personal meaning in life, the development of the self–other relationship of object relations theory, or the growth of identity as an individual phenomenon giving personal meaning, for which involvement in organised religion is optional.⁴⁰
- *Sociological* definitions focus on institutional allegiance: ‘religiousness is now described narrowly as formally structured and identified with religious institutions and prescribed theology and ritual’.⁴¹
- Then there are ‘*popular*’ definitions, which can be ‘fuzzy’ in their subjectivity, emotionalism, mysticism, and connection with new age phenomena, or meditative practices associated with eastern religion.⁴²

Each of the above has something to contribute to a Christian understanding. While these definitions are informative, and must be taken note of because, as Schneiders

³⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

³⁹ Joann Wolski Conn (ed.), *Women’s Spirituality, Resources for Development* (New York, 1986), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Examples can be found in the works of psychologists on whom I draw in ensuing chapters, such as Erikson and Kegan. A helpful summary can be found in Michael Jacobs, *Living Illusions: A Psychology of Belief* (London, 1993), pp. 23–54.

⁴¹ B. Zinnbauer and K. Pargament, ‘Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36 (1997): 549–64.

⁴² Ibid. In the United States spirituality has a closer popular association with religion than is the case in the UK as a critique of Zinnbauer reveals. Cultural differences between the United States and UK with regard to these issues is important to bear in mind where children’s spirituality is concerned as much of the recent research of relevance to children in church communities has been done in the United States where secularism is not as prevalent as in the UK.

comments, 'the subject of Christian spirituality is the human being as a whole',⁴³ I need to find a satisfactory definition which offers breadth as well as depth within an overtly Christian frame of reference for the study of girls. Schneiders goes on to define spirituality as 'the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self transcendence toward the horizon of ultimate value one perceives', a description of a broadly religious understanding of spirituality which, while attending to aspects of spirituality's outer and inner dimensions, importantly locates movement inwards to self-fulfilment and outwards to relationship and moral responsibility in 'ultimate concern' or 'the sacred'. Translating this into the language of Christian faith, Hess defines it as 'a call from the Holy Spirit to the human spirit',⁴⁴ and Wolski Conn as involving 'the human capacity of self-transcending knowledge, love, and commitment as it is actualised through the experience of God in Jesus Christ, by the gift of the Spirit'.⁴⁵ McIntosh expresses the transformational nature of Christian spirituality which focuses out into the world and prevents self-transcendence from becoming narcissism, or an 'almost imperceptible slide into egoistic self-preoccupation with one's own development'.⁴⁶ Such an ethical dimension must surely be a distinguishing mark of Christian spirituality but the definitions above still do not take account of the breadth of spirituality proposed by Hay and Nye as found in children, particularly with regard to relationality. If, however, we locate our spiritual awareness in divine personhood, then perichoresis within the Trinity both draws us in (as visualised in Rublev's icon 'The Visitation of Abraham') and inspires us outwards to a connectedness with the world.⁴⁷

Writers on women's spirituality bring their own subjective experience to bear on their definitions. Slee engaged in empirical research into women's faith, so when among her conclusions we find that connectedness and relationality are features of women's spirituality, this gives us a firmer basis for such an assertion about girls' faith; 'women's identity, development and spirituality are', she writes, 'embedded in a strong sense of connectedness to the other'.⁴⁸ Of the authors Slee cites in her extensive review of feminist writings and women's experience, it is

⁴³ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality', in A. Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, 2005), p. 17.

⁴⁴ Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville, 1997), p. 48.

⁴⁵ Joann Wolski Conn, 'Spirituality and Personal Maturity', in R.J. Wicks, R.D. Parsons and D. Capps (eds), *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counselling*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1992), p. 38.

⁴⁶ Mark A. McIntosh, 'Trinitarian Perspectives on Christian Spirituality', in A. Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, 2005), p. 179.

⁴⁷ See Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 2000).

⁴⁸ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development, Patterns and Processes* (Abingdon, 2004) p. 159. Although not interviewing girls, Slee suggests this is true for them, too.

Zappone whose definition comes closest to incorporating relational consciousness and the intrinsic interdependence of all reality that describes spirituality, and that distinctive of women. She says: 'In its broadest sense, spirituality centers on our awareness and experience of relationality. It is the relational component of lived experience'. Authentic spirituality is then lived 'in ways that nourish relationship between self, others, God and the world *that already exist*'.⁴⁹

In her research into children's spirituality, approached as a psychologist, Nye does not betray significant awareness of feminist literature, so her data analysis is not overtly influenced by feminism. Yet, alerted by her reading of Gilligan, she does acknowledge that her conclusions 'reflect a gendered account of spirituality' and that her 'findings are a perspectival rather than absolute contribution to the body of knowledge'.⁵⁰ A glance at the index of recent books on spirituality⁵¹ would suggest that her findings are being regarded as definitive, yet the gender attribution appears only in her unpublished dissertation. This is a matter of regret since the acknowledgement of the clear but spontaneous connection of her findings with the spirituality of women and girls would help in the study of girls' spiritual growth.⁵² I wonder whether this is a case of the silencing of a woman's voice in the field of scholarship where normativity is still covertly male. If 'masculinist' perspectives were so declared, 'the world would be a very different place'.⁵³

In the light of this discussion, I will use 'spirituality' to indicate imaginative experiments the girls engage in to make meaning of experience, as they strive to explore new dimensions to or ways of expressing their understanding of God. This often breaks new ground for them. As far as possible I will use active verbs for the processes of girls' 'development' since, in interviews with them, I experienced them as active makers of meaning in their lives.⁵⁴

If that is how I understand spirituality, what of the 'faith' of my title? I use it to denote more than the cognitive content of religion, rather a girl's trust in God to give life experience, and life itself, meaning in the context of relationship. Much of what James Fowler understands by faith, following Cantwell Smith, is what I have called spirituality. But Fowler also distinctively uses faith as a verb,

⁴⁹ Katherine Zappone, *The Hope for Wholeness: A Spirituality for Feminists* (Mystic, 1991), p. 12. Author's emphasis.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Nye, 'Psychological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1998), p. 279.

⁵¹ For example, Ratcliff, *Children's Spirituality*; Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (ed.), *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Thousand Oaks, 2006); Hay, *Something There*.

⁵² The majority of ten-year-olds whom she cites in her research are girls.

⁵³ Ann Oakley, *Experiments in Knowing: Gender and Method in Social Studies* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 21.

⁵⁴ For faith as an active verb, see James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, 1981), p. 16.

something done, not a body of doctrine requiring only rational assent.⁵⁵ It involves movement – towards it to embrace it, and within it to draw experience into its embrace. Many expressions have been used to describe it. Astley offers several: ‘belief-in is belief-that *with attitude*’, Wittgenstein’s ‘passionate seizing’, Hick’s ‘experiencing-as’ (that is, our recognition of God’s activity in human history).⁵⁶ I therefore also use ‘faith’ as an active verb to denote girls’ lively seeking after and trusting, that is, being in relationship with, who they understand God to be for them. In the context in which I am writing, it will also convey the content of Christianity, but as story to engage with both individually and in community rather than a set of fixed doctrines.

From this introduction, we turn now to survey the literature which informs this study.

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, chapter 2.

⁵⁶ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Abingdon, 2002), pp. 27–33. Author’s emphasis.